

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.

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. These currents can be seen in the wines; pieces that are rich and supple alongside more vigorous and structured components.

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



2018 PINOT NOIR *The Currents*

Harvest date: October 1st, 2018

Fruit source: West 114, planted 1996

Grapes at harvest: Brix: 23.6, pH: 3.1, TA: 7.6 g/L

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.6 %, pH: 3.44, TA: 6.3 g/L

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

106 cases bottle unfinned on February 10th, 2020

VINIFICATION: The two blocks that have historically made up this wine were co-fermented for the first time in 2018, in a 3-ton open top stainless-steel fermenter. After a 3-day cold soak, fermentation began and the wines were pumped over once a day to minimize extraction in a warm vintage from blocks with enormous phenolic potential. After 13 days, the new wines were pressed at dryness, settled for 7 days, and racked into oak barrels for a 15-month élevage.

WINEMAKER NOTES: The Currents came together with relative ease in 2018, simply because the sections of the vineyard that comprise it, leaned into all of the things 2018 brought to the table; ripe fruit flavors with blistering acidity and structure. This is typically the most muscular and taut of the Beyond the Blocks wines, and 2018 is no exception. Flavors of blueberry and pomegranate, over a rippling core of acidity and framing tannins are intriguing now but will take some patience to fully integrate. As stated with the others, some cellaring will be in order for the wines to reach their full potential.