

As our story unfolds, we learn that with the 2018 vintage, there has been a fundamental change in the style of Le Cigare Volant. Not that there was anything at all "wrong" with the thirty-four vintages preceding the current one, mind you. For a number of reasons, mostly, alas, drearily fiscal/economical, the older style of Cigare has unfortunately proven to be a not particularly sustainable proposition at least from a financial perspective.¹ The "new" Cigare, with a re-adjustment of the *encépagement*, by which we have dropped Mourvèdre from the mix and elevated the percentage of the (greatly underappreciated) and quite brilliant variety, Cinsault, creates a style of wine far more approachable and seductive in its youth.²

"Cuvée Oumuamua?"

We call this cuvée, "Oumuamua," (or "scout" in Hawaiian), so named in light of the recent mysterious cigar-shaped object/visitor to our solar system, initially imagined to be some sort of asteroid, but believed by none other than the chairman of the Astronomy Dept. at Harvard University to possibly be a sort of probe, perhaps a solar-powered light-sail, sent on a kind of reconnaissance mission to check us out. (Ok, this last part is a bit of interpolation.) Anyhoo, it has been agreed that this was a very, very strange object that recently came to visit. And it appears that it may have arrived in the very nick of time, to bring a sort of much-needed revitalization to our planet, and by metaphoric extension, to the Cigare brand itself.³

TASTING NOTES

2018 was a wonderful cool vintage, providing us grapes with great natural acidity and real vibrancy of flavor. The color is a deep, vivid violet-red, owing in part to the lower pH of the wine. On the nose, the wine has a haunting kirsch nose (I suspect that's the Cinsault), along with associated small red fruit (red and black currant) and perhaps a suggestion of blackberry. My colleague, Nicole Walsh and I toil away at the Cigare blend every year, and while the blend will change (sometimes radically, as it has this year), we share an idea of the Platonic form of Cigare, and the '17 certainly embodies that form. It goes something like this: Juiciness, fruit (but not confected or overripe), brightness, exuberance, joy, and not least, a sense of savoriness. I realize I'm not speaking orthodox wine parlance. We look above all for balance and for liveliness, for vinous *qi*. This wine is still incredibly young and just wants to jump out of its shoes.

VINEYARD | PRODUCTION NOTES

The Alta Loma Vineyard in the Arroyo Seco area of Monterey County, was planted years back to one of the earlier selections of Tablas Creek Grenache clones, typically not a great selection for imparting real backbone or structure to the wine, but capable of making a wine that is enormously pretty and fragrant; in cool years, the fragrance of cassis or black currant is almost overpowering; most surprisingly, the Grenache in cool years from this vineyard is profoundly black in color. The Cinsault was sourced from the Loma del Rio Vineyard, a vineyard, under a previous *nom de guerre*⁴ (San Bernabe), we know quite well. This was the first year of production for the Cinsault and it was thinned multiple times both for enhanced concentration and evenness of ripening. The cooler climate gives the Cinsault a wonderful articulation of flavor, but what is most noteworthy is the fact that we were able to coferment the Cinsault with Syrah from the equally cool Mesa Verde Vyd. in the Santa Ynez Valley. Something magical happens when Syrah and Cinsault marry; the healthy tannin titer from the Syrah seems to give more structure to the Cinsault, helps to stabilize the color, and in general, insures that the blend will not evanesce *tout de suite* into the aetherial plane. The spicy, licorice component from the Syrah is a perfect foil to the Griotte cherry derived from the Cinsault. Vineyard of Contra Costa continues to provide Mourvèdre for Cigare. The 120+ year old vines of the Bechtold Vineyard Cinsault provides a very particular fragrance of flowers and aromatic herbs.

¹ The biggest issue has been the fact that we have held the wine for release for such a long time after the vintage. The screwcaps (which we adore) seem to wind the wine up, which is a bit of a mixed blessing. The fact that it needs time in the bottle before it can optimally express itself is a key to its prodigious ability to age. (Twenty to thirty years of pleasurable drinkability is not at all unusual with this wine.) We have just not, alas, been able to translate this incredible feature of Cigare to a particularly monetizable proposition.

² I've written in the past about Cinsault, which is a grape that I believe is soon to achieve its moment. On its face, it is not a variety that would appear to be destined to rock-stardom. For one, it's a fairly ginormously sized variety, which in fertile or well-irrigated soils, will grow to prodigious size (we try to keep that well under control). Not deeply pigmented at all. But, it does have the great ability to tolerate both drought and heat, and is an ideal grape variety for global shifts in the climatic paradigm. But, most significant of all, it is capable (even in a reasonably warm climate) of real elegance. Perhaps not quite as complex as Burgundian Pinot Noir, Cinsault can still evince the haunting fragrance of violets and Griotte cherries, and often adds real sophistication to what might otherwise be a slightly rustic blend.

³ If you take a close look at the label, you can see that the beam emitted by the spaceship is not in fact a death-beam, but rather quite the opposite, bringing vibrant verdant color and life to a previously drab, somewhat sepia-toned world. I confess that I have appropriated this conceit in equal parts from "The Wizard of Oz" ("There's no place like Doon,.... There's no place like Doon.") and the largely overlooked but utterly brilliant film, "Pleasantville."

⁴ Managing a vineyard really does resemble managing a military campaign. When mechanical harvesters are arrayed at dawn through the mist, one can't help but imagine a scene from "Apocalypse Now."

VITAL STATISTICS

Varietal Blend: 52% Grenache,
35% Cinsault, 13% Syrah
Appellation: Monterey
County
Vineyards: 48% Alta Loma,
35% Loma Del Rio, 6%
Mesa Verde, 6% Zayante, 4%
Rancho Solo 1% Lieff
Cellaring: Drinkable upon
release (6/19) with ageability
of 7-10 years
Alcohol by Volume: 13.5%
TA: 6.1 g/L
pH: 3.62
Production: 11,500 cases
Serving Temperature: 58°F

INGREDIENTS

Grapes, sulfur dioxide.
In the winemaking process, the following were utilized: Yeast, yeast nutrients, French oak chips, and copper sulfate.



WINEMAKER

Randall Grahm



REGION

