

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 2018 VINTAGE: 2018 was the sixth vintage in a row defined by heat in the Willamette Valley. Following a wet winter, the spring and summer were very dry and warm, leading to the first signs of veraison in early August. Fortunately our reliable marine winds kept night-time temperatures cool, preserving acidity in the fruit as it ripened, and welcome rain events in September carried the vines through the final ripening period. The very dry hot summer made for small clusters with very small berries that in many ways defined our 2018 wines. The wines are significantly darker than is typical at Bethel Heights, with increased potential for tannin.

“The dark brooding nature of the vintage is unmistakable. Not since 2008 have we seen wines with the early exuberance of fruit that one expects from a warm vintage, combined with such a lean muscular structure of tannin and acid promising significant ageability.”

~ Ben Casteel



2018 PINOT NOIR *The Shallows*

Harvest date: September 28th, 2018

Fruit source: East Block Dijon clone 777 planted 2002

Grapes at harvest: Brix: 23.4, pH: 3.12, TA: 7.4 g/L

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.5 %, pH: 3.54, TA: 5.8 g/L

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

105 cases bottle unfined on February 10th, 2020

VINIFICATION: The grapes were destemmed into a 5-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 elevage.

WINEMAKER NOTES: For a section of our vineyard that is much better known for poise and purity over power, the 2018 vintage showed us that the weather can always upend our preconceived notions. The 2018 Shallows is a dense, compact wine in its youth with racy acidity that has been a hallmark of the vintage but also brooding, mouth coating tannins. The good news is behind the structure waiting to be coaxed out is a bounty of black berry, black currant, and baking spice that should evolve beautifully with 5-7 years of cellaring.