

Dear Doonstah,

It's that time of year again, when a winemaker's thoughts turn to weather forecasts (they're talking rain on Monday!), availability of harvesting crews, and of course, dreams of perfectly balanced, impeccable grapes that do not require heroic levels of winemaking intervention. (A guy can dream now, can't he?)

This has been a rather exciting year, what with the release of the new versions of Cigare, red and white, what we are calling "Cuvée Oumumaa." The critics seem to have responded very favorably ([click here to read what the Underground Wineletter has to say](#)), wholesalers also seeming quite excited about the wine, to the extent that wholesalers get excited by much these days', and we'll just have to see how the market in general responds. But, in my mind at least, both Vermentino, (the salient player in the white), and Cinsaut, (the salient component in the red) are both ready for their star turns in the California wine scene. They both arguably make exceptionally tasty wines at lower potential alcoholic degrees, and both have reasonably good drought and heat tolerance, making them excellent, sustainable choices for an indisputably changing planet.

We had a very tough year at Popelouchum with powdery mildew, (as did many). For reasons too complicated (and painful) to get into, we were unable to get in to spray our prophylactic stylect oil on the vines as often as we really needed to', so we are looking at a rather dramatic doon-turn in volume. But the vines themselves have grown well in the absence of irrigation, and it appears that dry-farming at Popelouchum is not an entirely far-fetched idea. The "varietal auto-tuning" project that we initiated with the Sérine seedlings is going very great guns, and we've observed frankly totally unexpected amounts of growth in some of the plants - some as much as three to four meters in length - from plants that were just seeds two years ago! As I may have mentioned previously, grapes grown from seeds behave somewhat differently than vegetatively propagated vines; they need to achieve a certain amount of growth before they send the hormonal signal to end juvenility and begin producing fruit. I had imagined that this process would take us perhaps six or seven years, but I think we should be seeing fruit on many of the vines as early as next year, and perhaps we'll find a particularly distinctive Sérine x Sérine seedling. (This is an unbelievably cool development.) As I've also mentioned, it is my intention to reiterate this self-crossing technique with the variety known as Rossese this year, hopefully with equally successful results.

¹ In many quarters of the wine trade there seems to be something akin to "weimüdigkeit," a neologism meaning "wine-tiredness," as in "we've seen it all," "de Voûde Musigny yet again, etc.?" Show us something that's truly new and startling different! (And not Napa Cabernet "perfected" in bourbon barrels.) (I'd add a footnote here to this footnote, which would express my own sheer and utter revulsion to the concept of a wine/bourbon barrel marriage.) These are indeed very strange times in which we live.

² Okay, since you're family I'll share some of the deets of the reason for the travail. We unfortunately used a bunch of wooden stakes in the vineyard that did not hold up very well, and simply broke off with the weight of the new growth. Because we couldn't keep up with replacing the stakes, it was impossible to get the tractor through the rows in as timely a fashion as was needed to keep up with the spray schedule. It's a real disappointment, but as with baseball, there's always next season.

It has been our intention at Popelouchum to make wines in as "natural" a fashion as possible. A quick report on the 2018 Grenache Blanc/Grenache Gris cuvée. It's still fermenting! (though by all reckoning, almost doon.) No need to rush things along here. The wine is still totally clean and utterly delicious; I have no idea how we will ever get it to undergo malolactic fermentation, especially as the weather begins to cool down this fall, but we'll worry about one thing at a time.

This final DEWN shipment of the year is truly special - a double shipment for many of - a bit like a double album - somewhat conceptual, but au fond, a treasure trove all the same. There are some superb pinks in this bunch, and some great reds as well. The Cinsaut from the venerable Bechtold Vyd. - don't get me started. I encourage you fill out your order to the point of total satiety. One postscript: Keep your eyes peeled for a very special offering that is soon to follow, which will be a deep dive into the BDV Archive/RG's cellar, with offerings of older vintages of Cigare and rare large and small format bottles - excellent choices for holiday gifts. #staydooned.

It is always such a great pleasure to connect with you, loyal DEWNstahs. It has been quite a remarkable adventure that we are on, n'est-ce pas?

Yours in Autumnal Delight,

Randall

Illustration and Design
by Sarah Williams

2018 Merlot, "Zayante Vineyard"

Not a saturated color, (mercifully), but a medium-ruby hue, bespeaking appropriate maturity level at harvest and appropriate extraction post-er. The fragrance speaks of pink peppercorn with a non-trivial amount of peppiness. On the palate, a beautiful acidity (all natural, natch), with reasonably well resolved, soft tannins, and the wine finishing with a clean, long finish. But, wait! Giving the wine additional air brings more volume to the wine; it's far more mouth-filling than upon opening. (Suggestion: Consider decantation.) There is little about this wine that proclaims, "California!" or "2019!" And this is not a bad thing at all these days.

There is something special about bordelais grapes grown in the Santa Cruz Mts. This wine in fact is a bit of a time-machine, harkening to an earlier, less self-conscious era of the wine industry in California, when winemakers made wines to please themselves, rather than trying to make wines that they reckoned would be commercially acceptable or sexy. (Does this oak treatment make my butt¹ look pHat?) Organically farmed, dry-farmed vines from high in the Santa Cruz Mountains in the hippie trippy Zayante area. (Growing grapes there is real no picnic with the intense avian and deer pressure. The degree of bird pressure is often a salient consideration in when grapes in the Santa Cruz Mountains are harvested.)

Standard BDV red wine protocol. Approximately 25% non-d stemmed fruit, a cold pre-soak and hand-punched down in small ½ ton bins with a 30 day/30 night maceration. The wine matured in older puncheon with minimal racking and not filtered.

¹ A "butt" is an actual vinous thing, to wit, an approximately 500 gallon oak barrel, typically used for the storage of sherry.

Food Pairing:

Rib-eye steak, flank steak or pork tenderloin au Marchand du Vin

Statistics:

VARIETAL BLEND: 100% Merlot
APPELLATION: Santa Cruz Mountains
VINEYARD DESIGNATION: Zayante Vineyard
PRODUCTION: 167 cases
SERVING TEMPERATURE: 58° F
TA: 5.6g/L
pH: 3.58
OPTIMAL DRINKABILITY: Now - 2026
LABEL ARTIST: Grady McFerrin
ALCOHOL: 13.4%

RETAIL PRICE: \$34

CLUB PRICE: \$28.90

2018 Old Telegram

From the nose, one scents licorice, blood(!) (make that very rare meat), blackberries (both berry and leaf), and wet earth. There is a definite scent of beef bouillon, one of the absolute true signifiers of (proper) Mourvèdre. On the palate, the tannins are soft, with almost a sense of sweetness (emphatically no R.S. in this), but with a really vibrant acidity and very great length. We somehow skirted the peril of over-ripeness and raisination, which is always a bit of a peril in the sunny climes of Antioch, CA. The wine is rich but also quite elegant at the same time.

We have purchased grapes from the Enea Vineyard in the sandy terroirs of Antioch for many years and have always found this shy-yielding vineyard to ripen as much as two weeks earlier than the other Mourvèdre vines in the neighborhood. I suspect that there is substantially less clay underlying the sand, resulting in diminished water-holding capacity and hence a bit more hydrologic stress on the vines, with resultant concentration in the fruit itself. A high percentage of sand in the soil limits the viability of phylloxera, and these very old (100+ year) vines have never seen rootstock.

Now it can be told. As much as we love the fruit from the Enea vineyard - it is always the most concentrated and vibrant Mourvèdre we see - we have been habitually plagued by some of the ambient bacterial flora that hitches a ride along with the grapes. As a result, even with reasonable use of SO₂, we have with almost vintage seen volatile acidity levels mount during and immediately after fermentation. Not that a little bit of VA is necessarily a bad thing, but these grapes represented a unique challenge. This vintage we experimented with a technique of ozone treatment of the grapes before harvest, wiping out the indigenous microflora and then inoculating both with cultured yeast and malolactic culture. I am as much for doing things naturally whenever possible, but in this instance, our enological intervention was certainly the wiser course. Volatile acidity well in hand without the need for major SO₂ additions. Success!

Food Pairing: Wine-braised lamb shanks with herbes de Provence. Enoki mushroom tempura with soy-based dipping sauce. Hoisin-marinated chicken breasts served with wild & brown rice medley. Wild mushroom & thyme pizza. Pork shoulder. Beef short ribs

Statistics:

VARIETAL BLEND: 100% Mourvèdre
APPELLATION: Contra Costa
VINEYARD DESIGNATION: Enea Vineyard
PRODUCTION: 398 cases
SERVING TEMPERATURE: 58° F
TA: 5.3 g/L
pH: 3.59
OPTIMAL DRINKABILITY: Now - 2028
LABEL ARTIST: Chuck House
ALCOHOL: 13.7%

RETAIL PRICE: \$45

CLUB PRICE: \$38.25

2018 Cinsaut, "Bechtold Vineyard"

Sheer happiness in a glass. Everything about this wine is just right. The color is an enchanting ruby hue, and upon pouring, the fragrance explosively leaps out of the glass. Cherries and mulberries, most significantly with a slightly pungent peppery, strawberry kick. On the palate, weightless elegance, at the same time showing extreme persistence. This wine charms the way the brilliant wines of Jura do. The wine is attempting to sublime into the aetheric realm, yet rooted with a sort of doon-to-earthiness that can only come from grapes borne by very, very old vines.

What can be said about this extraordinary vineyard that hasn't been said already? We've been privileged to work with these grapes for the last 25 years or so, albeit in ever-diminishing volume (that's another story altogether), indeed it seems that RG was the first in modern times to make the definitive varietal identification. (Grapes formerly shipped as "Red grapes.") Oh well, this vineyard is very old (maybe the oldest in California), wise, and the great coolth of the vintage year yielded perfectly ripe grapes that still maintained impeccable freshness and vitality.

Standard BDV red winemaking procedure, i.e., a brief cold soak (with the magic of dry ice), hand punched down in small ½ ton bins, with a cuvaison of approximately 30 days.

Food Pairing: Can be paired with virtually anything that Burgundy might complement, viz, game birds, wild mushroom ragout, etc.

Statistics:

VARIETAL BLEND: Cinsaut (Cinsault)
APPELLATION: Lodi
VINEYARD DESIGNATION: Bechtold Vineyard
PRODUCTION: 317 cases
SERVING TEMPERATURE: 58° F
TA: 5.3 g/L
pH: 3.65
OPTIMAL DRINKABILITY: Now - 2028
LABEL ARTIST: Grady McFerrin
ALCOHOL: 13.4%

RETAIL PRICE: \$42

CLUB PRICE: \$35.70

2018 Vin Gris Réserve

Rather pale color (remember this was pressed very lightly). Exceptionally concentrated with a soft, mouth-coating, creamy texture, bolstered by a firm but not oppressive acidity. Nose of apricots and strawberries, maybe even rhubarb, and a very slight herbal note (tarragon?) This wine will live longer than all of us.

The Texas Ranch on the west side of Paso Robles was exposed to some incredibly warm temperatures during the growing season, in addition to being chronically short of available moisture. (The vineyard typically has very little water with which to irrigate, so this is something rather akin to "dry-farming" by default. As a result, we observed that the normal developmental cycle of the grapes (both Grenache and Mourvèdre) was disrupted and the vineyard ended up with essentially Lilliputian-sized clusters - not raisinated, mind you - just incredibly teensy and intensely flavored. We made the decision to make the wine as a pink rather than as a red, to conserve the brilliant natural acidity of the wine (the acidity seemed to be concentrated along with everything else). The vineyard owner had to be very pleased with the abundant rain that followed the vintage into the spring.

As mentioned, these clusters were perhaps the smallest grape clusters I have ever observed, and as a result, they were essentially all skin and very little juice. We pressed the grapes as gently and lightly as could be reasonably be effected (whole cluster pressing) with no skin contact at all, if for no other reason but to eschew astringency, and as a result, we ended up with a scandalously low juice yield. On the brighter side, the juice didn't require much settling as there were very low solids from the get-go; the fermentation was conducted in old, neutral puncheons in a cool cellar and went rather slowly. Malolactic fermentation was conducted along with non-trivial lees-stirring to enhance textural complexity.

Food Pairing: Aioli monstre, scallops, lobster

Statistics:

VARIETAL BLEND: 62% Grenache, 38% Mourvèdre
APPELLATION: Paso Robles
VINEYARD DESIGNATION: Texas Ranch
PRODUCTION: 333 cases
SERVING TEMPERATURE: 48° F
TA: 5.8 g/L
pH: 3.58
OPTIMAL DRINKABILITY: Now - 2025
LABEL ARTIST: Chuck House
ALCOHOL: 13.5%

RETAIL PRICE: \$26

CLUB PRICE: \$22.10

2018 Grenache Blanc

What is perhaps most captivating about this wine is the minty/anise aroma that Grenache Blanc evinces when grown on the coolest sites. Refreshing, zingy acidity with suggestions of citrus zest. This is not your Father's zaftig and slightly fulsome Châteauf-du-Pape Blanc.

Edna Valley is one of the coolest places where Grenache, of any stripe is grown, and as such, allows GB to achieve wonderful natural acidities and extremely bright flavors. The slightly strange magnesium-rich soils of Edna seem to stunt vine growth ever so slightly, sometimes delaying maturity.

Stainless steel fermentation, cultured yeast.

Food Pairing: Sushi rolls (with real, proper wasabi)

Statistics:

VARIETAL BLEND: 100% Grenache Blanc
APPELLATION: Edna Valley
VINEYARD DESIGNATION: Paragon Vineyard
PRODUCTION: 439 cases
SERVING TEMPERATURE: 48° F
TA: 5.4 g/L
pH: 3.34
OPTIMAL DRINKABILITY: Now - 2024
LABEL ARTIST: Chris Freire
ALCOHOL: 14.5%

RETAIL PRICE: \$24

CLUB PRICE: \$20.40

2018 Grenache Blanc/ Grenache/ Cinsaut

Chez Doon, we love us the palest pink wines, yes we do, and in assembling our Vin Gris de Cigare, we occasionally hit upon a lot of singular charm and distinction, as found herein. From two cool, coastal vineyards located rather proximal to one another in mid-Monterey County, this wine is largely a study in Grenache (with a bit of Cinsaut thrown in because we could). Cool climate Grenache is capable of great elegance and intense primary perfume - typically of the strawberry and peach persuasion. Add to this the kirsch top-note from the Cinsaut, and you have a fruity (but not too) elegant boisson of great refinement. #pinkpulchritude

Loma del Rio Vineyard is an old friend from many years ago when we knew it as San Bernabe, and many early mornings were spent there, chasing after Muscats, Malvasias and other varieties as the sun came up. This was the first harvest of a recently grafted block at Loma del Rio of Cinsaut and Grenache, and as such the yield was carefully controlled. We expect great things from these grapes in the future.

Food Pairing: Seafood risotto, oysters, calamari fritti

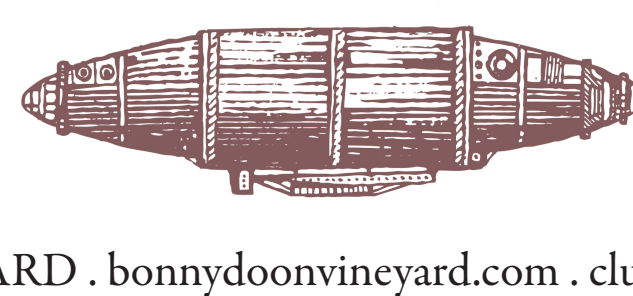
Statistics:

VARIETAL BLEND: 56% Grenache Blanc, 27% Grenache, 17% Cinsaut
APPELLATION: Monterey County
VINEYARD DESIGNATION: 56% Beeswax Vineyard, 44% Loma del Rio Vineyard
PRODUCTION: 189 cases
SERVING TEMPERATURE: 48° F
TA: 5.2 g/L
pH: 3.54
OPTIMAL DRINKABILITY: Now - 2025
LABEL ARTIST: Christine Colin-Ostertag
ALCOHOL: 13.5 %

RETAIL PRICE: \$22

CLUB PRICE: \$18.70

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