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BONNY DOON VINEYARD

by Adam Mahler

Growing into wine in the 90's, Bonny Doon was a tremendously important producer to me as I learned about wine. Randall Graham's embrace of Rhône varieties, as well as obscure Italians, gave hope to the idea that the world of wine did not begin and end with Chardonnay and Cabernet. His quirk and wit said that you can make serious wine without being self-important. There aren't too many rock stars in the wine world, Randall is definitely one.

This is the 3rd time I've sat down to write about Bonny Doon's addition to the portfolio, each time, finding myself at a loss for words. As I have discussed my portfolio with my colleagues, their amazement at the fact that I coerced them into the fold is compounding my writers block. I always try to think of the cliché, "act like you've been there before" whenever I approach something big and new and scary. I have a couple of funny stories that I'm going to keep in my pocket for now about Bonny Doon and Randall Graham. Somehow, though, I needed to give this brand all the sincerity I could muster. Fortunately, their National Sales Manager thought it would be wise for me to taste through the current lineup. This was a brilliant idea, as I guess I haven't tasted the entire lineup in a few years, since which time, Bonny Doon has reinvented themselves.

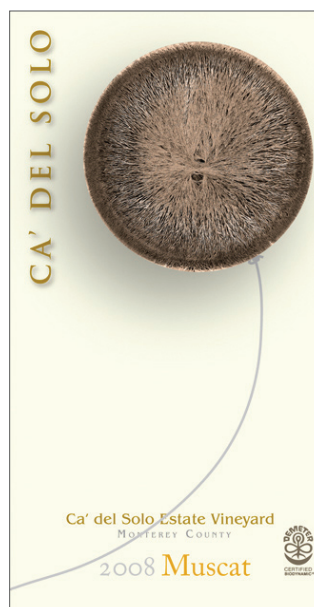


The lineup now includes the Ca' del Solo wines as well as the Cigare Volant wines, some dessert wines, and the Le Posseur Syrah. Gone are the larger production wines that you may have associated with BD over the years. Randall has always loved the old world analogues to his varieties, but without the overwhelming desire to replicate. This thought was crystallized in tasting through the wines. The Cigare wines are dead ringers for Rhône wines. Great structure from the grenache made the red drink just like a great CDP. The white, with a healthy backbone of Grenache Blanc is one of my favorites white wines of this year. Rose, always rocks. Then we got to the Ca' del Solo lineup. My first thought was "this is the first Albarino from California that tasted like it came from Basque country. Great minerality (California, really?), and that signature under ripe mandarin orange character. Then came the Nebbiolo and Dolcetto. Again, dead ringers for their Italian counterparts. Nebbiolo from California NEVER has this kind of Tannin and earthiness!

So with a few wines left to go through yet, I felt like I had a firm grasp on what is going on inside the bottle. These are all wines that make you reconsider whatever you feel

or felt about Bonny Doon. They remind you why Randall Graham got to be so famous in the first place, by making great, interesting, challenging wines.

The Bonny Doon story can't really be told without discussing the other exciting concepts Randall has championed over the years. Remember his burial of corks? How about his take on Dante's Inferno? The story of the alien spacecraft? So what is he up to these days? First, all wines are now from either sustainably farmed vineyards, organic or biodynamic. How about Bonny Doon is now including all ingredients on their labels? And then there's sensitive crystallization. I can't think of the last time a concept in wine was so complex that it required hours of reading to just begin to understand what it means. The Ca' del Solo wines all have an image on the front of the sensitive crystallization of that particular wine. Sensitive crystallization is basically taking the wine (or grapes or plant material) combining them with copper chloride in a petri dish and letting the liquid evaporate. What is left are these images of crystals that apparently tell one (that knows what to look for) all about the wine. They should show life force, balance, health in the wine. This is a concept that goes hand in hand with biodynamics. This is all an attempt from Randall to peer a little closer into the grape, the vineyard, the terroir, analyze what it gives back and frame this in a visual representation. Pretty heady stuff indeed.



Perhaps the thing that makes Bonny Doon such a special producer is their spirit. Embracing something new and exciting not just for changes sake but for the progression of quality, discourse and responsibility. Bonny Doon takes risks everyday in the noble pursuit of enhancing your wine drinking experience. All I needed to do to understand this was drink some of their wine.

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