

Frenchtown 'Nineteen Harts' 2017

Producer - Aaron and Cara Mockrish

Provenance: Sierra Foothills, California

Farming: Organic, dry-farmed

Grape(s): 85% Syrah, 15% Roussanne

Vineyard(s): Terraced vineyards at Renaissance with red, granitic soils. Syrah comes from the most wild and underdeveloped block at Renaissance at a 2300 foot elevation. The Roussanne comes block 23 at Renaissance with the same kind of red hued granitic terroir.

Fermentation/ Aging: Whole cluster, foot crushed and fermented in Flextank harvest bins for four days. Pressed back into Flextank until dry and then aged without stirring in puncheons, racked once before bottling.

Fining/ Filtration: none.

Sulfite: 18 ppm at bottling

Misc: Although the quality and condition of the fruit between 16 and 17 was essentially the same, the primary difference was the effort to keep the wine away from barrel until the fermentation was truly completed so as not to develop brettanomyces in the wine.



The Producer

Emboldened by a formative stint at Big Table Farm in Oregon, east coasters Aaron and Cara Mockrish moved to North Yuba, California with a mind to start a farm raising sheep and growing vegetables. That all changed when they encountered a bottle of 2008 Clos Saron 'Black Pearl.' The wine captivated them and upon discovering that Clos Saron was just up the road they set out to make a connection. This evolved into an apprenticeship of sorts that formed the foundation for what is now Frenchtown. Although Frenchtown began as an ideological successor to the Clos Saron legacy, Cara and Aaron have been through a rigorous process of exploration to find their own voice. Eye opening conversations with luminaries like Batiste Overnoy, Pascaline Lepeltier and Nicolas Gordo of Domaine Simon Bize have helped them develop new ideas about how to temper and communicate North Yuba's monumental terroir to produce more youthful wines.

The Vineyard

Through a farmer's market, Aaron and Cara encountered a few of the members of the 'Fellowship of Friends,' a doomsday cult that wine professionals will know under the name 'Renaissance.' The sprawling 360+ acres of terraced vineyards were hewn from sun baked, red granite that accentuates the already potent California sun.

Though the famed winery has shuttered, about 30 acres of vineyards remain of which Cara and Aaron cultivate about 20, selected with the counsel of their mentor Gideon Beinstock of Clos Saron. They grow Sauvignon Blanc, Roussanne, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and a small block of Grenache. Although the vineyards were irrigated before they took over, Cara and Aaron stopped irrigating. Instead they rely on the deep root systems the old vines have developed over 40 years to find water and increase complexity.

The fruit for 'Nineteen Harts' comes from the most wild and underdeveloped block of Syrah at Renaissance at a 2300 foot elevation. The Roussanne comes block 23 at Renaissance with the same kind of red hued granitic terroir.

Like their mentor, Cara and Aaron follow a 'touch' intensive approach to harvesting that results in quite a few more passes through any particular vineyard. Where they differ is the standard they use: instead of the 'avocado rule' to achieve perfect ripeness, they aim for 'perfectly under ripe strawberries.'

The Cellar

Whole clusters of Syrah (85%) and Roussanne (15%) are crushed by foot and cofermented in polyethylene harvest bins on the stems and skins for 4 days before pressing back into tank until the wine is dry. The wine is then aged for 16 months in old puncheons on gross lees with a single racking right before bottling at which point 18 ppm of SO₂ is added. Although the quality and condition of the fruit between 16 and 17 was essentially the same, the primary difference was an effort to keep the wine out of barrel until the fermentation was truly completed so as not to develop Brettanomyces in the wine.

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