

Beyond the Blocks

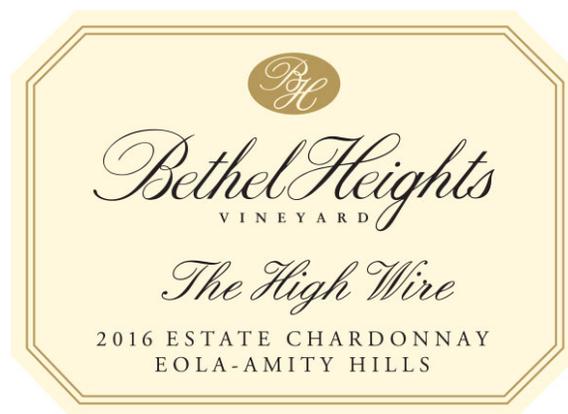
Bethel Heights, like most vineyards, is laid out in a series of rectangular shapes, or “blocks.” We began designating wines from some of our single blocks in 1991, both for exceptional quality and for the distinct differences they showed from one another. The distinct personalities of the Flat Block, 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, first in our Pinot noir and then in our Chardonnay. Our oldest Chardonnay, the own-rooted Wente clone vines planted in 1977, trained on the old “California sprawl” high wire trellis system, were a source of much disappointment in the early years, always ripening too late with searing acidity that had to be balanced out with fruit from other parts of the vineyard. Having stubbornly survived a failed attempt to graft them over to another clone, these vines reached full maturity in relative obscurity, until a string of unusually warm vintages finally showed us the possibility that they could become something extraordinary. Since 2014 The High Wire has been bottled as a stand-alone wine.

96 THE WINE ADVOCATE

The 2016 Chardonnay The High Wire opens with honey toast, hazelnut, lemon confit and tangy yogurt with nuances of freshly cut hay, white blossoms and red apple skin. Medium-bodied and creamy textured, it has a firm streak of crushed rock in the mouth over honeysuckle, honeycomb, toast and spiced apple pie plus mouthwatering acidity and a lovely texture to carry the very long, savory, honeyed finish.

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2016 CHARDONNAY *The High Wire*

Harvest date: September 18, 2016

Fruit source: own-rooted Wente clone planted 1977

Grapes at harvest: Brix 21.0, pH 3.2, TA 7.3 gr/liter

Finished wine: Alcohol 12.7%, pH 3.38, TA 6.5 gr/liter

Barrel aged 16 months in French oak, 33% new barrels

118 cases produced

Bottled unfiltered February 5, 2018

THE 2016 VINTAGE was the earliest vintage we have ever seen in the Willamette Valley. The growing season was warm and wetter than usual, leading to veraison beginning in early August at Bethel Heights. Harvest started on August 27 and was finished before the end of September.

VINIFICATION: The Wente grapes were whole cluster pressed under a blanket of carbon dioxide and the juice settled cold for 72 hours before being racked to barrels. The new wine completed alcoholic fermentation in a month, underwent full malolactic fermentation in the Spring, and spent 16 months in barrel prior to bottling.

WINEMAKER NOTES: The Wente Chardonnay has produced some of our most detailed and compelling wines in recent years, a departure from its youth when it struggled to achieve ripeness. 2016 marks a departure from the previous vintages that were sleek, precise, and compact. The 2016 is broad and expansive, still maintaining its hallmark acidity, but layering a pillowy texture on top, taking the wine into new territory. Aromas and flavors of lemon curd, graham, and baked apple, the wine’s texture and mouthfeel seem to expand on the palate, with fresh acidity keeping the wine in balance.