

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 East 777 Block (source of The Shallows) sits on a shallow, flat bench that it shares with the Flat Block. I’ve mistaken wines from the East 777 Block for the Flat Block many times in the past, despite it being a different clone, nearly triple the number of vines per acre, and 23 years younger. 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.

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 2019 VINTAGE: In contrast to the previous five vintages which were all dry and quite warm, 2019 started with cool, moist weather in the Spring that persisted into early summer. The crop was small, with small berries and lots of intensity. The cool season allowed us to outperform on “hang time” (the time from bloom to harvest). Instead of the normal 100 days, we were able to leave the fruit on the vines for 110 to 120 days without excess sugar accumulation, giving us enhanced depth and complexity. The 2019 vintage wines will take some time to settle in, as with most cooler vintages.



2019 PINOT NOIR *The Shallows*

Harvest date: September 29, 2019

Fruit source: East Block Dijon clone 777 planted 2002

Grapes at harvest: Brix 23.5, pH 3.2, TA 7.5 g/L

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.1 %, pH 3.56, TA 5.8 g/L

Barrel aged 11 months in French oak, 30% new barrels

66 cases bottled unfinned on August 12, 2020

VINIFICATION: The grapes were destemmed into a 5-ton stainless steel open top tank. After a 5-day cold soak, fermentation initiated and the wine was punched down twice a day throughout the fermentation. The new wine was pressed after 12 days at dryness, settled for 3 days, and racked into oak barrels for an 11-month *élevage*.

WINEMAKER NOTES: From the most precocious sections of our original estate, in 2019 The Shallows provided a sense of calm under rapidly darkening skies in early Fall. Aromas of tuberose, raspberries, blood orange and sandal wood directly inform the palate, which is awash with red and stone fruits. The 2019 Shallows has a graceful and elegant bearing in its youth, and these qualities will carry it forward and reward the patient. I think the early drinking window for The Shallows will be best 2024 – 27, and for those who appreciate some aged character, take notes from the last “cool” vintage we’ve had – the 2011s are only just now rounding into form after 11 years in the bottle.