

DIRECT PRESS

WOMEN IN WINE

MARCH 2024

MULHERES DO VINO

ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΤΟΥ ΚΡΑΣΙΟΥ

FEMMES DE VIN

DOÑE DEL VINO

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Every year I consider doing another feature on women in the wine industry and every year I feel conflicted. The last thing I want it to be is performative, tokenizing, and just talking to the same group of people; however, talking to more women winemakers and getting their response to our past newsletters on the subject shows me that there is still a compelling reason to do an annual focus on women and have them do most of the talking.

I was fortunate to speak with some of the people behind the wines we're featuring this month, including Erin Rasmussen of the American Wine Project in Wisconsin; Claudine Lteif and Michelle Chami of Heya Wines in Lebanon; Chenoa Ashton-Lewis of Ashanta in California; and Joy Kull of La Villana in Lazio, Italy. In many ways they have continued the conversation we had last March with Megan Bell, Summer Wolff, Tara Gomez, Mireia Taribó, and Brianne Day. You can check out the March 2023 newsletter on our [website](#) or we can print copies upon request.

Because much of the sexism women encounter can be subtle and passive-aggressive, reading about it can be validating and help all of us be more aware. Erin Rasmussen acknowledges, "I internalize a lot of things and I just assume it must be me. But reading through some of the responses from last year's newsletter, I realized it's not just me—it's the system. I definitely echo other people's comments about being relegated to lab work or not being able to find anybody that would hire you full-time after harvest because they need dudes who can lift a barrel over their head—or at least they think they do."

In Lebanon, "women were considered to be not as strong as men, so hence not as productive as men," explain Michelle and Claudine of Heya. "This mentality still applies today where men are paid more than women because they have more of the manpower to move and load baskets of grapes. Little do they know that before the woman shows up in the field at 4am to work she has been preparing food for the kids, doing a load of washing, making sure her household duties were done before work. So since we are both mothers and could empathize with these women, we thought this was totally unfair. Women need to be recognized and applauded for their hard work, so we pay our female harvest team the same as men (not a common practice). We also want to show them appreciation and so our labels are a reflection of these real life women out on the field. We want to show that in today's economic crunch, if the women stayed on the bench, we would all be struggling financially."

“I think proving myself as a farmer, especially in Italy, is more difficult because I am a woman,” says Joy Kull of La Villana. “Oftentimes when I speak to other farmers about renting land or buying grapes they think I need to refer back to my enologist, agronomist, or husband. As though I surely can’t be making a decision on my own!”

The unconscious assumption that a woman is not someone in power is hardly unique to Europe or the Middle East. Chenoa of Ashanta in Sonoma relates how, “my partner’s a white man [she is biracial, for context], so I’ve had people assume I’m the intern.” She recounts a time when she was foot-stomping grapes at her old winery. “This older gentleman came up and asked me, ‘oh, are you one of the new interns?’ And I was like, ‘no, I’m not, I’m a winemaker. These are grapes from vines my family planted in the ‘70s.’ And, meanwhile, while that’s happening, Sonoma Magazine is photographing me—yeah, I’m in the middle of a photo shoot for Sonoma Magazine’s ‘Brightening Stars’—and this guy asked me if I’m an intern. So, he was very wrong.”



Chenoa Ashton-Lewis of Ashanta

I asked Erin what it’s like having conversations with farmers in the Midwest. “Are you asking me why a bunch of farmers gonna listen to a girl?” she laughs before explaining a typical phenomenon of not getting very far with some farmers—for instance requesting vineyard work that will cut down on chemical treatments—only to have them do the exact thing she had asked for after a male friend of hers made the same suggestion.

Claudine and Michelle also see this in Lebanon. “Men are considered the more knowledgeable ones, and if a woman said the exact same thing a man would say, the man’s version would have a greater weight. On a positive note, Lebanon is a very open society, women have a lot of freedom; it was the Paris of the Middle East. The economic crisis that we’ve had in the last 5 years has really expedited the role and integration of the females in the workforce.”

There is evidence of change afoot as more women-run wine projects are popping up, but how much of that is due to societal changes and how much is due to women being forced to start their own projects after running into barriers elsewhere?

Erin pointed out, “To get a sense of what it’s really like as a woman in the industry, you have to ask the interns and you have to ask the lab techs. And you have to ask the people who don’t have any name recognition or a position of power to find out what it’s actually like.”

“I often think that people who feel like they don’t have a place are pushed to be innovative,” she speculates. “I see that in my colleagues and I see that in my own career. Now, leaving California to move back to Wisconsin to make wine is pretty extreme, but it was a response to feeling like my career didn’t have a trajectory I was excited about. I think that when you look at the cutting edge of wine in the United States currently, the percentage of women is a lot higher.”

The cutting edge of natural wine today goes beyond zero sulfur and involves hybrids and fermentations of fruits other than grapes that were historically part of many non-European cultures. The ABV [Anything But Vinifera] events in New York, San Francisco, Miami, and has been crucial in highlighting growers working with hybrids and fruit ferments in places like Vermont, Virginia, North Carolina, or, in Erin’s case, Wisconsin and neighboring Midwestern states. She explains that she feels the ABV group “is a really invigorating space to occupy and I do think in some cases it makes it easier to be a non-white dude. Here is a group that’s really supporting non-traditional makers; non-traditional identity-wise and also product-wise. And I think that’s really cool and it’s a bit of a panacea for us all to get together and just be together. There’s more people who I think are open minded. If you weren’t open minded about wine, you would think that you had to be on the West Coast or maybe New York, but probably not Michigan or Virginia. But when you’re open minded you see beauty where you are. I think it’s also getting better every year. You know, you’ve got this crop of millennials and Gen. Z who’ve grown up with a different way of being a girl in the world, and the attitude of ‘we’re not going to take no for an answer’.”

Chenoa affirms this, and attributes it to her dad, a Black man who grew up in the Black Panther Party. “They taught him to have a strong sense of identity. So I have a strong sense of identity,” she asserts. “I’m going to go out there and do whatever I want. If I want to do something, I want to go do it because I can. I’m a human, I have rights to this place. In terms of the wine, I’ve definitely felt a lot more empowered in that sense.”

While some have found the natural wine world more welcoming than conventional wine spaces, that was not a universal opinion. Joy Kull, originally from Connecticut, says “I don’t really know if there is a difference. I didn’t spend any time as a woman making conventional wines. But I do think my experience in the wine industry in Connecticut and New York was not welcoming to women. Call it ‘macho fest’ or ‘bro culture’, it definitely is a thing in the natural wine world unfortunately. Both among consumers, resellers, and also among winemakers.”

“I think that the natural wine consumer base is more open to the kinds of creativity you’re seeing from people who are forced to be creative,” suggests Erin. “But, I’m sorry, there’s a lot of boobs on natural wine labels, labels that are created by men. And that doesn’t feel great.” There’s also a pervasive thread of using terms like ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ or even ‘sexually explicit’ to describe wines that I encounter on a regular basis. “I fucking hate the gendered way of speaking about wine, it’s lazy and reductive,” Erin says. “A lot of that came from Robert Parker and the types of wines he liked, which were big and voluptuous. And though a word like voluptuous is typically used to describe women, it is at least more descriptive and not necessarily tied to one gender than just using the term ‘feminine’. I think we all have a range of qualities that combine to make us who we are, and any wine that is worth drinking will have elements that are in tension.”

Many of the winemakers I spoke to mentioned the ‘Zero zero bros’ who use zero sulfur winemaking as a kind of macho purity test that can quickly devolve into its own kind of closed mindedness. I like a lot of things about sulfur free wines but I prefer when they are more of an irreverent provocation to start a conversation instead of yet another example of gatekeeping. So I was a bit surprised that a major natural wine fair taking place in San Francisco this month appears to be absent of American women from their lineup. It seems odd that an event such as this would forget to invite women winemakers from the Bay Area using zero sulfur, like Ashanta. Like many things that came up talking to these winemakers, it can be hard to tell if the specter of sexism is real or imagined. The following weekend in San Francisco is the 7th year of WINEfare, a two day tasting featuring over 70 women-run wineries, but if anything that reinforces the divide that can come at the expense of focusing solely on sulfur additions in wine..

Despite these issues, the novelty and curiosity embraced by natural wine drinkers can create a market that actively looks to bolster women winemakers. Michelle and Claudine of Heya report how “more and more people are interested to try something new and something natural and so they have really embraced our wines. Others who have traveled abroad already know about natural wines, so when they look for natural wine producers in Lebanon, or wines made by women, they discover Heya and have really supported us.”

It's really important to 'put your money where your mouth is,' says Erin. "Capitalism certainly takes away from the love fest but there is an economic side of this where we can actually support the things we care about and the people who are creating what we want to see more of."

This helps reinforce part of why we want to highlight women winemakers each year. It's an economic statement, and it really makes a difference with the kind of small, independent operations we're featuring. We're so used to giant corporate entities that the idea of voting with our wallets can feel pointless when it comes to influencing Amazon or Apple. Not so with winemakers trying to stay afloat.

Nowhere is that more true than Lebanon. As Claudine and Michelle report, "A huge challenge is the increase in cost of material, everything apart from the fruit is imported. Lebanon doesn't have a glass manufacturing capability, although glass making was discovered in Mesopotamia on the shore of the Mediterranean, isn't it incredible when you think of it that way? But in the last few years Lebanon has had several issues, from the devaluation of the currency in 2019 to the Beirut port blast; the pandemic to the current situation with Israel in south Lebanon. The Lira has devalued against the dollar from 1:1,500 to 1:89,000 today. With that, the banking system has brought in a lot of new regulations, which have driven prices up, which also drives our costs up. Also the war in the region has raised the prices of shipping. Our bottles then reach importers at a higher price so it makes it difficult to compete with others in the same price range."

"People need to support these winemakers, even if it's been a bad year," emphasizes Chenoa. "It's not their fault that they're up against climate change, they're trying to run a business and they're trying to adapt to it. Even if the wine has faults, it's really important that if you care about these small producers to engage with that story of why the wine wasn't as sound as it could have been. We can't just dump wine—plus, our philosophy of natural wine makes it very hard for us to fully manipulate something, so we have to wait until the next year and just hope. As California winemakers, it is so expensive for us to make wine. It's so expensive to live here. Everything has just gone up in price. And it's really difficult for us to release a wine at one price and then a couple years later be forced to make it higher; you're scared that no one's going to pick it up."

I feel privileged to sell and drink wine from people that I have met, people I have visited, people who I can have conversations with about all the real issues that often get sidestepped by a slick label or a glowing Instagram post. Wine is such a canvas for our projections, but it can also be subversive, and a catalyst to have conversations about things that speak to society. One of the things my favorite art, photography, or music has in common is ambiguity and tension. A

mystery you can't quite identify or quantify. The same is true of wines. We all can benefit from exercising the brain muscles that allow us to sit with ambiguity, that foster our tolerance of cognitive dissonance. Though wine can be a back door to conversations about weighty issues, you can always take a break and go back enjoying your glass if things get too heavy. The important thing is the connection the wine can foster.

Erin drives this point home, telling me, "There's an artist [EM Forster] who's quoted as saying, 'Only connect': that's the point of all art, to start a conversation with someone. I ask everyone to remember how their mom made them peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and everyone has a visceral memory of that. Then I ask them to tell me how they make it now, and it's almost always different. It gives us the ability to talk about flavor and sense memory in a way that cuts through. And doing something 'weird' I have way more conversations than I ever would making Russian River Pinot. But inevitably people also talk about the time their mom forgot to pack their lunch, and all of the sudden you're talking about their lives, and that's what it's really all about."

All of the women featured this month initially connected with me because of their wines and the way they tasted. They are pouring their heart and souls (and finances) into their work. When we buy their wines and listen to them talk about their lives, it's all in the name of actively continuing the connection they initiated by putting their wines out into the world. We all know that getting your wine out into the world as a woman is still harder than it needs to be. If we can make it a little easier by continuing to shine a light on women in wine, it's not so much a political act as it is a statement of gratitude for their work, a way to make women feel seen, both figuratively and literally: Chenoa recounts people "not looking me in the eye and instead looking at my partner Will during conversations." This month is about seeing, listening, drinking, and connecting with these women.

Cheers,
Jonathan



Joy Kull of La Villana

La Villana Fuori Luogo 2022

Lazio • Italy

Press 4 Mix/White

Joy Kull is located in the northern Lazio region of Italy around Lake Bolsena about 10 KM from Tuscany. She focuses on cultivating indigenous varieties, low intervention farming, fermenting with native yeasts, and zero added sulfur.

‘Fuori Luogo’ translates to “out of place,” and since the Viognier, Vermentino, and Moscato are not indigenous to this area of Lazio or Joy’s home vineyards, the name seemed fitting. The vineyard, located in Farnese, was originally planted about 20 years ago for a cooperative cantina in Pitigliano, but the cooperative stopped paying for the grapes and Joy was able to convince the farmer to keep farming the vineyard just as he was about to rip out the vines and still farms the two hectares for her. This is an energetic and flavorful

bottling with the perfect balance of tension and approachability. Fresh cut spring flowers, stone fruit, and citrus on the nose are echoed on the palate with a bit of salinity to enhance the stone fruit, with a hint of mesquite and slight spice that makes this a great wine to pair with lighter meals or as an aperitif. Serve chilled and with good company for the best results. *Jeremy Hernandez*

Pato Vinhas Velhas Branco 2017

Bairrada • Portugal

Press 4 Mix/White

Maria João Pato comes from a family of contrarian winemakers that have been pushing the envelope in coastal Portugal’s Bairrada region for some time now. She is the daughter of the legendary winemaker Luis Pato, who put the Bairrada on the map by sticking to native local grapes like Baga and Bical when most were abandoning them. Her sister Filipa Pato has her own biodynamic winery started in the 2000s. Though Maria has been in charge of winemaking at the Luis Pato estate since 2017, you may know Maria from her other label made at the same winery, Duckman, with its outlandishly louche labels featuring photos of a giant pink duck, which she says represents her grandfather, João. He was one of the few Portuguese winemakers to bottle his own wine back in the 1950s, an extremely rare occurrence in that period of Salazar’s dictatorship when virtually all wineries were cooperatives and nothing was exported.

The Vinhas Velhas Branco is a blend of equal parts Bical, Cerceal, and Sercialinho from vines ranging from 40-60 years old. They come from two parcels, the Bical from a limestone vineyard owned by Maria's mother's family and the Cerceal and Sercialinho from vines on sand planted by her paternal grandfather. 2017 was Maria's first vintage in charge and the wine absolutely rips. There are Riesling-esque qualities, bracing and



Maria Pato

pungent notes of sea brine and lemon verbena, with a stony, mineral lift. The vivacious edginess is complemented with a depth of umami and some leesy complexity on the finish.

These wines age extremely well, so much so that the 1991 and 1990 have graced our shelves recently and are some of the most remarkable examples of aged white wines we've tasted. This tranche of 2017 was meant for Australia and therefore bottled under screw cap, but the importer didn't take what was expected. In Portugal, cork production is a huge part of the economy, wines with screw caps are

abhorred and nearly impossible to sell. We won't have that problem.

Jonathan Kemp

[Autour de l'Anne 'Anne, A Wine Again' 2020](#)

Languedoc • France

Press 4 Mix/Red

A car accident in 2010 made Anne Paillet reexamine her life and leave her career in Paris' financial district for natural wine in the Loire Valley. Not content to only make wine with her husband Gregory Leclerc, she started leasing some vines from a friend farming biodynamically in the Languedoc and started her own wine label. The wines are made in the Loire, and apparently she now is making the wine for her husband's label Chahut et Prodiges, which is maybe why these historically very gnarly natty wines got a little more approachable recently.

As for her 'Anne, A Wine Again,' it's 100% Syrah grown on limestone and red clay, fermented 60% whole cluster with semi-carbonic maceration in concrete. It finishes aging in the Loire Valley, with zero sulfur added. It definitely seems to have a Loire influence that gives lift to the darker Languedoc fruit. Blackberry and eucalyptus notes are mixed with some rustic, turbid qualities and gamey, animal wildness. But mostly it stays fresh and playful. *Jonathan Kemp*

Sikele Nero d'Avola 2018

Sicily • Italy

Press 4 Mix/Red

Many may recognize the label from their popular white wine. But like myself you may not have had the pleasure of trying this lively Nero d'Avola from the winemaking team of sisters Marilina and Federica Paternò of Cantina Marilina.

Their father Angelo handed them the reins of the 60 hectare estate on a hill that was formerly known as Poggio dei Fossi in the southeastern Sicilian province of Siracusa, near the town of Pachino, where he thought the land was one of the best viticulture areas in Sicily. They have been organic since 2001, practice poly-culture to nurture and enrich the ecosystem of their vineyard, and take sustainable measures to use recyclable materials and packaging wherever possible.

The Sikele Rosso 2018 is from organic Nero d'Avola grown on limestone and harvested by hand. Fermentation is spontaneous and carried out in concrete vats, aged in concrete for 8 months and bottle aged for 3 months. The wine is unfinned, unfiltered with minimal sulfur added.

Freshness is the first thing that comes to mind while thinking about how to

describe this wine. I think of freshly picked raspberries and volcanic soil on the nose, followed by beautiful fresh and juicy tannins, macerated black and blue fruits, volcanic minerality, balanced with a bit of restraint on the fruit and vibrant refreshing acidity that keeps the energy flowing.

Jeremy Hernandez

Heya 'Kanz' Lebanon Red 2022

Kffifen • Lebanon

Press 4 Red

Heya, which means 'she' in Arabic, was started by Claudine Lteif and

Michelle Chami.

They told us, "we are both good friends and we both love the land and are fascinated with the science of fermentation, so since we helped Eddie (Michelle's husband, of Mersel Wine) with many harvests and at the winery, we used to hang out and work on the field. We enjoyed it a lot but

then as a joke we said "hey we should make wine of our own", it could be like a female inspired wine, and then the joke turned into reality. It also stems from not enough women being on the field and so we also wanted to encourage more women to do what they loved and to break away from the stigmas of winemaking not being a woman's job. We wanted to be different from Mersel and we wanted



Heya team

to create something new in the Lebanese market so we thought of focusing on conferments using local fruits. All our wines are made with so much love and passion and we do everything by hand: pruning, harvesting, winemaking, bottling, blending, labelling, and shipping.”

“We are in the mountains surrounding Wadi Annoubine, a UNSECO protected region, and we have our own grapes, apples, our fruits. In the mountains we try to stay out of politics. We take care of our people, and then we are emotionally satisfied. However, in the region politics is everywhere, it’s everything, wine is politics. It has major implications on everything we do, from the economic, poor banking and social system.”

Kanz is a 60% Syrah and 40% Grenache, which reflects the heavy influence of the French and their colonial legacy in Lebanon. Vines are planted facing the Mediterranean at 400 meters above sea level on clay and limestone. It’s fermented whole cluster and aged in amphora with minimal sulfur added. It’s an easy, gulpable red with ripe strawberries, Swedish fish, black pepper, licorice, and hibiscus on the finish. Claudine and Michelle add, “we enjoy the lighter chilled reds, they just seem to go with everything. Pairs well with salads, cheeses appetizers or light food and also great to just chug in the afternoon when you are hanging out with friends and want something light and refreshing!”

Jonathan Kemp & Nico Haunold

Halkia ‘Reddish’ Corinthia 2022

Corinth • Greece
Press 4 Red

Anna Halkia was farming vineyards in Nemea organically selling the fruit—but that meant someone else was throwing her beautiful, healthy grapes in with those of lesser quality to make wine. So she decided to make wine herself and built a rudimentary setup behind her house in 2007. Though she already believed in working organically, she ended up making natural wine in part because she had no money to buy things like enzymes, commercial yeasts, or anything beyond the most basic equipment. She sold the wines locally—she still does—and her superior fruit and raw, unadulterated wines quickly stood out, earning her a loyal, growing following. Today she is still only working with 3.7 hectares of vines (not quite the size of Washington Square Park), so her wine production is tiny..



Anna Halkia

‘Reddish’ is so-named because of its lighter extraction and rosy hue. It’s a direct press of Agiorgitiko, the main grape of Nemea. Dare I say it’s the

Greek equivalent of the l'Anglore Tavel style? Also very similar to an Italian cerasuolo. Basically a low acid, lighter red that is not light on flavor. Sour cherry, rose petals, and white pepper on the nose with a smooth, plush mix of cherry, salt, and sage on the palate. Easy to gulp, easy to love.

Jonathan Kemp

American Wine Project 'Rivals' Wisconsin White 2020

Wisconsin • USA

Press 4 White

Erin Rasmussen founded the American Wine Project in 2018 as a way to explore winegrowing and winemaking in the Upper Midwest after living and working in Napa pursuing a winemaking career. Erin finished her studies in winemaking and viticulture at Lincoln University in New Zealand in 2012. The current winery home was established in 2019 in the former high school Tech Ed building.

The Rivals is 100% LaCrosse, an American hybrid grape that is early ripening and cold hardy, perfect for northern climates. The grapes come from the Three Branches Vineyard in Iowa County and Possum Ridge Vineyard near La Farge, Wisconsin. It is fermented in barrel and aged on lees for 22 months. Erin states that, “she loves LaCrosse because, like Chardonnay, she thinks of it as a blank canvas for winemaking.” Her goal was to make a lush, rich, creamy style wine with a squeeze of lemon in the same family of white wines from Jura, Savoie and Austria.

Erin Rasmussen



I'd have to agree with Erin. This definitely occupies a similar style to my favorite lush and opulent wines from Jura, Loire, and Savoie. On the nose notes of white florals, creme, and stone fruit lure you in to be met with a palate full of bursting stone fruit, salinity, creme, and lanolin with a medium body reminiscent of Chenin Blanc. *Jeremy Hernandez*



Noëlla Morantin

Noëlla Morantin 'Stella Maris' Sauvignon Blanc 2022

Loire Valley • France

Press 4 White

I f&*&%ing love Noëlla Morantin. Her wines have a very special place in my heart, as when I was first starting to work with natural wine she was beginning to rent 8.5 hectares from the vineyards that got me into this whole in the first place Clos Roche Blanche. Though she no longer makes wine from the CRB vineyards, her wines will always have a home with me, as they are vibrant, soulful and utterly delicious.

Stella Maris is Noëlla's everyday drinking Sauvignon, made from grapes purchased from another Loire Valley legend Mikael Bouges. The grapes are gently pressed directly into fiberglass lined vats where the juice ferments and ages on its lees. Bottled unfiltered after about 10 months, and given a Vin de France labeling because she doesn't have time for the politics of the Appellation control board. The 2022 is a bright and cheerful expression of Sauvignon Blanc with white flowers, stony minerals, and a touch of honeysuckle. It has twice the soul of your typical Sancerre for far less money.

Jonathan Kemp & Kirk Sutherland

Hauvette Jaspe Blanc 2021

Provence • France

Press 2

Dominique Hauvette is a modern day renaissance woman of sorts. Growing up in the Paris and spending the winters her parents hotel in the Savoie, she grew up giving skiing lessons and eventually settled into becoming an attorney—until sometime in the mid-to-late 80s when she went on a vacation to Provence. That trip never ended. She stayed and discovered her passion of working with horses and nature, began studying oenology, and eventually, started making wine on a small farm of about 3 hectares.

Today, Dominique's Domaine Hauvette covers 17ha, all across Provence and nearby appellations. She's been fully biodynamic since 2000, and together with her low intervention approach in the cellar, the wines capture a true high-quality representation of terroir of the Alpilles, a region between Provence and the Southern Rhône. It's got everything you need to make the wines that people have been calling "benchmark" natural wines: rocky limestone soils, a hot and dry climate regulated by the strong winds of the Mistral ensuring temperatures are neither too hot, nor too cold. She was mentored by Eloi Dürrbach of nearby Domaine de Trévallon, and her close friendship with Loire winemakers like the Puzelats and Bretons have her consistently regarded among the top natural winemakers, and a real pioneer in her region.

Jaspe Blanc is 100% Roussanne, and a shoe-in for winner of 'best Roussanne in the world.' Aged in concrete eggs that Dominique has been employing for over two decades, far ahead of the trend. Dried apple ring, chamomile, golden currant, and sautéed shallot on the nose. The palate is viscous and savory with sultana fig and some eucalyptus on the finish. Bewitching and complex, drink now or age for 5-10 years. *Jonathan Kemp & Nico Haunold*



Dominique Hauvette

Ashanta 'Minotaure' Tempranillo Mendocino 2021

Mendocino, California • USA

Press 2

Ashanta is a project led by Chenoa Ashton-Lewis and Will Basanta in Sonoma County. Chenoa's connection with wine is strong (her grandparents have been grape growers in Sonoma since the 1960's) and in 2019, they decided to have a hand at crushing grapes to make wine. With the help and inspiration from OG Tony Coturri, the couple released their first release in 2020. No small feat to start a new project during pandemic lockdowns, but factor in extreme weather events in recent years, and their resilience and commitment is even clearer. These are expressive, unique and characterful wines.

The tempranillo for this wine is grown in a high elevation site in Round Valley, Mendocino (one of the few areas in the county that is not directly influenced by the ocean). The continental climate in the valley regularly sees 45+ degree diurnal shifts in the summer, with highs nearing triple digits and lows in the mid 50s. This all adds up to this wine's gutsy character. Once in the winery, grapes were pressed 20% whole cluster, 30% direct press and the rest was destemmed and crushed into open top fermenters. Fermented for nine days on the skins then pressed into a stainless tank for one week then gravity fed into French neutral oak. Aged in barrel for 14 months. Zero sulfur added, as in all of their wines.

There's a lot happening here for the senses, from the savory, woody sarsaparilla spice tone to the ripe plum fruit under the grasp of firm tannins that give this wine texture and structure. I personally love this rustic yet decidedly Californian vibe. Decanting or letting it get a little air will help it unwind after opening, it was even better a few hours after we cracked the bottle. It would be a perfect high-brow/low-brow pairing with a cheesy smash burger with onions.

Bruno Sant'Anna



MARCH 2024

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