

THE CASTEEL PINOT NOIR

For many years Bethel Heights was recognized primarily for our limited bottlings of distinctive vineyard and block designated Pinot noir wines from our estate vineyard. In 2002 we took a new path and produced our first Casteel Pinot Noir, a blend of barrels from several different blocks, selected to express the epitome of that particular vintage at Bethel Heights. This is our only Pinot noir that carries our family name rather than a place name, which gives us considerable poetic license to select our favorite barrels from each vintage.

THE 2018 VINTAGE

2018 was the fifth in a string of easy warm vintages at Bethel Heights. Rainfall was within an inch or two of normal for the farm year (November through October), but much of the moisture came in the late fall and early winter so the vintage was defined by a very dry summer. This made for small clusters and therefore a relatively small crop. July was hot, leading to the first signs of *veraison* in early August, but our reliable Aeolian winds kept night-time temperatures cool throughout July and August, preserving acidity in the fruit as it ripened. September finally brought a couple of welcome rain events that refreshed the vines and kept them active through the final ripening period. Harvest began in the last week of September and was over by the 10th of October. The fruit came in with the natural concentration of flavor and acidity that one would expect from a hot dry season, but sugar levels were happily moderate.

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2018 PINOT NOIR CASTEEL

Harvest date: October 3, 2018

Fruit source: Bethel Heights West 114, 115 and 777

Grapes at harvest: Brix 23.2, pH 3.08, TA 8.7 gr/liter

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.8%, pH 3.46, TA 5.8 gr/liter

Barrel aged 14 months in French oak, 40% new barrels

300 cases produced

Bottled unfinned February 11, 2020

VINIFICATION: All the fruit was hand sorted and destemmed without crushing. After a 3-day cold soak, the fermenters warmed naturally and were gently pumped over once or twice a day at the onset of fermentation. After fermentations reached peak temperature, the new wine was aerated once a day, and pressed at dryness. The wine was racked to barrels and aged 14 months on lees.

WINEMAKER NOTES: The Casteel Pinot Noir is always intended to be the best expression of our estate in each vintage. The age and maturity of our vineyard has allowed the blend to remain remarkably consistent since the 2010 vintage, focused on two blocks planted in 1994 and 1996 on the most beautiful slope on the west side of the vineyard, but this hasn't stopped us from trying new things as the years go by. One particular block of own-rooted Chardonnay vines, top-worked over to Pinot noir in 2001, that never struck me as anything special (punctuated by being labeled 'the shed block' due to, well....its proximity to the equipment shed), has in recent years become one of the very best things we have. Excluding this block from the best wine we make has felt increasingly like a crime, so here it is, in equal parts with its sibling blocks that have defined the Casteel for a decade.