One Time Only—2023 Cain Sauvignon Blanc

Only grapes such as these can yield a wine such as this.
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The only way to get there is time. Old vines.

One look at the nearly golden clusters and an experienced winegrower knows instinctively that the wine they yield could be exceptional. Intense notes of citrus, floral perfume, lively acid, mouth-filling, almost savory structure…. Wines such as these transcend the variety—they're unto themselves.

When the folks at Eco Terreno suggested that we take a look at their 50 year old block of Sauvignon, Ashley and Mandy immediately said, "Yes!" and I took it on faith in their good judgement and on general principle. Because, old vines are becoming a thing of the past—and we know that some of the truly great wines of the world have been born on old vines.

When I finally had a chance to visit that block, the first thing I saw were the thrifty vine shoots, with their trim, resilient, glossy leaves. On their own, these shoots had all stopped growing, as the vines turned their energies to ripening their modest crop. This is a shocking contrast to the jungle of large, floppy, tender, lettuce-like leaves presented by most heavily irrigated, chemically farmed vineyards found on the fertile valley floors of Napa and Sonoma—all of which desperately need mechanical hedging to allow any sunlight to reach the clusters.

Then, those grapes … not the massive, honking clusters one might likely see in most young vineyards growing in deep, rich, fertile soil. No amount of viticultural technique can result in fruit like this. The vines need to be able to grow it without undue intervention. And only old vines can do it.

In the same vein, the wine-making must be minimal. The fruit was picked by hand in the cool of the morning, the whole clusters were put directly into the press and pressed gently. The yield was low. After settling overnight, the juice was racked into a couple of large ceramic jars (1000L and 500L) along with a couple of old barrels. Mandy inoculated it with some yeast, added some nutrients, and the wine fermented without further intervention until it could do no more. Sulfites were added, and the now-dry wine was allowed to rest on its lees for almost four months. Then it was gently fined for clarification and put to bottle. Now it can be yours.

We have no doubt that this wine is exceptional. And it will remain that way for many years—at least ten—to come.

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A few notes on the wine itself:
Our O.T.O. Sauvignon just might well be the fullest-bodied, most intense dry Sauvignon you've ever tasted. But power alone is not a sign of quality. Rather, look for power, personality, finesse, all working together in harmony.

Here are few tasting notes:
Nose: Discrete aromas of ripe lemon, just a hint of waxiness.
Palate: Clean, crisp entry; full, firm mid-palate, lychee and licorice; cleansing, mouthwatering finish.

Pairing:
This is not a picnic wine! It's meant for an indoor, sit-down meal where you'll have the time and attention to savor it. My ideal pairing (today)—a fresh sea scallop, lightly-seared, yet still tender and translucent on the inside. Or else—potato-leek soup, any light seafood, or a poached or seared chicken breast will all do nicely.

Christopher Howell, Winegrower