



Bedrock Wine Co. Fall Release

August 2014

Dear Friends,

News!

On the Wednesday before Mother's Day, Chris and I were out doing our regular 250 mile vineyard loop from Sonoma to Contra Costa County to Lodi to Amador County. While stopping at Kirschenmann Vineyard in East Lodi, we noticed the property across the street—Zinfandel, equally old (planted in the 1910s), own-rooted, in much worse shape—had a "For Sale" sign on it. While pondering the possibilities and implications, calling the listing agent to ascertain price, walking the vineyard and repressing the itch to get out saws to re prune the vines, a man in an older pick-up tore up. He informed us that he had an offer in on the property and that he was planning on ripping out the vines to plant walnut trees.

Oh, hell no.

A few more phone calls, a dozen hours, a cup check to make sure we felt men enough to farm in Lodi, and we had an offer in on the property. A week later Bedrock Wine Co. owned its first vineyard, situated in the cool oxbow of the Mokelumne River north of the tiny town of Victor (really a school, a watering hole for honky tonk heroes called Know Place, and the honor of being the real life inspiration for the show Sons of Anarchy). Given the closeness to Mother's Day we decided to call the previously unnamed vineyard, Katusha's Vineyard, in honor of the unique Ukrainian-German heritage of the area and the two Katherines (Katusha means Katherine) who have been such potent mother figures in my family.

Though Lodi generally suffers a mixed reputation, we feel confident we have purchased the foundation for one of the best vineyards in the state. We know the fruit from the excellent Kirschenmann Vineyard across the street; also, we have seen the amazing results when traditional quantity-driven farming is superseded by quality-focused farming in places like Contra Costa County, Lodi, Amador and Mendocino. It will take a few years to solve the problems created by bare minimum farming (furrow irrigation, Bermuda grass creep, etc.) but luckily we have been down a similar path before at other old vineyards staring at an ignoble future as a pyre of burning vines.

It also makes me realize that although I have often talked about the winemaking, our amazing growers, and quiver of stunning vineyards (in fact, getting me off the soapy rostrum is the trick), I have not talked much about the informing and constantly developing philosophy behind our farming, which in reality is probably the most important aspect of the wines and the winery.



Cliff Notes on an Evolving Practice

Healthy Soil and Healthy Grapes. For much of California's modern grape-growing history, the soil has been thought of merely in mechanical terms. We stand on it, it holds roots and vines upright, it is a porous substance through which we can feed plants what they need. Though all of these things are right, there has been lack of holistic reasoning applied. This mechanistic philosophy is akin to saying that our guts merely uptake nutrition and pass waste, ignoring the millions of bacteria doing the heavy lifting. In similar fashion, soil, teeming with life, is the medium that interfaces with the plant and affects its health in so many ways. Grapevines are only as healthy as the soil in which they are grown.

Double-down on soil. Many of the old vineyards we work with have been farmed with minimal soil and organic matter inputs for decades, if not over a century. On top of this, tractors have driven over the soil 5-6 times a year for the same amount of time, causing soil compaction. Roots, like us, tend to like healthy food and soft beds.

Organic matter. Not only is organic matter critical for nutrient uptake, it also serves valuable water-holding capacity. In a state where whiskey is made for drinking and water for fighting, dry farming, or coming as close as possible, is what is truly sustainable. Several recent studies have shown that a 1% increase in organic matter in soil adds an extra 14,000-18,000 gallons per acre of water holding capacity. From a less scientific perspective, we are in the midst of the worst drought in California's history and after nearly a decade of compost, cover crops, and other inputs, we have not had to water the old vines at Bedrock Vineyard once this year.

Dry farming. By minimizing water inputs, assuming the soil and vines are healthy enough, we find we get better flavor development at lower sugars. What this means is better expression of vineyard site unsullied by over-ripeness with the freshness and fruit density we are looking for. One of the greatest takeaways from Clark Smith's recent "Postmodern Winemaking" is how hanging grapes to great ripeness, a common practice in California, actually prematurely oxidizes polyphenols. What that means for the non-dorks among us is that hanging fruit to high sugar levels causes wines to age prematurely. Imagine an 18 year old with greying hair and a bald spot—is that what you want your wines to look like? This is why I think so many of the Bedrock wines tend to be more structured and age-worthy than many counterparts from wineries that pick later—we can pick earlier and maintain freshness and density in the wines. It is also the reason why I think the Ravenswood wines made by my Pop in the late-80s and early-90s have aged so elegantly.



Monoculture is the worst culture. Imagine having your car break down in the middle of nowhere with the radio stuck on the same station for eternity. Then imagine having no resistance to the hordes of pests that start to descend and eat away at the windshield (yeah, they are badass pests). That is monoculture. Crops have been rotated since the beginning of time to prevent the build-up of pathogens and pest populations but with a field of grapevines, permanently positioned, we do not have this luxury. Polyculture is the farming of different plants in the same field. During the winter we seed the rows between vines with many different types of crops depending on the site and situation. We often work with nitrogen-fixing crops like fava beans and peas along with vetch and cereal grains since soils often need replenishing. In situations where we have nematode issues (little soil bastards that sap vine roots and build up over time) we seed mustards that, upon integrating into the soil, give off mustard gas and cause a decline in nematode populations. In the summer we are (following on the work by the brilliant viticulturalist at Ridge, David Gates aka Yoda, and his work with agroecology guru Miguel Altieri) starting to plant insectaries of native flowers that attract beneficial predators who between taking sips of nectar feed on populations of vineyard pests such as spider mites and leafhoppers. As our own vineyard manager Diane Kenworthy says, “If you want the wolves you need to provide the rabbits.” All of this makes for a healthier and hardier vineyard that can deal with the many challenges any growing season runs across.

Like all things in life, farming philosophy is improved and changed with every new vintage encountered. However, thanks to mentors and friends I feel we have a great core kernel to work on. Obviously the proof is in the pudding but the dramatic changes we have seen in vine health and quality at Bedrock Vineyard, Compagni Portis, Oakville Farmhouse, Puccini Vineyard, and Sodini Ranch makes me feel we are on the right track.

2014 Fall Release Wines

In general I feel this could be the single greatest set of wines we have released. Both the 2012 and 2013 vintages were extraordinary- the 2012's buxom and delicious, the 2013's more beautifully composed and classically structured than any vintage in recent memory. With the generosity of crop it means that again, like in 2012, the Old Vine Zinfandel benefitted greatly from essentially being a super-cuvee of many of our amazing old vineyards. For those looking for wines to be enjoyed on the earlier side, Evangelho, Old Vine, Compagni Portis, Godello and the Carlisle Zinfandel should fit the bill nicely (decanting always helps though!). The 2013 Bedrock Heritage Wine, which might be my favorite we have made, should age gracefully for a couple of decades if stored properly and I would argue the same could be true for the new Oakville Farmhouse Heritage Wine. Dolinsek is delicious though more in line with the 2009 version of the wine (though with significantly lower alcohol) and Hudson is Hudson—always on.



2013 Old Vine Zinfandel: The 2013 Old Vine Zinfandel comes from vines averaging over 80 years of age. Like its predecessor, the lovely 2012, it benefited enormously from the second year in a row of exceptional quality with higher than average yields. Though its core still revolves around the Sonoma Valley appellation (Bedrock Vineyard, Monte Rosso, and Casa Santinamaria Vineyard), we have become geographically more adventurous due to the addition of a few pretty amazing vineyards. The first of these is Nervo Ranch in Alexander Valley with its steep, decomposed shale soils. The second is Sodini Ranch on Limerick Lane in the Russian River Valley that Bedrock Wine Co. happily farms. The last is the amazing Stampede Vineyard in the Clements Hills AVA of Lodi: own-rooted on granitic sands and planted in 1919, it is a star in the making under the new ownership of the Perlegos family. There are also bits of Papera Ranch, Pagani Ranch, and Lorenzo's in the blend. Though it is legally a Zinfandel, and labeled as such, it is also a Bedrock wine so you can be sure it has its full quotient of the wacky, weird and wonderful in it as well—nearly 23% Carignane, Mourvedre, Grenache, Petite Sirah, Abouriou, Auburn, and assorted mixed white varieties. We are thrilled with this wine—I think it is every bit as good as the 2012 though perhaps reflective of the age-worthy 2013 vintage. \$20

2013 Compagni Portis Heritage White Wine, Sonoma Valley, planted 1954: It was a unique year for this already singular vineyard. Planted in 1954 to a field-blend of Gewurtzraminer, Riesling, Trousseau Gris, Roter Veltliner, Chardonnay, and Pinot Gris, along with others, and organically farmed by Phil Coturri in concord with Bedrock Wine Co., the vineyard is a jewel. In 2013 the Gewurtzraminer ripened at a more accelerated pace while the Trousseau Gris and Riesling lagged behind. The result is a wine that is both unctuous and highly aromatic but with higher acidity than is typical for this vineyard. Fermented with native yeasts in a combination of old oak and stainless steel barrels this wine did not go through malolactic but did sit on lees for close to 10 months. \$26

2013 Abrente Godello, Sonoma Valley, 75 cases. Godello?! What is Godello? Good question. When Michael (Havens) suggested we plant a little of it I thought he was a bit nuts. Upon tasting a number of lovely examples from the Valdeorras area of Spain where the variety harkens from I was easily convinced. I also had to remind myself that Michael is strangely prescient sometimes—he talked Lee Hudson into planting some of the first cool-climate Syrah in northern California, was the first to make Albarino in the New World, and even made the first Sine Que Non wine. We talked equally addled John Baillie into grafting over some Merlot at his nicely situated Birdland Vineyard at the base of Sonoma Mountain to the variety. Highly textured and aromatic, this is the type of white variety we love. Primary fermentation was done in stainless steel with native yeast, the wine was put down to neutral oak barrels with the majority of its lees and malolactic was prevented to retain the wines spine. The wine is delicious, one of the best of many happy surprises from the great 2013 vintage. Aromatics of grapefruit, blood orange, tarragon and anise and a textured and layered mouthfeel. \$23



2013 Evangelho Heritage Wine, Contra Costa County, planted 1890's. Planted in the 1890s. If the success of the 2011 was blind luck (show up with a truck in the wee hours of morning in a place I had never been based on the tip of a friend), and 2012 was the first effort of following an entire year's worth of farming and coming to understand the unique conditions of Antioch and Oakley, then 2013 is a wine that reflects a better understanding of the site. Evangelho lies just inland from the Sacramento River Delta on banks of sand that can reach 40 feet in depth. Though a warm area there is rarely a day that passes without a serious wind—very much like a Californian Mistral and the antecedent to the fog coming through the Golden Gate—racing through the vineyard. This causes the vines to shut down for much of the hot afternoons, and the result is a wine that seemingly defies conventional wisdom when it comes warm weather sites. Evangelho is the earliest-picked vineyard by weeks in the winery, but it tends to be the lowest in pH and alcohol of the Heritage Wines. This means that the crackling red fruit of Carignane, unctuousness of Zinfandel, and terrestrial perfume of Mourvedre is held aloft by an underlying brightness. Yet another unique terroir only found in this great State. \$30

2013 Dolinsek Ranch Heritage Wine, Russian River Valley, planted 1910: This is my favorite vintage of this wine so far. Perhaps a little less forward than the gregarious 2012, this still has the dramatic perfume and opulence that Dolinsek typically has. From vines planted in 1910 on a north-facing slope of Sandy Goldridge Loam, this comes from one of the cooler parts of the Russian River Valley. The vineyard is composed of Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Grand Noir de la Calmette, Teroldego, Syrah, Golden Chasselas and even a little delicious Black Muscat. \$37

2013 Bedrock Heritage Wine, Sonoma Valley, planted 1888: Always the wine closest to my heart, the Bedrock Vineyard Heritage Wine comes from my family's old vineyard in the heart of Sonoma Valley. Planted between 1888 and 1895 and composed of over 22 interplanted varieties, the Bedrock Vineyard Heritage Wine is the wine that I started the winery to make. The piece of rock strewn red clay soils produced a wine of citrus-tinged red fruits and spice. I hope this wine speaks as much to the vineyard as to the varieties from which it is composed- which of course is the point. Composed of roughly 55% Zinfandel, 30% Carignane, with the balance being the many other varieties scattered throughout the vineyard. \$38



2013 Carlisle Vineyard Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, planted 1934. If you are excited about seeing this vineyard on a Bedrock label you can only imagine my sheer joy. I count Mike and Kendall Officer as some of my closest friends and the wines from Carlisle occupy a large portion of my own cellar. Beyond this, Mike and I have spent many hours in vineyards together and he is one of the best ampelographers (the science of vine variety identification) I have ever met. So, when he called during harvest last year and said that he had a few extra tons that he simply did not have space for, I was thrilled to take them. Carlisle Vineyard is perhaps the most diverse vineyard I have seen (almost 40 varieties) and this wine comes from a section that is particularly heavy with Petite Sirah. It is one of many favorites from the vintage—opulent, dark, spicy and reflecting its proud Russian River Valley heritage. The only downside is that this could be the only vintage we make the wine (unless my Faustian bargain with Mephistopheles comes to fruition and Mike gets a little extra crop every year!). \$38

2013 Oakville Farmhouse Heritage Wine, Oakville, Planted 1930's; we think. This is a special one. Mark and Mollie Gamble's vineyard is the oldest vineyard left in Oakville and one of the last remaining museum pieces from a nearly extinct time in Napa Valley's history. Lying at the foot of Harlan and catty-corner from the southern edge of To Kalon Vineyard, this 2.5 acre piece occupies some expensive real estate. A fascinating field blend of Negrette, Zinfandel, Mondeuse, Petite Sirah, Carignane, Ruby Cabernet, and more this vineyard actually has the last known vines of old Mondeuse in Napa Valley. This is surprising as the original owner of To Kalon Vineyard, H.W. Crabb was so enamored with the variety upon planting it in the 1880's that he called it Crabb's Black Burgundy. The vine is incredibly unique, with aromatics of violets and anise and dark fruit supported by a deep spine of acid and tannin. This should age beautifully and could use extended decanting if opened young. \$55

2012 Hudson Vineyard Syrah, Napa Carneros, 300 cases. One of my favorite vintages of this wine so far. This comes from the T and S blocks of the famed Hudson Ranch. Vinified with 40% whole-cluster and cofermented with a smidge of Viognier, this is classic Hudson—savage, bacon-rind, peppery goodness. Dark and dense this wine will age gracefully but will reward earlier-term drinking with a good decant perhaps a bit better than its 2010 and 2011 counterparts. \$39

As always, thank you for your ongoing support of our little enterprise. Every year we feel we get a little better at what we do- we hope it shows! Please feel free to reach out if you have questions regarding ordering.

Morgan and Chris
