2003 Dancing Bear Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon
Napa Valley

Vineyards
The grapes for our Dancing Bear Ranch on Howell Mountain were planted in 2000. With elevations from 1,400 to 1,800 feet above sea level, this 200 acre ranch is planted to approximately 27 acres of vineyard. It is owned by the Cakebread family. The vineyard has 5 different soil types, 10 vineyard sections with different sun exposures and features steep, rocky, volcanic soils. Because of its remote location it also has a wonderful myriad of wildlife. We named it for a black bear that has developed a taste for our elegant wine grapes. Fortunately, the bears leave enough fruit behind for us to craft this distinctive, Bordeaux-style red, a blend of 89% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Franc. In 2003, the grapes were harvested between September 24th and October 14th with an ideal balance of sugar and acidity.

Vintage 2003
In 2003, a warm early spring gave way to cool, wet weather in April, which set back vine development. Seasonally temperate weather prevailed from May through July, but a cool pattern returned in August, delaying ripening. By early September, warm, sunny days and clear, cool nights were again the norm, although late September included a few torrid days that sent us scurrying to harvest early-ripening varieties. Fortunately, October ushered in classic autumn weather, with crisp mornings, warm afternoons and cool evenings extending the harvest by several weeks and enabling us to pick our Dancing Bear Ranch grapes at ideal sugar levels.

Winemaking
Our Howell Mountain grapes have a higher acidity and typically more tannins and deeper color than most other vineyards. Consequently, it’s important that we capture the special, intense qualities of this mountain fruit without extracting harsh, aggressive tannins. We do this by carefully monitoring fermentation temperatures and the ‘cap’ of skins at the top of the fermenting tank, whose contact with the juice determines tannin and flavor extraction. Winemaker Julianne Laks carefully manages these processes, including the number of ‘pumpover’ (sprinkling juice over the cap) and ‘rack and return’ procedures (draining and refilling a tank to thoroughly macerate juice and skins and soften tannins). During fermentation and maceration, she tastes the wine daily to assess tannin levels and ‘mouth-feel’. When she feels it has achieved an optimal balance of fruit intensity and ripe tannins, the free run juice is drained from the skins and transferred to French oak barrels for aging. (The juice subsequently pressed from the skins is not used in the blend.) The 2003 Dancing Bear Ranch was aged 22 months in French barrels before bottling in August 2005.

Tasting Notes
Our 2003 Dancing Bear Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon from Howell Mountain displays a wonderfully complex aroma of sweet black fruits (currant, plum and blackberry) mingled with notes of chocolate, clove and ginger. The wine’s rich flavors are juicy, deep and long, with a spicy/herbal tone that evolves into an intriguing tea-leaf spiciness in the wine’s long, satisfying finish. The firm tannins and youthfully compact structure of this lovely Bordeaux-style red, a classic mountain wine, argue for extended cellaring, although it provides great pleasure now when decanted and paired with grilled steaks marinated in a zesty pepper sauce.

Grape varieties: 89% Cabernet Sauvignon
6% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc
Alcohol: 14.1%
Total acidity: 0.65 g/100 ml
pH: 3.78

Vineyards: Dancing Bear Ranch, Howell Mountain
Harvest dates: September 24 – October 14, 2003
Bottled: August 2005

Fermentation: 100% in stainless steel
Winemaker: Julianne Laks
Barrel aging: 22 months in French oak, 11% new