

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.

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A fresh, flinty and chalky edge with lemon pith, grapefruit and wet stones. Fresh melon, white peaches and pears, too. The palate has a very composed feel with assertively fresh acidity, underscoring quite pure lemons. Fresh hazelnuts to close. Exceptional focus and tension here. This is a parcel that sits right in the sweet spot of quality in the 2018 harvest. Drink or hold.



2018 CHARDONNAY *The High Wire*

Harvest date: September 29th, 2018

Fruit source: Own-rooted Wente clone planted 1977

Grapes at harvest: Brix: 21.7, pH: 3.02, TA: 9.1 g/L

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.2 %, pH: 3.24, TA: 7.4 g/L

Barrel aged 16 months in French oak, 40% new barrels

99 cases bottle unfinned on February 10th, 2020

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. The 2018 I believe is the best wine of either color we produced in the vintage. There is terrific energy to this wine with just enough suppleness and richness to balance the acidity. The vintage conditions lined up perfectly for our older blocks, and I believe it shows in the subsequent wines.