

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 2017 Chardonnay The High Wire is pure class! It takes its time to unwind, slowly revealing aromas of white peaches, red apples and pears, wafts of hay and button mushroom with nuances of elderflower and oyster shell. The medium-bodied palate is silky and pure, with fresh fruits wrapped in savory, honeyed nuances. It has tangy acidity and a gentle phenolic grip, finishing long and nuanced. This will require another 2-3 years in bottle to really show its stuff.



2017 CHARDONNAY *The High Wire*

Harvest date: October 14, 2017

Fruit source: Own-rooted Wente clone planted 1977

Grapes at harvest: Brix: 21.1, pH: 3.23, TA: 6.7 g/L

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.2 %, pH 3.33, TA 5.9 g/L

Barrel aged 14 months in French oak, 40% new barrels

102 cases bottle unfinned on January 3, 2019

VINIFICATION: The 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 the following Spring, and spent 14 months in barrel with no stirring 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. In 2017 it was one of the latest picks of the vintage and the extra hang time produced a wine of purity and poise, with layers of tree fruit, citrus, mineral and its hallmark mouthwatering acidity.