2008 Dancing Bear Ranch
Howell Mountain, Napa Valley

Vineyards
In 2008, the Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc vines in our Dancing Bear Ranch on Howell Mountain in eastern Napa Valley reached their 10th year, attaining a level of maturity that ensures consistently excellent, complex wines. Hugging steep hillsides at elevations ranging from 1,100 to 1,813 feet, these hardy vines are rooted in well-drained volcanic soils and enjoy excellent sun exposure, prompting their fruit to ripen earlier in the harvest season than do our valley floor vineyards. To ensure the grapes reach full physiological maturity, we carefully manage the crop load on each vine for optimal ripening and flavor development. The blend changes each year; the 2008 Dancing Bear is 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Cabernet Franc.

Vintage 2008
The topsy-turvy 2008 growing season seesawed from heavy winter rains to early spring drought to severe frosts in late March and throughout April. Coupled with inclement weather during bloom and stress-inducing heat during grape set, these conditions significantly reduced the size of the grape crop throughout Napa Valley, greatly concentrating flavors. Clear, mild summer weather, with warm days and cool nights, provided ideal conditions for fully maturing our Dancing Bear grapes, which were harvested on October 1st with a perfect balance of sugar and acidity.

Winemaking
With Dancing Bear Ranch, the challenge for Cakebread Cellars winemaker Julianne Laks is to capture the intense mountain character of its fruit without extracting overly aggressive tannins. Julianne’s approach is to constantly monitor tannin levels in the juice and wine during fermentation and maceration. She also co-ferments a portion of the Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc to soften the former’s tannins and enhance the wine’s complexity, a technique used successfully in 2008. After all the component lots of the 2008 Dancing Bear had achieved an optimal balance of fruit intensity and ripe tannins, the free run wines were drained from their skins and transferred to barrel for aging prior to blending in spring, 2009. In all, the 2008 vintage spent 21 months in French oak, 45% new, before being bottled in August, 2010.

Tasting Notes
The 2008 Dancing Bear delights the senses with heady, deeply concentrated and wonderfully complex aromas of black plum, crushed boysenberry, ripe olallieberry, fig, earth, baking spices and chocolate. On the dense, weighty palate, the wine delivers intense, mouthfilling, blackberry, black cherry, boysenberry and forest-floor spice flavors supported by supple, chewy tannins and a long, mouth-coating finish enriched by dark chocolate and toasted oak tones. Big and youthful with layers of intensely concentrated flavors, this dramatic mountain red drinks well now, but it will continue to evolve and become complex in bottle over the next decade.

Grape varieties: 95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc
Vineyard: Dancing Bear Ranch, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley
Harvest dates: October 1, 2008
Fermentation: 100% in stainless steel
Barrel aging: 21 months in French oak, 47% new
Alcohol: 15.1%
Total acidity: 0.69 g/100 ml
pH: 3.88
Bottled: August, 2010
Winemaker: Julianne Laks