

Ken Wright Cellars / Notes on the 2004 vintage

The crop level of the 2004 vintage was the lowest we have experienced in the 20 years we have been winemaking in Oregon. All told we averaged .82 tons per acre. The low crop was caused by less than perfect weather during the June flowering which dramatically reduced fertility. Since our costs of farming remained steady, and prices did not increase, 2004 will result in a financial loss for the winery.

On the positive side this loss of crop greatly decreased the work we were asking of the vines and set the stage for a very early harvest. We began on the 9th of September, the earliest on record save 1992. In 1992 we harvested Beaux Freres Vineyard (they had not finished construction of the winery yet) on the 31st of August.

The vintage was far milder than the blistering 2003. As a result, acidity is a bit higher and promises to give this vintage a long life if properly cellared. The wines are elegant (no, this is not a code word for weak) and delineated. The balance of the vintage will allow the wines to marry well with everything from salmon to roast pork loin. They are wines that will continue to develop and improve for many years to come.

Vineyards of the Yamhill-Carlton District

All of these sites have marine sediments (siltstone and sandstone) as the mother rock. Were you to dig a 10 foot deep trench the walls would look like beach sand. They are all lower in acidity than the volcanic areas when they achieve ripeness and as a result are a bit more forward. The marine sediments produce Pinot noir that has floral, spice and earth elements. Common descriptions include semi sweet chocolate, anise, cedar, tobacco, lavender, violets, black cherry, black raspberry and plum. There is a rustic quality to the wines from these sites that marries particularly well with winter dishes such as roast pork loin or game birds.

Abbott Claim

Named after John F. Abbott who held the original donation land claim. A donation land claim was the way land was acquired before the Homestead Act. An individual could claim half of a square mile or 320 acres. A married couple could claim a full square mile or 640 acres. At that time in Oregon's history there were quite a few marriages of convenience.

We purchased the property in 1999 and planted it in 2000 to Pinot noir clones 777, 115 and Pommard. It lies on a ridge just south of Guadalupe. Unlike Guadalupe, which is an undulating hillside with peaks and swales, Abbott Claim is a broad even face with very consistent soil depth of 30 inches to mother rock.

Guadalupe

Like Freedom Hill, Guadalupe is transitioning through a bout with phylloxera. The new blocks of clones Wadenswil and 115 are now on line though production is meager. This is a precocious vineyard and has historically been the first to ripen of all the sites we work with. Though this vineyard was included in the Dundee Hills AVA it properly belongs in the Yamhill-Carlton District as it is the last marine sediment based property before the basalt soils of the Dundee Hills begin. We began working with Guadalupe in 1992 when vineyard manager Joel Myers showed up at the winery during harvest with two unclaimed bins of fruit that he said were so ripe they were "nuclear". He was right, the two barrels of Guadalupe from that year were our favorites in the cellar.

McCrone

Don & Carole McCrone split time between Oregon and New Zealand pursuing the endless summer. They have properties in both countries which are almost identical. Each has a 7.5 acre vineyard with a lease to a winery that manages the property as well. In New Zealand it is Ata Rangi that manages their vineyard and utilizes all of the fruit. Ken Wright Cellars manages and utilizes all of the production of McCrone Vineyard.

McCrone is densely spaced at over 2000 vines per acre. Plantings began in 1991 and continued until 2000. The majority of the site is planted to the 777 clone with smaller amounts of 115 and 667. McCrone tends to be a bit firmer than its kindred in the AVA due to a western exposure which promotes thickening of the skins from hot late afternoon sun. There is an appealing briary component in the aromatics and flavor which is unique to the site.

Savoya

This is the first site that we purchased and developed from scratch and home for Karen and I. Just over the ridge from McCrone it has a southeast facing and lies at an average elevation of 400 feet. Savoya is just under 18 acres of planted vineyard and is comprised of the clones 777, 667, 115, Pommard and Wadenswil. Though a young vineyard Savoya has shown great promise from the first harvest in 2002. Dark fruits, cola, richness and delineation have been consistent vintage to vintage.

Shea

As with Canary Hill and Carter in 1990, Freedom Hill and Guadalupe in 1992, we were the first to produce a vineyard designated bottling of Shea in 1994. Of all the marine sediment based sites we work with Shea has a bit more red fruit in the mix and is slightly lighter and more graceful on the palate. Shea is a larger vineyard for our area, 125 acres, spread over two hillsides with our 3 blocks all located on the east hill, which we favor. Clonal make-up is 777 and Pommard which were replanted after phylloxera took its toll on the original plantings.

Vineyards of the Eola Hills

The Eola Hills are underlain with basalt at an average depth of 24 to 30 inches. The wine of this region tends to show darker fruits than the Dundee Hills and has more structure as well. As with all other volcanic areas of the Willamette Valley the aromatic and flavor focus is all about fruit. Spice, earth or floral elements take a back seat. Common descriptors would be blueberry, black cherry, cassis and cola. Seared salmon or venison are excellent matches.

Canary Hill

We began sourcing fruit from Canary Hill in 1987. Planted in 1983 Canary Hill is an east facing site largely planted to the Pommard clone. Half of the vineyard is still own rooted vines and we are knocking on wood as phylloxera has yet to make its presence known here. Other clones include 777, 114 and 115. Canary is very forward and accessible at an early age. Aromatically, black cherry is the focus. There is sweetness on the palate that would suggest there is residual sugar though of course there is none. Parts of the site tend to be a bit more vigorous and in these locations we utilize the Scott Henry trellising system which allows twice the number of buds to be left in the same space as a vertically shoot positioned vineyard. The extra growing points let the vine spend its energy in a moderated and controlled manner. We lease and directly manage Canary Hill.

Carter

Like Canary Hill, Carter was planted in 1983. The vineyard is only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from Canary Hill as the crow flies. Carter is lower in elevation and faces slightly west. Though the wine is generally fruit focused, Carter has a mineral quality as well and a bit more tannin than Canary Hill. Carter Vineyard wine has the ability to age very well. Recent tastings of the 1990 bottling show it to be healthy and delicious. Clonal make-up for Carter is Wadenswil, 777, 667, Pommard and 115. The original plantings are still intact and unaffected by phylloxera. We directly manage Carter Vineyard and have acreage contracts for more than half of the site.

Elton

Elton Vineyard was established in 1983 as well. Our small two acre section is all Pommard clone on its own roots and is split between 1983 and 1984 plantings. Elton is located well north of Canary and Carter and has a slightly different profile. The aromas are often reminiscent of Smith Brothers cough drops (candied cherries) and there is more acidity than either Canary or Carter. This is an east facing vineyard at 400 feet of elevation.

Dundee Hills

The soils of the Dundee Hills tend to be rather deep, often ten feet or more. There is also more clay in the mix which increases the water holding capacity of the soil. The higher water holding capacity helps to sustain the vines later in the year when other regions are drying out. The mother rock is basalt which arrived 20 million years ago as the tailings of a massive flood of lava from an insanely active chain of volcanos in Eastern Oregon. David and Diana Lett helped establish the modern era of winegrowing in the Willamette Valley when they planted their vineyard in these hills in the mid-60's. The wine of the region is generally lighter in body than other growing regions but very pretty, emollient and complex. Red fruits such as strawberry, raspberry and cherry are common descriptors.

Nysa

Planted in 1990 Nysa neighbors Domaine Drouhin. The vineyard is tightly spaced at 6 feet by 3 feet which is well over 2,000 vines per acre. Own-rooted Pommard clone accounts for two thirds of the site and one third is own-rooted Wadenswil. Nysa has a southeast inclination and lies at 425 feet of elevation. This is an excellent representation of Dundee Hills fruit in its elegant high-toned red and blue fruits and textural complexity.

Coastal Range

Meredith Mitchell and Freedom Hill both lie in the coast range and share some structural similarities but they are planted on very different soils. Freedom Hill is sedimentary whereas Meredith Mitchell is volcanic. Meredith Mitchell does lie within the newly formed McMinnville AVA while Freedom Hill is an outlier without an overriding AVA designation.

Freedom Hill

We have worked with Freedom Hill since 1987. Planted in Oregon's coastal hills west of Salem, Freedom Hill was established in 1981. This is an east facing vineyard planted on marine sediments. Originally developed with a hanging trellis (which tends to promote higher tannin levels from fruit exposure) the vineyard is now in transition to a vertically shoot positioned system which will provide dappled light to the clusters. The transition was made possible as new blocks are planted to replace phylloxerated vines. Freedom Hill has historically been a little firmer than most of our sites and therefore very age worthy.

Meredith Mitchell

As the coast line of Oregon is pulled north and south occasional rifts form in the mother rock. When this occurs soft magma rises from far below to create a vertical column of basalt. This is a physical feature known as a dike. Meredith Mitchell is planted on a dike and since it was a fairly recent occurrence, geologically speaking, there has been little time for soil development. In most of the vineyard the soil is not much more than a foot in depth before you hit the volcanic mother rock. This limited rooting depth keeps the vines from being the least bit vigorous and in fact presented problems with vines shutting down before fruit was ripe before irrigation was installed on our contracted acreage. Meredith Mitchell, like Freedom Hill, is higher in tannin than most of our sites. It also has more acidity than most so there is great structure for aging. The aromas are very focused with black cherry and black raspberry being common descriptions.