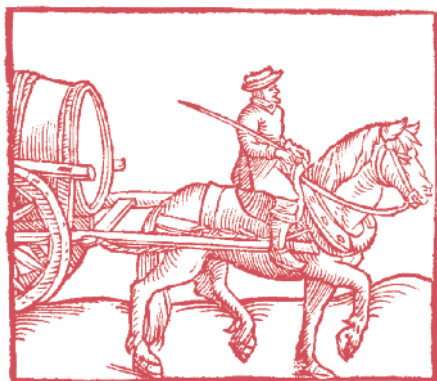


THE
CASSIOPEIA
PROJECT



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WINE · MAKER



PEOPLE who need simple answers tend to arrive at them, unfortunately, given the universe we're faced with, less than 5% of which consists, at current count, of matter we know anything whatsoever about.

:: The entire rest of whatever it is, is simply a necessary inference about which we know precisely nothing.

:: Not too surprisingly in present context, the relevant micro of this macrocosmic thought is the experience of wine, which seems to me to enclose with each wine a universe of moving parts and aspects about most of which we know next to nothing, either.

:: For example, clones, and in this case, clones only of Pinot Noir. There are thousands of them, so to take refuge in the idea of "Pinot Noir" as though it were a simple uniform "varietal" amenable to such pronouncements as "it's really all about terroir", and so forth and so on, is simply ignorance.

:: Yet one well may and certainly should ask, "well, ok, so what difference do different clones of Pinot Noir actually make in the glass?" The Cassiopeia Project is a first attempt to begin thinking intelligently about that question, by

providing some actual evidence for our own senses, since after all their opinion is the only one that really matters here, particularly since the only object of the exercise to begin with is a more enlightened understanding of their pleasures.

:: The grapes for the clonal comparison are from the River Block at Wentzel Vineyard, on a bench above the Navarro River barely east of Philo in the Anderson Valley, Mendocino, organically farmed and perfectly sited for Pinot Noir. Four clones are grown: Dijon 114, 115, 667, and 777; they are grafted on identical rootstock, planted at the same time, cultivated identically, trellised in long immediately adjacent parallel rows over identical terrain with identical sun exposure.

:: So it seemed irresistible to me to make a separate wine from each of the four clones, harvested, fermented, and aged as identically as it is humanly possible to do, so that they could all be compared side by side.

:: Thus the 2013 Cassiopeia. It is available in four-bottle sets (one bottle each of the four separate clones); the vineyard blend (i.e., the rest of the vineyard, all clones fermented together, in the normal manner) is available separately in individual bottles, but the clones are not.

:: Notes:

:: 1. If you'd like to see the actual vineyard, cruise over to Google Earth, punch in 39°03'07.45"N 123°26'28.85"W, adjust eye altitude to about 400m., and you'll be hovering right over the 2013 Cassiopeia. The entrance road from Philo Saw Works comes in at upper right; the oak trees edging into the vineyard lower left are where I park the harvest truck. I wasn't there when the photograph was taken, or of

course I would have waved. The River Block is the one on the left, with long rows roughly parallel to the river; the Buddy Block is on the right, roughly perpendicular to the river; both are planted to the same clones. The separate clonal bottlings come entirely from the full rows in about the two-thirds of the River Block closest to the river, since only these fulfill the requirements of the comparison. The vineyard blend is from the remaining rows of the River Block, plus all of the Buddy Block, named after Roland Wentzel's (late) dog, about whom (dog) I know nothing else.

∴ 2. Roland's note on his vines: "Planted in late summer, 2001, to Dijon clones 114, 115, 667, 777, on 101-14 and 3309 rootstock. Geologically, the base rock is Franciscan sandstone, soils are clay loam, typical for the region; however, the vineyard of 5 acres is situated on a sloped bench which formerly was river bed, and thus river rock/gravel makes the soil well-drained. (*ST note: so, how does this make these soils typical of the region?? Is the region all a raised rock/gravel river bed?? I don't think so...*). Spacing is 6.5' x 4', trellis is vertical shoot position (VSP). The vineyard was initially trained as bilateral cordon but is now 50% converted to cane pruning. Canes are pruned to carry 6-8 buds per cane, 2 canes per vine. Compost tea to which is added humic acid and seaweed extract is applied in the spring before budbreak, once during summer and then again post-harvest. The objective of compost tea application, applied through drip irrigation, is to enhance soil health, and therefore vine health expressed through fruit quality, by encouraging microbiological diversification. This strategy shares with biodynamic cultural techniques the basic tenet of biological

diversification as a means of achieving biological balance, thus controlling disease pathogens as well as strengthening vine health. I am agnostic on Rudolph Steiner's biodynamic lectures given in Vienna in the 1920's, but the aspect of biological diversity is beyond controversy. Microbiological diversity in our soils is our expression of this concept. I believe that this, as well as other organic practices, will give the wine maker a superior raw product to work with."

:: 3. Sean's notes on the wines themselves: I would strongly recommend that anyone seriously interested in this project purchase more than just one set. Lalou Bize-Leroy, co-director of the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti for so many years, used to describe herself as "gardienne des millésimes", meaning that she felt she had to conserve her various lots of Pinot Noir until they were truly ripe and à point for tasting. Until they were ripe, she said something like, "they're just babies: charming, but they have nothing to tell us." In this sugary era of baby bumps and mommy files, that's not likely to be a popular observation; fortunately, it concerns Pinot Noir, where it is accurate, and it is true of the Cassiopeia. At this point, they are all charming, and can be tasted with great pleasure, but I think with less enlightenment than will be the case when they are mature and their full individual characters have bloomed; as I'm sure we all hope will be true for all our children.

:: Sean Thackrey, September, 2014 ::



∴ NATIVE WINES ∴