



Bedrock Wine Co. Fall Release August 2017

Spring Newsletter - Evangelho Vineyard

“There’s a force in the universe that makes things happen. And all you have to do is get in touch with it. Stop thinking, let things happen, be....the ball.” -Ty Chase, Caddyshack.

I have been in love with this crazy vineyard since I first set eyes on it in September of 2011.

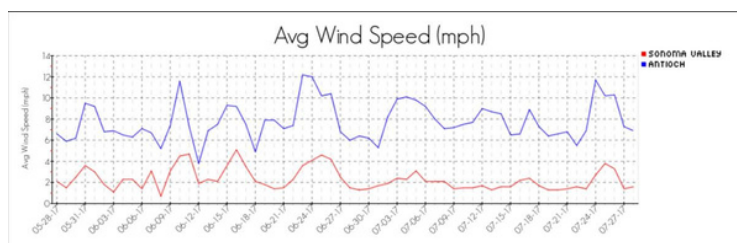
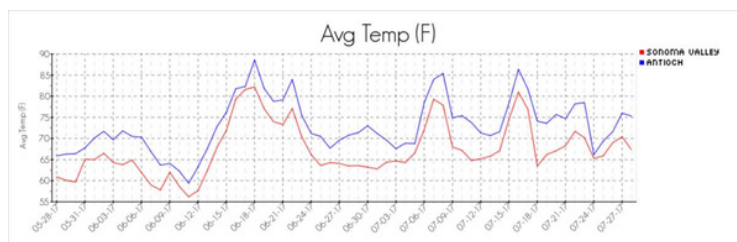
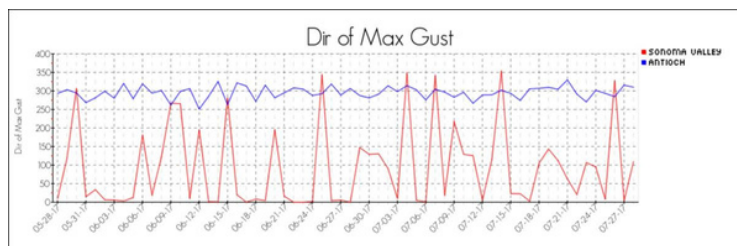
Acting on a recommendation from a winemaker friend, I headed out well before dawn to meet Frank Evangelho in my little bobtail loaded with a few picking bins. As I drove the hour and fifteen minutes southeast to the Antioch/Oakley border, I felt like I was driving through the modern story of the Bay Area. I drove smaller country highways across the fog-wrapped vineyards of the Carneros, navigated the constant construction of Jamieson Canyon, and did the quick drop onto I-680. From there I drove 20 miles south, through a barren area on the backside of the Coastal Range towards the strangely beautiful nighttime light show of the oil refineries of Benicia and Martinez lying along the edge of the windblown Carquinez Strait. As my little truck flailed against the howling winds on the Benicia Bridge, I realized that my family’s history ran this route as well—my grease chemist grandfather worked at these refineries, my father sailed small boats under the cantilevered bridges from his home base in Richmond, and I played baseball as a high schooler on the fields in the shadow of Crockett’s C&H Sugar Factory. More than anything, I was driving through the blue-collar organs that have clattered constantly in the background of the greater Bay Area and its growth for decades. Turning east on Highway 4 in Concord, I drove up over Willow Pass, rattling between low gears in the truck and semi-abandoned military barracks, a golf course, and a dump. Dropping over the pass, the Delta Highway drops into the suburban sprawl dripping from the shoulder of Mt. Diablo, a Malvina Reynolds nightmare with stucco filter. I continued to pass tract homes, old industrial plants, strip malls in varying states of decay, and recently abandoned auto dealerships (this was only a few years after the Lehmann Bros. debacle). Curling northward on Highway 160, I got a first glimpse of vines just to the right of the “Oakley” sign. A quick exit and a left, a bouncy drive through a field beyond a Kmart and a Burger King, and I was staring at a vineyard like I had never seen before.

Frank Evangelho, a couple months into recovering from one of several heart procedures, rasped over to me led by his enterprising Jack Russell terrier, Zooey. Instead of the guarded old-school farmer I was expecting, Frank was warm and kind—fitting for a man who spent the second act of his career as a marriage therapist. In the truck behind him was his wife Jo Ann, softly keeping watch. An older, grizzled gentleman was warming up a decades old Massey Ferguson forklift, and a group of pickers huddled in the dark drinking coffee and sharpening their blades. Cool winds were blowing and not so far in the distance, the humming and infrequently blinking lights of an antiquated PG&E power plant created a dissonant backdrop. As we drove through the vineyard, I could sense the enormous pride and love Frank had for this strange field of vines.



The first thing one notices about Evangelho Vineyard is the sand. There are various forms of sandy vineyards—sandy loams, sandy clay loams, Tokay loams—all of which are defined by having more sand in them than silt or clay. Evangelho’s soils are a different beast altogether—they are identical to walking on a beach: The dry part of the beach. Their technical name, Delhi Sands, always conjures images for me of Lawrence of Arabia or Arabian nights. The second thing one cannot help but see are the rather enormous, healthy, own-rooted vines that lay over the landscape. As we drove out towards the Zinfandel block I noticed interplanted Carignan, Mataro (Mourvedre), and even a few extra monstrous white Palomino vines. Frank mentioned that he had some of those varieties available as well. Walking through the Zinfandel, I also could not help notice how amazingly good all the fruit tasted—it was toothsome fruit with deep and dense flavors that even when well sugared had a beam of acidity running through it. I always had thought of this area as intensely hot, but Frank was quick to point out that winds, the same ones that buffeted my truck on the Benicia Bridge, whip through the vineyard nearly constantly during the growing season. This caused the vines to essentially hibernate through the hot afternoons and not drop acidity like they would in a more typical warm climate. As we ambled our way through the vineyard, Manuel Carranza driving the tractor and his family picking quickly, we picked a couple bins each of Zinfandel, Carignan, Mataro, and even a few hundred pounds of Palomino.

(Below see comparison of wind and temperature at Evangelho (blue) and Bedrock (red) during the 2017 growing season).





The older gentleman, Greg, loaded the truck—the old Massey running like melted butter under his careful watch. As he did, he told me the story of his family, which I now know runs parallel to so many others in the area. His father farmed hundreds of acres of grapes, almonds (pronounced amond in Oakley, because to pick them you have to shake the L out of them), prunes, and peaches. Gradually though, land he leased was sold for development or in sadder cases, seized by eminent domain, until Greg was left with only a small vineyard on the east side of Oakley. What I know, years later, is what Frank and every farmer in Oakley has known for decades: that Greg Castanho is one of the kindest human beings you will hopefully get to know. He is old school in the way you seem to only hear about—the type who will take your broken tractor all the way to Modesto for repairs and then go back and get it when you are away and can't do it yourself. He is the guy that makes sure your diesel tank is full. He is among the strongest of the few coarse ropes that holds farming together in Oakley.

I departed Antioch, not knowing fully what to think but feeling a little richer for knowing the vineyard and the people, and for getting to simply walk a vineyard so rare. Own-rooted vines comprise less than 0.1% of the total acreage planted in the world, and own-rooted vines that have passed the century mark are more rare than that. However, this means nothing unless wine quality is there to go along with it.

I learned in 2011 what was discovered by Brother Timothy of Lasalle Winery (now Hess) who started buying fruit from the vineyard in the 70s, and then Ridge who vineyard designated the fruit in the early '90s, and after that Doug Danielak, Bruce Neyers, Randall Grahm, Turley, and so many others. Evangelho Vineyard is simply a phenomenal vineyard. That haphazard blend from 2011, though riper than a typical Bedrock wine, was one of my favorite wines from the vintage. The wines we have made since then show what a wonderfully different expression of old vines—always marked by gorgeous natural acidity and suave tannins from the sandy soils. I have friends who call it the “Rayas” of California, and though that seems a bit uncouth, I understand why people think of the famously sandy vineyard in Chateauneuf-du-Pape. The wines here, particularly when laced with Mataro, feel like a fusion of California and the Southern Rhone.

It was only after a couple of years that we started talking with Frank about his plans for the vineyard. As much as he loved it, his health was a concern, and the stressful days of harvest were starting to wear on him. The other element at play was the continued expansion of the Bay Area sprawl towards the once remote areas along the Sacramento Delta. Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) has plans to expand eastward into Oakley and many old vineyards remaining in the area are on the market, their owners hoping the mighty purse of developers will drop \$200,000 or more per acre for their farmland. The already scarce vineyards that dot the landscape of Oakley—peeking out behind housing tracts, gas stations, and strip malls—are high on the endangered list for California vineyards. For Frank, whose father started farming the vineyard in 1938, the idea of being forced to sell to a developer was repugnant.



For Bedrock, our goal has been to take more and more control of our farming—realizing that it is the ultimate way to maintain quality and continue to improve the wines. We had been eyeing several vineyards closer to home and the idea of investing so heavily in Oakley seemed onerous at first. Also, Evangelho's 36 acres was a lot to gnaw off from any number of perspectives. However, over the course of several years we realized that in some way, we couldn't afford not to make a play for the vineyard. We love Frank and Jo Ann, we love the wines, and we have the rare capacity to make sure the vineyard, and the decades of Frank's emotional and financial investment, continues to be tended with the care it deserves. In April of this year, Bedrock took over responsibility for this jewel of Antioch. Frank and Jo Ann, who are likely cruising the coast in their Tesla as I type this, will still be linked to the vineyard, with Frank staying on as an advisor for as long, I hope, as he continues to skip over the sands of mortal time.

The Wines

2016 Compagni Portis Heritage White, Sonoma Valley, \$26

This is always one of my hands-down favorite wines we make each year. The combination of field-blended Gewurtzraminer, Trousseau Gris, Riesling, and Roter Veltliner always morph slightly according to vintage conditions. For instance, the 2015 showed off more of the Gewurtzraminer richness that comes in a warmer year. The wine from the more moderate 2016 displays plenty of Gewurtz perfume but also some of the stoniness and leavening acidity from the other varieties.

2016 Judge Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, Bennett Valley, \$28

In exceptional years we make a single vineyard Sauvignon Blanc from this vineyard in the cool Bennett Valley Gap. Done exclusively in a blend of older French oak, new cigare barrels and Stockinger barrels this is one of my favorite SB's we have made. Judge Vineyard, though not planted to the musque clone, always has head spinning perfume. Red cassis, pink grapefruit and peppercorn jump out. In a year like 2016, this is matched by surprising intensity and weight that sits atop all the nerve you would expect from a wine with a finished pH of under 3.3.

2016 Old Vine Zinfandel, California, \$19

We take immense pride in the quality of this wine as we want it to reflect how good California's beloved Zinfandel can be. A quick glimpse at what goes into it tells most of the story. In order of percentage, the wine comes from Bedrock Vineyard, Teldeschi Ranch, Sodini Ranch, Nervo Ranch, Katushas, Evangelho, Esola, Casa Santinamaria, and Story Vineyard. It is about 88% Zinfandel blended with Petite Sirah, Carignan, Alicante Bouschet and many different interplanted varieties that maintain poise and add complexity and structure. This has plenty of juiciness and should be delightful in the nearer term with a good decant; however, as many have discovered this wine will age gracefully and improve with time in bottle.



2016 Bedrock Vineyard Heritage Wine, Sonoma Valley, \$39

This is the wine I started the winery to make. From vines planted by Senator George Hearst in 1888, this is the geographic and viticultural center of everything else we do. 2016 is one of my favorite Bedrock Heritage wines to date, as I tend to prefer vintages that are less about immediate fruit intensity and ripeness and more in line with the old-school “California Claret” these vines were originally planted to make. This wine is more in line with the 2013 than the 2008 or 2015. The wine, a blend of the 27 varieties interplanted at our family’s vineyard is roughly 50% Zinfandel, 20% Carignan, 4% Mataro with the reminder being everything else found in the field. The rocky site yielded a small amount of dense and balanced fruit and as always this wine features the savory, spice-infused character of Sonoma Valley. This wine will last a long time and decanting is highly recommended if consuming in the next few years. I have had a few of the more recent vintage wines that really show nicely after 12-24 hours of double-decanting—there is a lot of goodness coiled in this one.

2016 Monte Rosso Zinfandel, Sonoma Valley, \$60

Our last vintage from this storied and beautiful vineyard, a fact that almost brings me to tears as I write this. As heartbreaking as it is to have this fruit taken away from us, the good news is that the 2016 is a wine for the ages. This reminds me most of my father’s 1993 version from this site—a wine that is still vibrant and hauntingly perfumed 25 years later. Tight-knit and structured, this wine has the classic citrus and pit fruit tintured perfume of the ranch backed by vibrant and dense fruit. This one will need some time but has great promise.

2016 Evangelho Vineyard Heritage Wine, Contra Costa County, \$30

I still cannot believe that we somehow own this unbelievable unicorn of a vineyard. Perched on banks of deep sand on the windy edge of the Sacramento River Delta this vineyard of own-rooted, 120-year-old vines produces vibrant and personality-filled wines unlike anything else we make. Though all the blocks are field-blends and co-fermented, I would estimate this wine is about 60% Zinfandel and 35% Mataro, with the remainder being Carignane, Palomino and a few other odds and ends. This features racy and vibrant fruit that is pleasantly funkified but the presence of the savory Mataro. Raised predominately in large foudre, this wine probably resembles a wine from the Southern Rhone as much as a “Zinfandel” from California. As always, the incredibly suave tannins from the sandy soils at the ranch make for a high-tone and elegant red wine.

2016 Esola Vineyard Zinfandel, Amador County, \$35

Since starting to work with this vineyard in 2014, the wines have continually redefined what I thought possible from Amador County. Elegant and poised, the 2016 has the immense perfume this site can be capable of—the fermentations often smell like grapefruit and cherries—with the line and structure common to Amador County. As in previous years, this is a blend of two different lots from the same block at the vineyard. The first is pressed off at dryness and typically has fresher perfume but rawer tannic structure. The second sees extended maceration on the skins for 20-30 days to help reconcile the structure, a process that makes for more refined structure and deeper fruit tone. As in 2015, this is one of my favorites from the vintage.



2016 Dolinsek Ranch Heritage Wine, Russian River Valley, \$39

A poster child of generously endowed, but still vibrant, Russian River Valley old vines. These stunning little bonsai vines date to 1910 and cling to a steep, north-facing slope of Sandy Goldridge Loam off of Laguna Road. A field-blend of Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Barbera, Syrah, Black Muscat, Palomino, and even a single vine of Mourastel, this wine, as in most years, is ready to impress in its youth. This is one to break into while you wait for Bedrock Heritage and Monte Rosso to come around.

2015 Sodini Ranch Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, \$37

Our first wine from this lovely vineyard since 2012—and boy has the vineyard changed. We were approached by Steve Sodini who was at wit's end after several difficult and money-losing harvests and was looking to find a solution for his 1905 planted vineyard. As is the case with too many old vineyards, there were lots of missing vines and soils had been depleted after years of production. In certain blocks almost 55% of the vines were missing, which meant the 16-acre vineyard was putting out less than 1 ton per acre. With Steve's blessing we took over the farming and started pouring TLC into the vineyard. Compost was spread, hard-pan was spaded and cover crops were planted to start the process of soil rejuvenation. Missing vines have been replanted to a massale selection of cleaned up Zinfandel clones from Bedrock Vineyard and are starting to bear fruit. It has been a bit of a massive undertaking but the quality has steadily increased year after year and the vineyard is living up to the enormous potential of its Limerick Lane address. Starting in 2015 we were able to select some of the best barrels for a vineyard designate (the remainder is a core of the Old Vine blend). Sodini is almost a perfect hybrid between the weight and pepper of Dry Creek and the sexy blue fruit of Russian River Valley—indeed, the soil on the flat of the vineyard are classic RRV sandy clay loams, while the hillside is made of the red clay loam so common on the east bench of Dry Creek Valley. This is satisfying stuff that will age nicely but can also be enjoyed on the sooner side with a generous decant.

2015 Griffin's Lair Syrah, Sonoma Coast. \$45

To say working with Griffin's Lair since 2009 has been a privilege would be an understatement. Few younger vine vineyards have excited us every year like this wind-swept Petaluma Gap location. Our love and belief in the greatness of California Syrah is heavily owed over the last 8 years of making wine to this vineyard and tasting the great wines from others like Pax and Arnot Roberts. Coming from a co-fermentation of several clones of Syrah and a smidge of Viognier, grown in the ever-windy Petaluma Gap, this is one of the most consistently excellent wines we get to make every year. To double down on the already explosive aromatics of violets, pepper and bacon, we included 50% whole-cluster at the fermenter. The wine was then aged in a combination of large and small format barrels. This is a classic Griffin's and should age beautifully. Decanting and hearty fare are always recommended here.

Cheers!

Morgan & Chris