

Notes from the Winemakers

On blending the Casteel Reserve

Over the past twenty years Bethel Heights has been known for limited bottlings of distinctive vineyard designated and block designated Pinot noir wines. In 2002 we took a new path and produced our first Casteel Reserve Pinot Noir, blending select barrels from several different vineyard sites. It has turned out to be a very exciting wine in each succeeding vintage.

As in each previous vintage, two of the main components in the 2006 Casteel Reserve are barrels from the old vines of the Bethel Heights Wädenswil Block and Seven Springs Vineyard. The final elements are from Dijon clones 114 and 777, which round out the blend with their very different but complementary personalities.

Bethel Heights Wädenswil Block was planted in 1977, the only section of our vineyard planted to the distinctive Wädenswil clone of Pinot noir. The vines are very large and very fruitful, requiring extensive thinning to give us ripe fruit with good concentration. Its wines consistently have bright acidity and well-defined fresh fruit character, particularly black cherry.

Seven Springs Vineyard is about five miles north of Bethel Heights, planted in 1982 to the classic Pommard clone of Pinot noir. Undoubtedly one of the best vineyard sites in the Willamette Valley, Seven Springs produces wines with a distinctive mix of red and black fruit with a touch of savory spice.

Bethel Heights Clone 114, planted in 1996, is our current favorite of the Burgundian clones that became available in Oregon in the early 1990s. It adds youthful upfront fruit to the blend and contributes to mid-palate sweetness.

Bethel Heights Clone 777 was grafted onto 20-year-old Chardonnay roots in 2000, and suffered from that trauma for several years afterward. It was not until the 2006 vintage that it finally turned a corner, producing some of the best fruit of the vintage. The resulting wine is dense and concentrated, adding weight and structure in its first reserve level appearance.

The 2006 Casteel Reserve has all the elegance and complexity of its predecessors. Although purists may remain committed to the separate block and vineyard designated bottlings, for others this reserve blend has emerged as the best of Bethel Heights Pinot noir.

Terry Casteel and Ben Casteel, Winemakers

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2006 PINOT NOIR ♦ CASTEEL RESERVE

Fruit sources:

48% Bethel Heights Wädenswil Block,
25% Seven Springs Vineyard, 17% Bethel Heights Clone 114
10% Bethel Heights Clone 777

Harvest dates: September 28 - October 12, 2006

Grapes at harvest: Brix: 25, pH: 3.42, TA: 6.8 gr/liter
Finished wine: Alcohol 14.8 %, pH: 3.53, TA: 5.5 gr/liter
Barrel aged 13 months in French oak, 50% new barrels
747 cases bottled unfiltered December 2007

Suggested Retail \$ 60

The 2006 Vintage: As a general rule a large crop usually means a bit less concentration in the wines, but 2006 was an exception. Mother Nature provided the extra heat and light necessary to ripen a larger crop, and there was plenty of moisture in the soil at the beginning of the season to carry it through. Unlike 2003, another exceptionally warm vintage, in 2006 all the heat came in early to mid-summer. Since the heat came before color change, rather than at the end of the season as it did in 2003, the grapes actually ripened in relatively cool conditions and therefore have more expressive fruit and more freshness than one might expect from a hot vintage. There was no rain to threaten the integrity of the fruit before the harvest.

Vinification: 25% of the fruit was fermented whole-cluster. The remaining portion was destemmed without crushing. After a five-day cold soak some lots were fermented with our favorite cultured yeasts and the rest fermented spontaneously. The wines were racked once, blended and bottled in December 2007.

93 THE WINE ADVOCATE

“Medium ruby-colored with an alluring perfume of wood smoke, damp earth, black cherry, and black raspberry. This is followed by a wine with excellent focus, density, and intense, savory dark fruits. It is well balanced, nicely structured, and has a long, fruit-filled close. Drink it from 2010 to 2018.”

91 THE WINE SPECTATOR

“Light, silky and open-textured with vivid currant and blackberry flavors, shaded with spice and black olive notes, lingering nicely on the generous finish. Drink now through 2014.”