



Bedrock Wine Co. Spring Release February 2014

Dear Friends,

*"Sweet spring is your
time is my time is our
time for springtime is lovetime
and viva sweet love"*
-EE Cummings

Spring, 2014

After the slow days of December and January, February sees gentle awakenings in the cellar and vineyard. The phenomenal 2013 wines are gradually finishing up their malolactic conversions and are beginning to show their density and loft. The final blends for Ode to Lulu Rosé, Abrente Albarino, and Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc have been pined over, tasted, re-tasted, tweaked and have finally come together beautifully. As you will read below, our inner fires have been stoked by the remarkable 1-2 punch of the 2012 and 2013 vintages.

In between cellar work and a few days of desperately needed precipitation, we are getting out to prune vineyards. Pruning, particularly in old vines, is the fundamental crux from which the entire cycle starts anew. This is exceptionally so in a drought year, as the decisions we make now will influence vine balance for this year's vintage. It also provides a type of meditation and connection with our vineyards; with foliage gone, we see more subtle effects of soil and contour on vineyard vigor and health. That, and a day to empty the quiver of jokes—generally ones we might not want our mothers to hear (unless one of our mothers was Joan Rivers).

Sadly there seems little doubt that we will be experiencing some form of drought this year. It's been painful to drive all across the state seeing strangely brown expanses knowing that even though the vines aren't showing stress now, they are experiencing a similar alarm. However this is the life of agriculture. We can only react and work that much harder to deal with Mother Nature's best Koufax-esque curveball. We will watch crop load and canopy vigor closely this year. We are pruning vines showing weaker growth from last year to 50% of the available fruiting buds, thereby asking them to do far less. We are spreading spring compost amendments as good research shows added organic content in soil dramatically improves water retention. I see a season of frequent and early suckering to focus vine vigor into fruiting canes and the need to drop A LOT of crop on the ground. This means we will be in the vineyards even more this year, watching and adjusting. And it is also likely that 2014 could be a short year when it comes to production. However, another ten inches of rain before April and all of this will change quickly. Ah farming.



What we do know is that 2012 and 2013 will likely be regarded in ten years as two of the best back-to-back years in California. Although exceptions always exist, particularly for a winery like ours that uses geographically distinct vineyard sites (aka vineyards days like pilgrimages to the viticultural hinterlands of the Golden State), there are a few common themes that run through the wines.

The 12's are generally more congenial. It is vintage of mirth, of flaxen hair, and beautiful round face, of larger bust and of lusty conversation.....like the Renaissance Fair lady that always has the most enticing turkey legs and the tastiest flagons of ale. Yeah, you know. This is not to say it is a vintage of simple charms, rather its character seems to be more readily revealed than most. The challenge was to find the appropriate structure to balance the generosity of fruit. Even the Syrahs, for all their density, have revealed a trace of buxomness I was not expecting and I am thankful we included such a large percentage of whole cluster as it seems to have provided ballast to the generosity of fruit.

The 13's are just beginning to reveal their character as the last clouds of malolactic are receding and the wines are beginning to speak with clarity. The Syrahs and Cabernets are impressively dense and dark, a bit more sinewy and muscular at this stage. The Syrahs all saw a little less whole-cluster inclusion as tannin and color seemed off the charts already. As Hemingway might say, "It is strong and that is good." Or, as a yogi might say, "Great core!" Like the 12's it clearly is going to be a vintage of deciding what is great versus very good, rather than good versus meh. The Zinfandels and Mixed Blacks are marvelous. I am not sure I have encountered a vintage where vineyard definition has been so beautifully defined. Bedrock Vineyard SCREAMS Bedrock Vineyard, Limerick Lane and Sodini beautifully represent their snug little corner of the Russian River Valley, the Evangelho lots so far seem the pinnacle of juicy grace that CoCo is capable of. Carignane is frickin' brilliant whether from the northerly gravels of Redwood Valley in Mendocino or the sandy dunes of Contra Costa County. Mourvedre is haunting and seems more perfumed than normal. Across the board the wines are relatively darker and more primary, and I get the feeling that theirs will be a conversation of deeper tone as they show themselves to the world.

It is also true that with the new winery we have been able to pick vineyards more specifically by area and soil type. For instance, we picked our areas of Bedrock on five different days, giving us a kaleidoscope of textures and ripeness levels from which to work. The Lulu rosé, which I think is the best we have made, benefited greatly from the narrow and tall tanks that we had built specifically so we could do more controlled micro-lot fermentations. Beyond this, nobody can get annoyed with us for the stupidly inefficient but necessarily diverse types of barrels and tanks we employ. Barriques, Cigares, Puncheons, Demi-Muids, Foudres, stupidly-heavy concrete tank that looks like a spaceship, yessir. If Chris wants to listen to Ace of Base while doing punch downs, no one is there to stop him (seriously, the man loves his Swedish Pop during harvest). Though building the thing was crazy, the subsequent control has been incredible and there is no doubt that on top of the great vintage of 2013, having our own space has made the wines better. It also makes us all the more confident that no matter what type of vintage we encounter we will be better positioned to make the most delicious and exciting wine we can from it.



The Wines

2013 Ode to Lulu Rosé: In our quest to continually one-up the previous vintage of this wine we stumbled headlong into the rugged terrain of Mendocino. Don't get me wrong, I really like the 2012, where I feel we finally captured a trace of ethereal lightness and perfume while maintaining the sturdy stock of Mourvedre at the wines base. However, I wonder if perhaps the 2012 was just a trace too delicate. We used more Carignane from the sandy, soft soils of Contra Costa County for that wine so my theory was that we needed to find soils with a bit more edge in them. Though the base of 2013 wine is composed around the ancient plantings of Mourvedre at Bedrock Vineyard and Pagani Ranch, the rest of the blend is composed of dry-farmed Grenache planted in the 1880's at Gibson Ranch in McDowell Valley and Carignane from the 1950's planted on soils that remind me of Pauillac in Ukiah. As always, all the lots were picked early and all except the Grenache Gris were whole-cluster pressed. This, I think, though I am sure I will continue to refine, is the best Ode to Lulu to date. Fresh, perfumed, lifted, bright, clean, dense, and delicious. 12.6%.

2013 Gibson Ranch Grenache Gris: When life gives you ancient Grenache, make ancient Grenache! After picking out our bit of Grenache for rosé at Gibson Ranch I got a call from the ranch's new owner Jake Bilbro. It was their first year working the vineyard and it turns out they had a few extra tons of the Grenache left. Would I be interested? The stuff we got for rosé had been phenomenal and I wondered what it would look like for red. It should also be noted that none of us are too sure what type of Grenache is up there. It has very light pigmentation and the clusters take on a grayish caste, leading many to suspect it is actually Grenache Gris. Another friend thinks it is too dark for Gris but might be Grenache Rouge, but not Grenache Noir. I frankly don't know what it is, but I know it is delicious. I have long wanted to make a light, summer, red—a California version of Beaujolais or Pinot D'Aunis or Frappato (yes, I know, those are not just summer wines) but perhaps kissed with just a trace more sunshine. Something fresh, juicy, spicy, and delicious. This fits that description. It was fermented with 50% whole-cluster with no foot-trodding to maximize carbonic fermentation with the rest destemmed. It fermented to dryness with native yeasts and underwent ML in a combination of neutral barrels and concrete tank. 13.8%

(A note on the label. In our circuitous route of label development for our Under the Wire project, Chris and I stumbled down Martin Luther King Avenue in Berkeley towards the antique printing presses at St. Hieronymus Press. There we met with David Lance Goines, who did my father's Ravenswood label back in 1978. He showed us an image he had already done that, though not perfect for the sparkling project, seemed to capture the Grenache wholly.)



2013 Sauvignon Blanc, Sonoma County: First, it should be noted that despite not being a “vineyard designated” wine, the Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc is stronger than it has ever been. The reason for this was the addition of Judge Family Vineyard to the wine—a site so rocky that Joe Judge removed 200 tons of rock merely to make the site plantable for grapes. Like Kick Ranch, which is 22% of the blend, the rocky site limits the vigor of the naturally robust Sauvignon Blanc grape and makes for more concentrated fruit. Roughly 15% of the wine was done in the celebrated “cigare” barrels created by Dider Dagneau and coopered by Tonnellerie Ateleir from tight-grain and lightly toasted oak. The remainder of the wine split its fermentation between neutral oak barrels and stainless steel. The resulting wine is the type of Sauvignon Blanc I like to drink, interestingly textured, layered, racy and exotically perfumed. 14.1%

2013 Abrente Albarino: The fifth iteration of this wine made by Michael Havens (the first person to make Albarino in the New World) and myself. The wine comes from two sites in the far southern part of Napa Valley. Unlike previous iterations our newer Watson Vineyard site, which is planted in limestone, makes up almost 60% of this wine, adding greater density and perfume. Done completely in stainless steel tank, with no malolactic this racy, bright wine is perfect for briney oysters, sushi, or pretty much any time the sun is shining. Easily my favorite version of this wine to date. 13.3%

2012 Pagani Ranch Heritage Wine: A vineyard that needs little introduction! This old planting of a patchwork of varieties did beautifully in the luxurious year of 2012. In fact, the sheer density and broadness of the wine, which enjoyed a particularly hefty level of mixed blacks due to the fruitfulness of the Alicante, Lenoir, Petite Sirah, and Grand Noir, made us hold it in barrel for several more months. The resulting wine is an age-worthy beauty, though those who like more muscular efforts will be fine opening this in a couple years. At early glance, this looks to be the finest Pagani Ranch to date. 14.8%

2012 Griffin’s Lair Syrah: The 2012 Griffin’s Lair is the best wine we have made from the vineyard. When the fruit came in the berries and clusters were so small I thought the wrong variety had been delivered. 80% of the clusters were foot-trod and put into the destemmer with 20% of the fruit destemmed over the top. Roughly 12% Viognier was combined for cofermentation. Following native yeast fermentation the wine was barreled down to French oak, roughly 20% new. There, it remained unracked until bottling after 15 months in barrel. Wildly Syrah, like violet and peppercorn tintured raw pintail duck breast. One of my favorite Syrah’s ever to come from the Bedrock cellars. 14.6%



2012 Kamen Cabernet Sauvignon: I am so pleased that the vineyard and appellation has piqued peoples' interest!

First off, the Moon Mountain AVA was just recognized this year. As a Sonoma Valley boy I have long been aghast that the Sonoma side of Mount Veeder and all of its unique soils, California chaparral, elevation, etc. have been simply lumped into Sonoma Valley, particularly when Sonoma Mountain has long enjoyed its own official viticultural area. Anyone that drives over Oakville Grade and Trinity Road can see the remarkable change in native flora when one passes into the Sonoma-side watershed.

Second, there are roughly three major soil types on the Moon Mountain AVA. The first is the Red Hills Clay Loam that defines Monte Rosso, parts of Repris (formerly known as Moon Mountain Vineyard), Amapola Creek, Rancho Salina, and the several vineyards in the north of the appellation on Nelligan Road in Nun's Canyon (including Bedrock's rows of 50 year old dry-farmed Cab at Montecillo Vineyard). The second is whiter soils defined by tufa. There is a little of this at Kamen, but more up at Bismark Vineyard and others along Cavedale Road. The third is basically pure basalt, which really differentiates Kamen Vineyard from most other vineyards in that it is intensely, stupidly, tire-poppingly, rocky.

Kamen vineyard is like no other vineyard I have seen. I have been to most of the Napa "cult" vineyards and I have yet to see one that moves me the way that Kamen does. It is the viticultural opus of Phil Coturri's career that has been funded by the lovely and loveable madness of owner Robert Kamen. There are parts of the vineyard where Phil, via the use of cover crops and compost and rock crushers, has literally created soil on slopes of tennis to soccer ball sized rock. It is as modern and perfect a vineyard as one will find anywhere in California and I would argue it is the best, modern, organically farmed vineyard I have ever seen.

I have long argued (and those who read the newsletter in 2009 when I released the 2007 Bedrock Vineyard Cabernet can attest) that Sonoma Valley is as excellent a site for Cabernet varieties as Napa. However, years of second-rate status has meant that Sonoma wineries get a fraction of what Napa wineries get for their Cabs (even for equally meh wines), which means that they pay less for their grapes, that farmers get paid less, that farmers limit inputs and focus on cropping, that wineries get lower quality grapes, which makes the wines worse, and so on and so on. Yes, I know there are some exceptions but they are the serious minority.



Kamen is one of the only vineyards I have seen in Sonoma that breaks this mold so when Robert offered to sell fruit for the first time in the vineyard's history in 2012 I was immediately in. Yes, it was crazy expensive by my standards, but I have always loved mountain fruit from Mt. Veeder and longed to make it myself. Also, though it was expensive, the fruit farmed the same way in Napa would be 3-4x the amount.

Most importantly, the wine itself is something I am really proud of. It is mountain fruit, made in a relatively old-school way, picked much earlier than the remainder of the vineyard. Hopefully it does justice to the three decades of love and work put into the vineyard by Robert and Phil. 14.5%

As always, we sincerely thank you for the support you give us. Each year we fall more deeply in love with what we do. We hope you find the wines intellectually stimulating, but most importantly we hope you find them flat-out delicious.

Our best,
Morgan and Chris
