

BUTTONWOOD

Overview

The westernmost part of the Santa Ynez Valley (the Sta. Rita Hills AVA) is such a cool climate that where many grapes would never ripen, Pinot Noir thrives. This Burgundian treat hails from a vineyard owned and farmed by longtime Buttonwood Farm friends, Art and Sherry Hibbits. A wine club exclusive.

In the Vineyard

The Hibbits Ranch Vineyard is the most western vineyard in the Sta. Rita Hills appellation and an eclectic combination of clones, rootstocks and varieties. Father and son, Art and Gregg Hibbits, began planting the vineyard in 2001, added in more vines in 2003 and a few more in 2005. The vineyard is small (just about 2 acres), on a rather steep southwest facing hill with challenging soils of chert and clay. It would be impossible to keep clones and rootstocks separate from Hibbits Ranch, as there is quite a *mélange*. Rootstocks include 101-14, 1103-P, Freedom and own-rooted. The clonal selection boasts 777, 667, 114, 459, 828, swiss clone 2A, Pommard 4 and Sanford & Benedict field selection. This is a field blend that works in harmony! Yields in 2009 were typically small (just a little over 3 tons), but very intense with small berry and cluster size.

The Vintage

The crop was larger than the previous year, and for most of the growing season the vineyard experienced the normal foggy early mornings, warming sun in the early afternoons and then Pacific breezes to keep the vineyard cool from mid-afternoon.

August, however, threw a curve at us with record high temperatures over a 5 day period, which hastened ripening and caused some raisining and dehydration. The call to pick was made, the Hibbits family called into service and the petite, pine-cone shaped, indigo colored clusters harvested in September.

Winemaking

The indigo clusters were entirely de-stemmed and then cold soaked for 4 days before being inoculated. To add just another layer of complexity to the wine, two fermenters were inoculated with RC212 yeast and the third with BRL-97; yeasts that work well together in a final blend. At dryness, the free run wine was drained to a combination of French oak barrels – including one new Sirugue barrel. The skins were lightly pressed in our manual basket press, with that wine bucketed into neutral French oak barrels. The wine aged in barrel on soft lees and without racking until tasting trials determined that the wine was ready to be bottled. Gently moved from barrel, lightly filtered and then bottled in April of 2011, just 165 cases were produced.

Tasting Notes

Visually, this is a beautiful wine with a garnet color and cut-gem clarity – there is a good reason that burgundy is the name of a color as well as a wine region in France. A first impression of the bouquet is all fruit on the nose – red and black berries of all sorts, red plum and a wisp of rose petal. Pretty and delicate. A first sip astonishes with a truly velvet-like texture, suave, sophisticated and classy. Cherries, plums, redcurrant, a hint of cocoa/mocha, black cherry cola. With time in the glass over a meal, the lilting layers of bright acidity and finely tuned tannins dance on the palate, bring additional complexity and little spicy accents of saffron. The wine lingers with a bright and beautiful finish. Totally enjoyable now, and will gain additional complexity with 1-3 years in the bottle. Smooooth.....

Pairing ideas

This is a match made for a roasted, crispy duck and a side of gratin potatoes. On the vegetarian side, anything with really good mushrooms – vegetarian stroganoff, mushroom bisque, Portobello risotto!

