

Beyond the Blocks

Bethel Heights, like most vineyards, is laid out in a series of rectangular shapes, or “blocks.” We began designating wines from some of our single blocks in 1991, both for exceptional quality and for the distinct differences they showed from one another. The distinct personalities of the Flat Block, the Southeast Block and the West Block are deeply woven into the fabric of Bethel Heights’ history; it would be impossible to tell that history without them.

Then, with the passage of time, certain other patterns began to emerge. The gentle mid-level slope on the west side of Bethel Heights that is now home to The Currents was originally planted to four different white varieties that had such distinctive identities that no commonality of terroir was apparent. It was not until we took out some of those original plantings in the mid ‘90’s to make room for new Dijon clones of Pinot noir, that we began to appreciate the unique character of that slope.

At its most fundamental, terroir encompasses all the limiting conditions of the place you’ve decided to plant some grapes: geology, geography, topography, climate, ampelography, and on and on. Terroir does not fit neatly into the tidy rectangles of vineyard blocks. We had to start looking beyond the blocks, following where the wines lead us. While we respect our history and what we learned in the process, we don’t allow it to hold us back from where we may go next.

~ Ben Casteel

The Currents

The lower Western slopes at Bethel Heights gently undulate to the South, creating sections that are directly exposed to the Western marine winds and those that are protected from it, leading to “currents” of wind that move through the blocks that can be seen in the wines; pieces that are rich and supple alongside more vigorous and structured components.



2015 PINOT NOIR *The Currents*

Harvest date: September 20, 2015

Fruit source: West 114 planted 1996

Grapes at harvest: Brix 23.4, pH 3.17, TA 7.0 gr/liter

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.6%, pH 3.54, TA 5.7 gr/liter

Barrel aged 17 months in French oak, 33% new barrels

140 cases produced

Bottled unfiltered April 11, 2017

THE 2015 VINTAGE was characterized by early bud-break, early bloom, and a big heat spike in early August. Fortunately September brought mercifully cool temperatures and chilly evenings, and the vineyard was allowed to develop the integrated, intense, and focused flavors only afforded by generous hang time at cool temperatures.

VINIFICATION: The grapes were destemmed into several vessels: a 5-ton stainless steel tank, and two 1.25-ton bins. After a 3-day cold soak, fermentation initiated and the wines were pumped over once every two days to minimize extraction in a warm vintage and from a section that has profuse phenolic potential. The new wines were pressed at dryness, settled for 7 days, and racked into oak barrels for a 17-month élevage.

WINEMAKER NOTES: The Currents wines are imposing in breadth and depth even in cooler years, so we need to tread lightly in warmer years and 2015 was no exception. Aromas and flavors of black berry, black currant, and pomegranate are all framed by lively acidity and firm, fine grain tannins.