



photo: Dan Pannter

ON THE COMPLEXITY OF THE CAIN VINEYARD

—REPRINTED FROM NOTES FROM CAIN, ©2018—

AT FIRST GLANCE, winegrowing might seem impossible on our steeply terraced, highly faceted site. Spectacular, it is true, but difficult for sure. The soils are thin, fragile, and very low in nutrients. That is precisely the point: it is vineyards such as ours that yield wines with the strongest, most distinctive character. Wines grown in the Cain Vineyard are unforgettable.

It's hard to pin down the most important factors that lead to the complex personality of the Cain Five. We know that it is not the five-varietal blend in itself. Many wineries are now blending the five varieties of a classical Cabernet Blend. A similar composition can be created working in the classical benchlands of the Napa Valley but the wine, our Cain Concept—The Benchland,

for example, will be very different. The Cain Concept is delicious, and it reflects the best of the Napa Valley, together with our Cain aesthetic of complexity, balance, grace, texture, and finish. But, beyond all of this, the Cain Five is distinctive. How can we understand it? How can we explain it? What are the factors that contribute to the unique and distinctive personality of the Cain Five?

FACTORS OF COMPLEXITY

ELEVATION

First might be elevation. The Cain Vineyard is cradled in a bowl on the ridgeline of the Mayacamas mountain range, with the vines growing at elevations ranging from 1400 to 2100 feet, whereas our benchland vineyard sites average just 100 feet above

sea level. Naturally, as we climb in altitude, it generally becomes cooler, with the early morning being a significant exception. But altitude alone does not set us apart. Although the Cain Vineyard is among the highest, there are other Napa vineyards as high and some even higher.

As with most Napa Valley vineyards above 1400 feet, Cain is usually above the inversion or fog that in summertime often fills the Napa Valley at sunrise. Those foggy mornings will be warmer at Cain than they are on the valley floor. Throughout the night, warm air rises from the valley, so even though the vineyard doesn't get as hot in the afternoon, the vines enjoy a more temperate nighttime and early morning.

STEEPNESS

Then one might think of the steepness. If the Cain Vineyard were a ski area,



PRUNING



BUDBREAK



FLOWERING

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

more than one place could qualify as “black diamond.” The vineyard is rugged. Still, there are other steep vineyards in Napa, some even steeper than ours.

THIN SOIL

What often comes with steepness is the relative thinness of the soil. In most of the Cain Vineyard the roots of the grapevine don't have much soil to work with. The dramatic rock outcroppings should be a clue. Nonetheless, there are a few other vineyards with thin soils.

EXPOSURE

Another key to the diversity of the Cain Vineyard is the multiplicity of exposures. As the photograph attests, vines are growing on slopes facing all points of the compass. When harvesting and vinifying the various blocks, we usually have some twenty or more different wines. Many different Cabernet Sauvignons, Merlots, etc., picked over the span of more than a month. How, working

with all of these facets, could the Cain Five not be a wine of great complexity?

PERSONALITY

Running through all of these individual lots is a unifying family resemblance to the wines of the Cain Vineyard. Most share some common personality traits, and in the best of them, that personality will be especially strong.

SOIL COMPOSITION

What most of the blocks have in common is a soil formed of sandstone, shale, and clay—ancient marine sediments, buried deep within the earth before being uplifted to form the backbone of the Mayacamas Range. Whereas a great deal of the Mayacamas Range still has a more recent volcanic overlay, here at Cain, these ancient underpinnings are directly exposed to the roots of the grapevines.

WIND PATTERN

Cain sits on the crest of the Mayacamas, so the wind is almost always blowing, generally from the West, from the cold Pacific Ocean thirty-five miles away. Moreover, there's a gap where the ridge drops down to 1950 feet, funneling even more wind through the Cain Vineyard.

FOREST

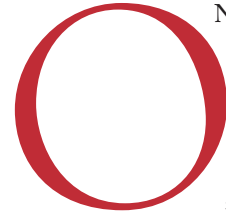
Our mountain vineyard blocks are surrounded by forest. Most people will note a wild herb, almost garrigue-like aroma in the Cain Five. There is, no doubt, an herbal and even citrus note to the Cain Vineyard. We're not sure of the cause or the origin. Perhaps it's the Douglas Firs, the Madrones, and the Bay Laurels that comprise the forest, along with various herbal plants growing in the open fields. Maybe it's simply the environment that leads our vines to express this wild, savage character.

TERROIR

If you've ever wondered about the meaning of that elusive word, Terroir, here it is. It is all of these elements, taken together as an ensemble that can create a distinctive personality, unlike anywhere else. When everything is working, as it is in the Cain Vineyard, the signal is strong.

—Chris Howell

CAIN BOTANICALS: “TARWEED”

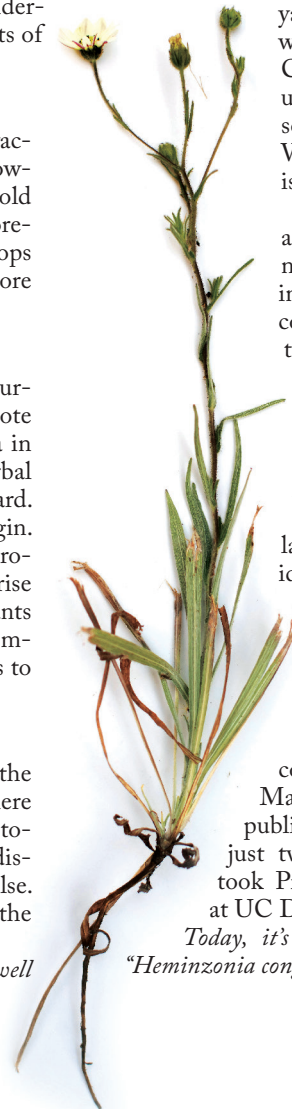


ONE OF THE many unique attributes of the Cain Vineyard is the “tarweed” we find growing in our soils here. It has a sticky sap clinging to its stems and leaves, with an indescribably heady floral, citrus, musky, herbal, resinous perfume. Everyone who works in our vineyard knows it well and we find aromas in the Cain Five which remind us of this plant. Is it the soil? Is it the plant itself? Who knows? And what is this plant, really?

There are more than a dozen species of plant, not all related, growing in California that are commonly identified as tarweed. We have not seen our tarweed, with the delicate white and purple flowers and distinctive scent, growing in any other vineyard.

Cain's own particular variety was recently identified, but only with the help of our master gardener, landscaper and horticulturist, Bea Henke, who located it in “Weeds of California,” a book co-authored by Professor Margaret K. Bellue, and published in July of 1951, just two months before Bea took Professor Bellue's course at UC Davis!

Today, it's known by botanists as “Heminzonia congesta subsp. luzulifolia.”



ON RIPENING

TRUE RIPENING BEGINS when the berries have at last metamorphosed from hard green vegetables into bluepurple, soft, succulent, perfumed fruit. This is *Veraison*. It is a process observed carefully by everyone in the vineyard: the bees, the birds, the raccoons, the coyotes, the turkeys, and all the rest of us. We can see the clusters change color, but we have to touch the fruit and taste it in order to perceive the changes taking place within.

Photo: Chuck O'Rear



VERAISON



HARVEST



LEAF FALL

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER