

94 | Bell

\$55

1997 Rutherford - Napa Valley Baritelle Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

After fifteen years at Beaulieu Vineyards as director of winemaking and general manager, Anthony Bell set off on his own to establish Bell Wine Cellars in 1994. He partnered with BV grower John Baritelle on this wine, pulling from a vineyard that grew out of experiments BV had conducted with cabernet clones propagated from a 19th century field station in Jackson (Bell refers to it as the Jackson Clone; BV labels it "Clone 6", and their '97 rated 94 in our December 2000 issue). As grown by Baritelle since the '91 vintage, the Jackson Clone creates a complex cabernet essence out of his Rutherford terroir. The great '97 vintage will likely be a benchmark for this wine — a dynamic force that will develop for years. Right now, it has the immediacy of a deep currant scent, a super-rich texture, a dark plummy and black olive savor that lasts. The tannins brace all the flavor without getting in its way, a wall of cabernet intensity rushing forward. Oak offers cinnamon and nutmeg to the mix, enhancing the boldness of the taste that should grow more elegant and eloquent with time. With a day or two of air, the texture and brightness of the fruit continues to gain, lifting the wine into a cloud of currants. Even if this goes a bit beyond your normal wine budget, it's well worth seeking some out to cellar. Ten years from the vintage, you'll be extremely pleased. (1,733 cases) *Bell Wine Cellars, Yountville, CA*
