

JAQK CELLARS – A brick building in the architectural richness of the Jackson Square area (between North Beach and the Financial District) is home to **JAQK Cellars'** lovely offices, complete with rooftop deck in the shadow of the Transamerica Building (you can host private wine and food tastings here with 8-12 people at a mere \$25 per person). I was impressed with the down-to-earth staff and winemaker, **Craig Maclean**, of **JAQK Cellars**. As much as I like the striking, irreverent labeling of their **bottles** with a speakeasy gambler's feel, it can give the impression of being gimmicky.



JAQK's Pearl Handle Chard (photo source: JAQK website)

They brought it up first, saying restaurant owners and wine buyers often see them coming and turn the other way... *until* they taste the wines, which are selling out on many of the wine lists where they're featured. They spoke frankly about California wines compared to old world, European styles, and the pressure to cater to **Parker**, which they refuse to do

(though Maclean has won Parker accolades in the past, he sees right through the hype of awards and points).

These wines are California wines and thus bigger than many European wines with higher ABV, though not outrageous (hovering around 14% for some of the reds). Among the whites, 2008 **Pearl Handle Chardonnay** was the stand-out. Higher-priced at \$36, it's toasty oak, spiced pear and vanilla notes open up with surprising acidity as it aerates. Their 2008 **Charmed Sauvignon Blanc** (\$19) grew on me with each consecutive taste, crisp with mineral citrus and vanilla. 2007 **Napa Valley "High Roller" Cabernet** (\$67) is JAQK's flagship wine, meant to age, rich with tannins, oak and acidity. Not commonly a Merlot drinker (there are some fine ones, of course), I'd almost go for the



JAQK's 22 Black (photo source: JAQK website)



JAQK's rooftop deck view

2007 **"Bone Dance" Merlot** first, both for value (\$25) and round, black cherry earthiness.