

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. I’ve mistaken wines from the East 777 Block for the Flat Block many times in the past, despite it being a different clone, nearly triple the number of vines per acre, and 23 years younger. It also happens to sit on a shallow, flat bench that it shares with the Flat Block. And that led to thoughts about terroir, the French term for “sense of place,” and what it really means.

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 Shallows

Perched on a rocky bench with only a slight skim of soil over bedrock, vines planted in The Shallows find their foothold deep in the interstices between basalt boulders. Their tenacity yields wines of purity, subtlety and elegance.

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2016 PINOT NOIR *The Shallows*

Harvest date: September 19, 2016

Fruit source: East Block Dijon clone 777 planted 2002

Grapes at harvest: Brix 24.2, pH 3.41, TA 5.7 gr/liter

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.9%, pH 3.67, TA 5.1 gr/liter

Barrel aged 15 months in French oak, 40% new barrels

50 cases produced

Bottled unfiltered January 16, 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 grapes were destemmed into a 3-ton stainless steel open top tank. After a 4-day cold soak, fermentation initiated and the wine was pumped over just once a day to minimize extraction in a warm vintage. The new wine was pressed after 12 days at dryness, settled for 7 days, and racked into oak barrels for a 15 month élevage.

WINEMAKER NOTES: The Shallows in many ways mirrors its neighbor, the Flat Block, albeit younger and planted at a significantly higher density. Both are perched on a flat bench on our property, splitting the slopes above and below. The Shallows typically favors purity and poise over power, but 2016 marks a departure from that mold, showing both delicate strawberry and hazelnut aromas and flavors but with an undercurrent of saline acidity and fine grain, expansive tannins typical of the vintage on our Estate.