

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 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.

THE 2017 VINTAGE

2017 was our sixth very warm vintage in a row. Fortunately we had quite a lot of rain in the winter and early spring; total rainfall for the year was almost 20 inches above normal. The summer overall was hot and dry, punctuated by a couple of significant hot spells in August and early September with consecutive days over 100 degrees, but September cooled down mercifully, with a few brief rain events that helped maintain freshness in the vineyard through the final ripening phase.

“I feel that the 2017 wines have the best natural balance we have seen out of a warm vintage since 2012. In spite of the heat the wines have terrific acidity, relatively low alcohol, and the different parts of our Estate show their personalities without being muddled by vintage.” Ben Casteel



2017 PINOT NOIR *The Shallows*

Harvest date: October 5, 2017

Fruit source: East Block Dijon clone 777 planted 2002

Grapes at harvest: Brix 23.4, pH 3.11, TA 6.7 g/L

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.5 %, pH: 3.66, TA: 6.0 g/L

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

104 cases bottle unfined on January 22, 2019

VINIFICATION: The grapes were destemmed into one 5-ton and one 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 14 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 the same flat bench on our property, splitting the slopes above and below. In 2017 we thought it would be instructive to ferment a small amount of the 2 blocks together, and this wine is the result. Of all the wines in this series, it is the most complete picture of the vintage traits with clarity and precision: a warm year that ended cold, showing both the ripe fruit of a hot year, but with the restraint, and acidity from a cooler finish to the growing season.