



Bonny Doon Vineyard's Rhône Reds

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Posted by Fredric Koeppel

One of the smartest moves Randall Grahm, owner of Bonny Doon Vineyard, made as a businessman and winemaker was selling his Cardinal Zin and Big House labels in 2006 and his Pacific Rim brand in 2010, allowing him to reduce production and concentrate on the Rhone variety grapes that his Central Coast vineyards grow best and for which, it must be said, he seems to have a natural affinity. Grahm also delved full-time into biodynamic farming practices while espousing, as he always had, the principle of minimal manipulation of wines in the winery. Under review today is a group of Bonny Doon's red Rhone-style wines which, whatever the nuances of detail and dimension that differentiate them, share an almost genetic propensity toward spareness and elegance, toward a rooty-branchy structure and lithe, sinewy texture. If terroir means being able to taste the influence of the vineyard in the wine, then these wines seem to embody that doctrine. These wines fall into the limited edition category of reserve bottlings and a couple intended for members of the the winery's DEWN club. They were samples for review.

I reviewed the Bonny Doon Vineyard Le Cigare Volant 2011, Central Coast, as a Wine of the Day, in August last year. Here's a link to that post: <http://biggerthanyourhead.net/2015/08/21/wine-of-the-day-no-53/>

The unusual blend for the Bonny Doon **2014 CINSAUT COUNOISE**, California, is 67 percent cinsault and 33 percent counoise, this latter being one of the minor grapes allowed into Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape and other red wines of the southern Rhone Valley. The color is medium to light cherry; a bouquet of red cherries and currants is slightly briery and brambly and opens to hints of cloves and sandalwood, tobacco, black tea and cigarette paper. The counoise lends a distinctly peppery note in the nose and on the palate, where a tannic bite and blazing acidity cut a swath. It's almost unnecessary to add that this is a lithe, lively and sinewy wine that prizes bones above flesh and muscle above fat. I like it. 13.7 percent alcohol. Now through 2018 or '19. Production was 280 cases. Very Good+. About \$35.



My first note on the Bonny Doon **2014 CUVÉE R GRENACHE**, Monterey County, was "lovely wine," and indeed it is. From its nearly transparent medium ruby color, it goes to aromas of pure raspberry and red currents over briars, brambles and loam, with hints of violets and lilac, cloves and cinnamon, with a spicy, peppery effect a bit like Red Hots, and a background of black tea and orange zest. Spare and limber on the palate, the wine delivers a mouthful of red and blue fruit flavors deftly and lightly graven with graphite and mildly dusty tannins. Overall, the impression is of a liquid both dense and weightless. 14.5 percent alcohol. Production was 270 cases. Drink now through 2018 or '19. Excellent. About \$48.



Bonny Doon **2011 LE CIGARE VOLANT RÉSERVE, "EN BONBONNE"**, Central Coast, is a blend of 37 percent mourvèdre, 34 percent grenache, 20 syrah and 9 cinsault. This is the "normale" version of the Reserve Le Cigare Volant, meaning that it aged in oak barrels rather than in five-gallon glass demijohns as the following wine did. The color is dark ruby-purple with a tinge of magenta at the rim. The wine is slightly dusty and graphite-inflected, burgeoning with elements of ripe black currants and raspberries etched with notes of cloves, leather and sandalwood. Delicately mossy, rooty and woody, this mellow and drinkable wine's tannins feel clothed in lightly sanded oak and chiseled granitic qualities, while bright acidity keeps it lively and flowing. I played with this wine for three hours, and it gained power and structure over that time, but never to the detriment of its tasty black and red berry flavors, both fresh and dried. The lithe finish offers more dried spices and a sinew of forest floor, brambles and briars. 14.5 percent alcohol. Production was 966 cases. Drink now through 2020 or '22. Excellent. About \$79.



Bonny Doon **LE CIGARE VOLANT RÉSERVE "EN BONBONNE" 2010**, Central Coast. "En bonbonne" refers to the five-gallon glass demijohns mentioned above, in which this wine rested for 20 months, after a brief pass through oak for malolactic fermentation. It's a blend of 28 percent syrah, 22 percent grenache, 17 cinsault, 17 mourvedre and 16 carignane. The color is dark ruby shading to transparent mulberry; aromas of ripe and macerated red currants, cherries and plums are permeated by notes of violets, smoke, leather and mushrooms. This is a wine of threads, tendrils and filaments, a bosky, framboiserie of a wine whose fruit seems to shift subtly from red to black from mid-palate back; though it possesses plenty of slightly dusty tannins and vivid acidity for structure (and it's quite dry), it's not heavy or strenuous. Rather, it offers lovely detail and satisfying dimension in its approachable character. 13.3 percent alcohol. Production was 511 cases. Drink now through 2019 to '21. Excellent. About \$79.



The Bonny Doon **2011 SYRAH, BIEN NACIDO VINEYARD, "X-BLOCK"**, Santa Maria Valley, delivers an enticing dark ruby hue shading to pale magenta; aromas of dried lavender and violets, cloves and white pepper underlie notes of black currants, blueberries and plums; a few minutes in the glass bring in elements of loam and forest floor, cedar, black olives and bell pepper. The wine flows across the palate with brisk vitality, expressing a sense of litheness and sinuosity; dusty, graphite-infused tannins are a little chiseled and faceted, needing a year or two to smooth out. Other than that aspect, this is a thoroughly tasty, approachable wine that gains some power and dimension in the glass. 12 percent alcohol. Production was 463 cases. Try now or from 2017 through 2022 or '23. Excellent. About \$50.

