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A SURPRISE FROM BONNY DOON

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I'll admit it. I didn't expect much from the **2005 Bonny Doon Vineyard Ca' del Solo Nebbiolo** (\$30) - most domestic wines made with Italian grape varieties that I've had have tasted generic at best. But when I stuck my nose in the glass, I couldn't believe what I smelled: Italy. The wine had those telltale notes of rose petals classic to Nebbiolo, and while it wasn't as beguiling as a great Barolo or Barbaresco, I still fooled my in-house wine snob. He guessed the wine I poured was a Chianti (not a bad guess, as there were also a lot of licoricey notes, too, common in Chianti). The fruit was ripe but tart and the tannins gripping rather than soft and plush - two qualities that are common in Nebbiolo but that often seem to scare California winemakers. The finish was shorter than I would have liked (I suspect the vines are young), but I'm thrilled to see that even in the U.S., Italian grapes can taste like themselves.

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