

“THE CAIN WINES ARE AS  
STYLISTICALLY INTERESTING AS THEY  
ARE CONCEPTUALLY ENGAGING.”

—Kelli A. White  
on *Cain* in her book:  
*Napa Valley, Then & Now, 2015*

# CAIN

VINEYARD & WINERY

SPRING MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

NAPA VALLEY

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— FROM NOTES FROM CAIN, SUMMER 2016 —

## THE PARADOX OF BLENDING

**M**any wine lovers believe that the ultimate expression of the vine is from a single variety, grown in a single vineyard, harvested in a single vintage. It's all about specificity and focus. We expect such a wine to have character: a distinct personality. But, although a single variety, single vineyard, single vintage wine can be enjoyable, it's often the case that such a wine may let us down a little bit. Its distinctive traits and characteristics might appear more as simplicity, gaps, and lack of completeness.

On the one hand, the temptation to blend, to “correct” the gaps and complete the palate, carries with it the implicit threat of blending away personality toward generic banality.

On the other hand, the goal of blending can be to amplify certain characteristics, rather than to dampen them. It's tuning an instrument and getting the adjacent strings to resonate, or tuning an antenna to pull a specific signal out of static.

This is the paradox.

### Case Study: Blending The Cain Cuvée

Like the Cain Five, the Cain Cuvée is a blend, not only of multiple varieties, but also of two vintages. Our Cain Cuvée is drawn mainly from different vineyards, and most importantly, has a different purpose. The key point about our Cain Cuvée is that it is intended to be an expression of lightness and to leave your palate refreshed. We're also looking for complexity on the nose and balance on the palate. To achieve all of this,

blending is a surprisingly useful and powerful method.

The story of the NV12 Cain Cuvée begins with the harvest of 2011. We have already selected and set aside specific wines from 2011 to use in the NV12 blend. Of course we must wait for the following year, until after the harvest of 2012, to taste how it all comes together.

The base of the NV12 comes from the



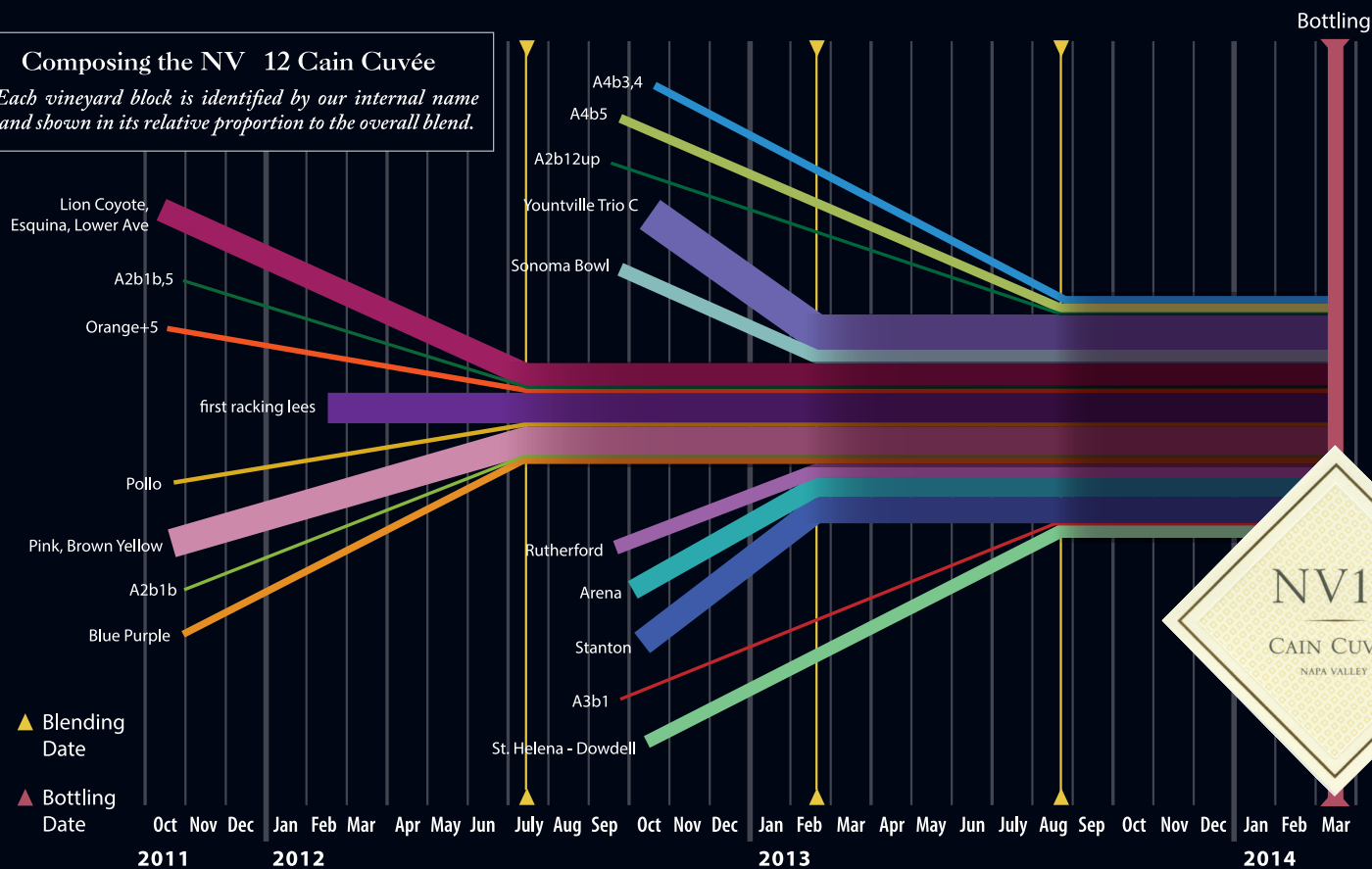
Photo: Charles O'Rear

2012 vintage. We have been working with four specific vineyards (Nord, Stanton, Gallegos and York Creek), each for more than a decade, two for more than twenty vintages. We watch carefully to capture the fruit early in its ripening curve—when it is just ripe and still bursting with juicy energy—not three weeks later, when it is fat, tired, and flabby. We handle the grapes gently, allowing the fruit to give up its essence without pushing too hard—it is a delicate extraction—an infusion. After no more than a couple of weeks, the new wine has been separated from its skins and seeds and is slowly finishing its fermentations.

This is the moment when we begin to

## Composing the NV 12 Cain Cuvée

Each vineyard block is identified by our internal name and shown in its relative proportion to the overall blend.



Graph: Leanne Schly

## FLOWERING

Grapes, like all fruit, begin as flowers. Each flower might become a single berry. If all goes well, about half will be fertilized. Though at first, one might not notice these tiny flowers, if one pays close attention, their delicate, ephemeral scent is unmistakable. It's a tender moment.



think about blending. For the Cain Cuvée we look for freshness, lightness, complexity, and balance with a mouth-watering texture and finish. If those first lots which make up the base of the Cain Cuvée seem to fit together, we will assemble the base as we did for the NV12. In the early winter we'll taste those wines from 2011 again and taste them in the context of the 2012 wines for Cain Cuvée. After a few experimental trial blends we'll find the place of harmony. Then we'll compose the blend in the cellar and put it down to age and slowly come together. This first blend often happens in February or March, about the same time we're bottling the prior vintage of Cain Cuvée.

Before the next harvest, in the late summer as the *élevage* continues, we'll rack the wine, giving us another moment to refine the blend with the possible addition of a few more lots that might add complexity, fill in gaps, or slightly adjust the wine in one direction or another. After another six months in the barrel the Cain Cuvée is ready to bottle. The *élevage* continues in the bottle for one or two more years.

When we release the Cain Cuvée, it is ready to be enjoyed. Although it will continue to develop for a decade or more, we suggest that you enjoy your Cain Cuvée young, in its freshness!

—Chris Howell

## THE FRAGILITY OF CORKS

Natural corks are essential to the wines of Cain, and indeed to all classical wines. After the wine has been bottled, the cork plays a critical role in the evolution and development of the wine as it ages in the cellar. It is just as important as the role, prior to bottling, of the oak barrel itself.

Cork is actually a branch of the oak family tree as well: *Quercus suber*, the cork oak. The cork seals the bottle and protects the wine as it ages. It also exchanges various elements with the wine, most importantly, oxygen. What happens, and how, is only gradually becoming known—much remains to discover.

Call it magic.

After a year or two in the cellar, the wine slowly becomes one with the cork, and the cork becomes one with the wine. In time, the cork becomes increasingly fragile, even as it continues to protect the wine. With respect to this fragility, at Cain we often prefer to use the two-bladed "Ah-So" cork puller on wines with extended bottle age.

To show you how to best use this device, we have posted a video at [CainFive.com/Ah-So](http://CainFive.com/Ah-So).



If you'd like us to send you the "Ah-So" cork puller that we use, simply email your request to Brooke Sinnes at [Brooke@CainFive.com](mailto:Brooke@CainFive.com).



Pruning



Budbreak



Flowering



Veraison



Harvest



Leaf Fall

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER