



Bedrock Wine Co. Fall Release

July 2016

Dear Friends,

I can't believe it but we are about to start our 10th harvest at Bedrock Wine Co.! In thinking back over the many adventures, successes, and failures, we thought it would be fun to share some of our brushes with personal incompetence. Though you might have a hard time knowing it from the newsletters of some wineries, we winemakers screw up all the time. I mean, what could go wrong when dealing with an agricultural product prey to the vicissitudes of Mother Nature, human ego, and a million other variables? In fact, many of us know how to screw things up in spectacularly glorious fashion.

As we all know though, failure is where you can learn the most and Bedrock would not be in the fortunate position we are in now if not for a few near misses and outright f#ck-ups. Here are some of our favorites:

"If you stand for nothing, Burr, what'll you fall for?" -Hamilton

The near miss of pricing

In late August 2008, Chris came out to work a few weeks of harvest. Though fruit from Bedrock Vineyard was starting to come in and Hudson was racing, we still found time to cook ourselves a decent meal, sit on the back patio at my little condo, and taste the previous year's efforts.

When Chris asked about how I was going to price the wines, I suggested somewhere between \$35 for the Heirloom wines and \$45 for the Pinot Noir. This seemed fair to me based on how much I was paying for the fruit and because I wanted the wines to be within reach of as many wine lovers who might be. Though I pointed out that this tactic had worked for my father, Ridge Vineyards and others, Chris, coming from the world of high end wine sales, could not fathom why I would ask for less money than we thought they might be worth. Needless to say, Chris's opinions have always carried great weight with me as he has a knack for ending up on the right side of history.

With this one however, I am pretty happy I went with my gut and priced them where I did. A little more than two weeks after we talked, Lehman Bros. went down in the subprime avalanche. In the couple of years following we watched as high-end producer after high-end producer struggled with sales. However, Bedrock did okay and made it through relatively unscathed. The same result happened with other producers that have always provided great wine at fair prices—wineries like Ridge, Carlisle, Turley, etc..



There were a few great lessons that we took away. One is that wine has finally become ingrained in American culture. People did not stop drinking wine in the Great Recession; they just became more budget conscious about it. We saw that the first wineries to be hit hard by the financial downturn were those that were both overpriced and cold to their customers. To this day, if someone emails the winery about anything, it comes directly to either Chris (chris@bedrockwineco.com) or myself (for faster response, also chris@bedrockwineco.com); complaints, unpaid bills, and jokes about Iowa should be sent directly to our assistant winemaker (cody@bedrockwineco.com). Though our prices have crept up a touch due to the rising cost of grapes and glass, we are fundamentally committed to keeping our wine prices fair, even if it means getting a few annoyed looks from competitors who might want to goose margins a bit more.

Never forget the bung (hole)

You can imagine my excitement when we received our first fruit in 2007. There were also a lot of parallels to think about. The fruit was from a Pinot Noir vineyard located across the street from Joseph Swan Winery, where my father had been mentored and brought into the trade. I was 27—the same age that my father had called his first pick at the vineyard across the street. After months of getting redwood open top fermenters made, finding the perfect basket press and other equipment, not to mention finding the lovely but primitive winery to make the wine in, it was pretty hard to believe that it was all going to actually happen. Luckily, we caught it all on video.

What the video left out was that I set up the de-stemmer, the lines, everything, perfectly. Except for one small thing. I forgot to put in the bung at the bottom of the little tank and the first 10 gallons of must ended up in the gravel under the tank. Luckily Dad's cellar instincts saw it and stopped the pump quickly enough to avert real disaster.

The lesson for this one is pretty self-explanatory.

2009 Russian River Valley Zinfandel

In 2009, I started to receive the beautiful old vines at Dolinsek Ranch in Russian River Valley. As part of the deal, I also agreed to take a couple tons of Jim Dolinsek's younger vine Zin that grew on the adjoining hill. I wasn't quite sure what to do with it, but I wanted the old vine section so much that I agreed to take it.

As many of you know, the 2009 Dolinsek Heritage Wine was a pretty lovely, if large scale, wine that somehow managed to stand on the needle of high alcohol and high acid with remarkable ease.



The young vines were also quite pretty, though the VA was a little higher and one could certainly find some alcohol if one was looking. However, I thought it decent enough that I would bottle the whopping 47 cases as Russian River Valley Zinfandel.

For whatever reason, after giving it its final sulfur the day before bottling, the wine transformed in a manner that I have never seen on another wine to this day. The sulfur completely stripped out the fruit center, caused some reductive stink, and basically made the wine hard-edged and weird. Rather than being the flamboyant wine that I thought was going to sweep Robert Parker into rhapsody, it went into a strange hole.

At the time I was convinced that the wine was just shocked from bottling and the fruit would come back around. I was wrong, and it is easily the worst wine we have ever released. We are proud that our wines regularly average over 90 points on Cellartracker so the 83.3 average for this wine is painful, but deserved.

We did offer a full refund to anyone who bought the wine and offered to take the wine back. I thank goodness it was a small amount of wine but the ordeal served as a great reminder to only sell wines that you are fully behind and never to offer a wine just because it is convenient or might cost you some money in the short term. There are too many great wines made in the world today to offer something that doesn't feel quite right to you.

The first attempt at Amador Zinfandel

I have long been in love with Amador County. Its classic landscape of gilded hills and widely spaced oaks touches something deep within me. I adore the sweet Gold Rush towns, with names like Sutter Creek and Ione, evocative of a John Ford movie or a Bret Harte novel. There is history in the air and grapes to be had—something that is hard for me to resist.

I have also been enamored with organic farming.

In 2013 I thought I had found the vineyard that put these two things together. Located in the heart of Shenendoah Valley on a beautiful aspect looking over tumbling foothills and farmed by one of the first people to farm organically in Amador County, the vineyard seemed to check all the boxes. It was a sure winner in my mind.



However, being more accustomed to the hyper-intensive Phil Coturri form of organic viticulture, I forgot that some early proponents of the farming form took it more as a “do nothing” approach. Combined with the fact that Amador County was a 2.5 hour drive from a winery that we were in the middle of building, this meant that I was not as present as I normally like to be.

Pick day was a disaster. First the truck driver got lost and arrived an hour late, by which time half of the crew had walked. This meant that a partial crew was stuck picking Zinfandel on what turned out to be a nearly 100 degree day. After a long truck ride back across the furnace that is the Central Valley, the fruit arrived at 7:00 PM with many hours of crushing ahead of us.

Then, we dumped the first bin into the hopper. Though I can still viscerally feel my reaction, I cannot quite explain the smell. It was a cross of 95 degree fruit that had broken down over the course of the long journey and botrytis. And not the “noble” botrytis that makes Lachryma Montis or Sauternes, this was the stuff you get warned about on day one of winemaking school. More disturbing was the cloud of mold spores hanging over the hopper that required us to put on face masks before proceeding on with crushing the fruit. In the early hours of the morning we finally finished—though to this day if you bring the incident up with our cellar master Luke, who had the unenviable task of dumping the bins of fruit that long night, he quickly develops a ten mile stare.

It was also one of the few times I have had to use all the tricks of the trade learned along the way. Borrowing oak chips from a neighboring winery to help stabilize tannin and bind out the browning effects of laccase and polyphenoloxidase that come from botrytis. Chilling things down as quickly as possible and (gasp!) inoculating the ferment with a strain yeast to keep the volatile acidity accumulation as low as possible. Somehow, we managed to make a wine that was drinkable, albeit sold on the bulk market for a loss.

However, many lessons were learned from the ordeal. First, if we were going to sign on a vineyard that far away, we need to take the “trust but verify” approach to farming. This means carving out the time to be in the vineyard at least every couple of weeks. Second, it was a good reminder that organic farming is harder and more expensive than conventional farming, so you need to have a farmer that is willing to allocate the necessary time and labor to walk that viticultural tight-rope. Third, refrigerated trucks are your friend. Fourth, it’s good to brush up on the technical winemaking stuff every now and then even if you hopefully never have to use it.



Using insulated bins for the first time

In our first few years, one of the great vexations of being a fledgling winery was T-bins.

T-bins are plastic bins that hold roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ ton of fruit. Their main advantages are their cheapness, ease of cleaning, and mobility. For me, their main disadvantage is that they never get warm enough during fermentation, resulting in a wine that doesn't quite live up to the fruit's potential. I tried all sorts of things to combat this, from putting a tent around them with a space heater to sticking aquarium warmers in the cap, but nothing really worked.

Enter: the insulated plastic bin. I noticed fisherman on the docks of Bodega Bay would use thickly insulated plastic tanks to keep water cold enough for the crab they were bringing in. This seemed like it could be a good solution to counteract the cold fermentation temps I was battling, so I tracked down the company and purchased a bin large enough to hold one ton of fruit.

That harvest, I decided to put some Hudson Syrah into the tank, figuring the normally sanguine Syrah would gradually ferment and come up to my ideal temp of 90 degrees in a smooth and controllable fashion. On day three, everything was going to plan—the fermentation was coming out of lag phase (roughly 19 brix) at 70 degrees and I was looking forward to what I thought was going to be a nice fermentation curve.

That night I woke up around 3 AM with a bad feeling. I drove to the winery and found that the fermentation had exploded—in just a few hours, they must have dropped seven brix and the temperature had gone to over 100 degrees. This was easily high enough to stick the ferment, and I had almost no cooling capacity at my disposal.

The lone cashier at Lucky Grocery Store seemed very confused when I bought them out of every bit of dry ice in the store at 4 AM. I hoped that by dumping it into the fermentation I would be able to bring the temperature down enough to the point that I wouldn't be sitting shiva over some rather expensive Hudson Syrah fruit. Somehow it worked and the fermentation actually came to completion without sticking; the resulting wine, the 2008 Hudson "Cofermented," has stood the test of time.

From this I learned two things. First, cooling plates, even if you just have cold water running through them, are a wonderful investment. Second, if you are messing around with something new in the winery, don't use your most expensive fruit!



In conclusion

John Steinbeck signed off on his personal correspondence with a small drawing of a pig with wings he dubbed Pigasus. Below this image he would write “Ad astra per alas porci,” which translates from Latin as “to the stars on the wings of a pig.” He meant it as a comical sign-off to show that he was earthbound but aspiring. This has always resonated with me as we have learned to navigate the sometimes complex and overlapping web of winemaking, viticulture, business, and the diverse cross section of humanity we get to experience every day.

Over the last nine harvests, our intentions have gotten stronger and more clearly delineated, even if our wingspan is a little short from time to time. Thanks to your support we have been allowed to aspire, flounder a bit, and survive to make better wines. We look forward to this trend continuing, so we can continue to make better wines and better serve the people who matter most—those who drink our wine and let us live this rip-roaring adventure we call Bedrock Wine Co..

Why do I smell smoke?! Did I forget to turn off the pump again...

Wines

2015 Old Vine Zinfandel, California

This is perhaps the most important wine we make—it is what Chris calls the “gateway drug” to Bedrock. Virtually all of the vineyards that go into this blend are also vineyard which means in some ways it is a bit of an old vine super cuvee—albeit a value-priced one. The fulcrum of the wine is based around three old vineyards we farm in Sonoma County: Bedrock (1888), Nervo (1896), and Sodini Ranch (1905), along with a healthy dollop from the gorgeous Esola Vineyard in Amador County. The wine also has tasty morsels from Pagani Ranch, Evangelho, Pato, Papera Ranch, Teldeschi, Dolinsek Ranch, Carlisle, York Creek, and others. With the average vine age over 80 years, this is some legit old vine goodness. The 2015 is 90% Zinfandel, with the remainder made up of Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Grenache, Carignan, Mataro, and various other mixed varieties found interplanted in these old vineyards. This is a delicious wine that will be great out of the gate with some decanting but, as many have noted on earlier incarnations, will also reward some cellar time. \$19



2014 Lorenzo's Heritage Wine, Dry Creek

The last of the 2014 vintage heritage wines, the Lorenzo's as always promises to be one of the longest lived wines of the vintage. From gorgeous, dry land vines planted on the eastern bench of Dry Creek Valley, this wine is a blend of Zinfandel, Carignan and Petite Sirah, along with small amounts of Alicante Bouschet, Cinsault, Peloursin, and Valdigue. This is a dark and powerful wine, full of Dry Creek black cherry, iron filings, violets, and tea. This is a perennial favorite from one of the foundational vineyards for Bedrock, Teldeschi Ranch and its inimitable guardian John Teldeschi. \$39

2015 Evangelho Heritage Wine, Contra Costa County

Our fifth iteration of this wine, and each time I think we get closer to capturing the true essence of this Grand Dame of a vineyard. Coming from own-rooted Zinfandel, Mataro, Carignan, Palomino, Alicante, and Mission planted in the 1890s on 40' banks of granitic beach sand, this wine is a unique expression of a California field blend. Aromatically lifted by bright Zinfandel and crunchy Carignan but held in earthbound embrace by the terrestrial Mataro, this is a wine of opposition, a veritable Hegelian dialectic in vinous form. One time, when walking through this vineyard, my feet sinking in the sand, I had a David Lean inspired delusion of grandeur: it is 1917 and I am trudging across the Sinai peninsula with the only thing standing between me and the Gulf of Aqaba a Turkish-held garrison (otherwise known as a PG & E power plant) but where is my camel and why am I sampling grapes? \$30

2015 Dolinsek Ranch, Russian River Valley

In most years, Dolinsek Ranch Heritage Wine is one of the most immediately gratifying wines we make. In 2015 this is especially true. A gushing spring of rotund Russian River Valley blue fruits and spice, this is a wine that can, and perhaps should, be drunk young. Yes, you just heard me say that about a Bedrock wine. Sourced from Jim and Kathleen Dolinsek's 1910 plantings, this scant yielding field blend of Zinfandel, Alicante Bouschet, Petite Sirah, Syrah, Palomino, Black Muscat, and Burger is one of the last old vineyards on the east side of the Laguna del Santa Rosa. Jump on in, the water's great! \$39



2015 Bedrock Heritage Wine, Sonoma Valley

Diane Kenworthy, who has overseen farming at Bedrock Vineyard for the last ten years, has a sage mantra that the best vineyards teach you how to farm them over time. I think the same can be said of making wines from a great vineyard. Over time you see the gentle nuances of ripening and subtle variations in a vineyard. You gain a better understanding of maximizing the potential of a vineyard in a given year rather than attempting to force it into a particular style. Bedrock Vineyard is always going to have orange-scented perfume and rooted tannins, but outside of that I have been amazed by the variations of vintage. The 2015 is a svelte lumberjack but a true lumberjack—not the soft-handed, urbane, hipster type, nor the Monty Python cross-dresser (though if that is what it wants to be when it grows up, that is just fine with me!). A wine that is well-built, a little gruff at first, but full of nuance, soft eyes, and a well-hewn heart. Composed of the 27 different varieties found in the old vines at Bedrock Vineyard, the wine is dominated by the classic California field blend of Zinfandel, Carignane, Mataro, Petite Sirah, Syrah, and Alicante Bouschet. However, it also has Cabernet, Merlot, Castets, Trousseau Noir, Grenache, Bequignol, Mondeuse, Semillon, Tempranillo, Muscadelle, and more. From the heart of Sonoma Valley, this is the wine closest to our hearts. \$39 - \$100

2015 Esola Zinfandel, Amador County

Though the name is new, the vineyard is what made up the majority of our Sherman's Gold bottling from 2014. We were not planning on having another vineyard designate wine—I swear. However, this wine was so d*mn good that I would have been incredibly bummed to see it all go into our Old Vine bottling. By far the most explosively perfumed Zinfandel vineyard I have ever worked with (the wine smelled liked grapefruit and angostura the first few days of fermentation!), this is also one of the most complete wines from 2015. Its glory should not be too surprising though, as this was the vineyard that was used by Dave Bennion and Paul Draper at Ridge for their “Shenendoah” bottling in the 70s and 80s. The grapes from the vineyard were split into two lots—one was pressed at dryness, while the other saw 30 days of extended maceration on skins to help round out the classic Amador tannins (a technique we usually reserve for Cabernet). The final wine is 68% extended maceration and 32% what was pressed at dryness, with the majority of the wine aged in 600 gallon foudre. I love this wine, but definitely give it a nice decant if opening on the sooner side. \$36

2015 Schmiedt Road Zinfandel, Lodi

The excellent Kirschenmann Vineyard and our own Katushas Vineyard lie on either side of the tiny Schmiedt Road just north of the small town of Victor. Planted in 1915 on their own roots, the vineyards are located in a half-moon shaped bend of the Mokelumne River. The afternoon breezes and winds that travel up the river from the Delta wash across this oxbow, providing cool respite from the warm Lodi days. The result is a wine with surprising elegance and polish from a region better known for bruisers. This wine is more along the lines of the 2012 Kirschenmann rather than the more savory and raw-meat inflected 2013 and 2014 offerings. Supple and forward, this will provide some very nice early drinking pleasure but should age nicely for a few years beyond that. \$31



2013 Weill Vineyard Syrah, Expositions 3-pack

Our third and final year of this experiment, as Syrah decline is unfortunately starting to ravage this wonderful vineyard. All sourced from the various aspects, clones, and blocks of Weill a Way Vineyard located at the mouth of Sonoma Valley, these wines are a love-letter to the LaLa wines (La Landonne, La Turque and La Mouline) of Guigal in Cote Rotie. Exposition One comes from clone 470 on a steep west facing hill, saw 100% whole-cluster, and is free of the perfumed shadings of Viognier. Exposition Two comes from clone 877 and was 50% destemmed and cofermented with 8% Viognier. Exposition Three saw scant whole-cluster inclusion, 16% Viognier, and is the most rounded and headily scented of the wines. Only 125 cases were made of each of these wines, and if last year was any indication, these will certainly be among the highest-demand wines we have released. \$180

2015 Cuvée Karatas

After a few year hiatus (the last we produced was the 2012), Cuvée Karatas is back! One of my favorite wines we make, when we have the material to make it, the Karatas is based around the oldest Semillon plantings left in the country. Planted in the 1880s at the stunning Monte Rosso Vineyard, the Semillon is one-of-a-kind stuff. Whole-cluster pressed and barrel fermented in a combination of new Stockinger barrels and older barrique in a range of sizes, the Semillon is weighty and expressive. Sauvignon Blanc from Judge Vineyard in Bennett Valley and Uboldi Vineyard in Kenwood were blended in to make a classic “Bordeaux Blanc” style wine. This is delicious now but should age gracefully for quite a while. We find that with time more of the Semillon oiliness and tobacco character comes out, while in its youth the raciness of the Sauvignon Blanc is more defining of the aromatic and fruit profile. This is easily my favorite version of this wine since the original 2008 (which is aging beautifully!). \$38

2014 Griffin’s Lair Syrah

As much as we love working with old vines around the state, there is something utterly magical about Griffin’s Lair Syrah. Starting with its evocative name, one that conjures images of ghouls and goblins, of sweet smoke-scented rooms of alchemy and potions, of swords rising from lakes and profs called Snape, the vineyard seems to capture the many dark mysteries of Syrah. The 2014 is a winery favorite and a classic expression of this wind-ripped site in the Petaluma Gap. Fermented with 50% whole cluster and some Viognier, the wine lies on the border of elegance and enormous density—full of violet pastille, tousled Corsican Myrh, white pepper, copa, and Benton’s southern smoked ham. Like the Great Smoky Mountains during wildflower season. Gotta get me some more Benton’s..... \$42

Cheers,
Morgan and Chris
