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Comptche Ridge Vineyards Pinot Noir SF Tasting



2012 was said to be a “perfect” year whereas 2013 imo, more traditional for Anderson Valley.

About a year ago, we shipped a Comptche Ridge Vineyards Pinot Noir & received a really, really good response. That isn't surprising given Anderson's Valley quick ascension to the utter echelon of Pinot Noir regions in America. We originally were interested in Comptche Ridge Vineyards because they sell some fruit to Anthill Farms for a vineyard designate Pinot Noir. Of course, if you want to buy that Pinot Noir, good luck...Anthill's waiting list these days is pretty legendary and likely a number of years long.

As with many winemakers though, the guys at Anthill make a number of different wines. From Bluxhome Street in San Francisco, to this Comptche Ridge bottling itself, the guys behind Anthill Farms have a number of other projects, that are basically the same style of wine, without the huge waiting list.

The Comptche Ridge folks held a small scale tasting at Wayfare Tavern in San Francisco, in a little known 3rd floor room that, in my opinion is quintessential San Francisco.

To get up there, you'll probably need an escort from the hostess as I did.

You walk up the main stairs into the 2nd floor and then cut past a number of tables, to the staircase which is marked “exit only”. Head up those stairs and you find the wine cellar and some more tables in a larger room, which I am guessing the Tavern uses for private events.

Comptche Ridge was pouring their 2012 and 2013 Pinot Noir, as well as a neighbor's Chardonnay and a dessert wine, that the Europeans consider an apertif.

It was an interesting event for me largely because, as usual, I was the first to arrive, so I had some time to spend with vineyard owner Mark Weir by myself.

Mark talked about a wide range of issues and things that told me the story of Comptche Ridge in exquisite detail. To start, I was wondering why sell to Anthill and not one of the larger names in wine?

To that end he said that he had grown up in Ukiah, so when the vineyard's grapes were ready to sell, he was a little taken back at the larger winery operations showing up to talk to him about his grapes, in their luxury SUV's. Would those be the sort of folks that would be enjoyable to work with in vintage after vintage? He said that he remembers seeing them drive up in a beat up pickup, which seemed like the kind of winemaker he wanted to have his grapes.

I also asked Mark about the state of the farm. He said that they'd been lucky so far to not have any real disease on then property as of yet, but also that it wouldn't be terrible to deal with if and when it happened, he said he had a good view of the vineyard from his house. That's something I've heard from multiple small vineyard owners over the years. All too often the big boys will talk about how their vineyard staff makes 6 passes, or 8 passes through a vineyard during every vintage. The small scale farmer laughs at that, they're walking through the vineyard every day. When they see something that doesn't look quite right, they go and have a look-not on a regular schedule, but much the same way we handle our fruits and vegetables that we grow at home. Mark also said that he's starting to gain a greater appreciation for the Pommard clone of Pinot Noir, it might be the most famous, but he said that it took almost instantly in his vineyard.

About that vineyard, he's largely had to let it be dry farmed-while he sees something changes in the decade plus he's been on the site due to climate change, he isn't choosing to dry farm because of the much discusses California drought. Instead, he had to because there is a layer of clay in the soil. Watering a vineyard with clay makes for a virtually impossible situation for vines.

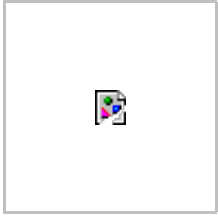
He said that they're at the point where all the clones have broken through the clay layer for more fertile soil below.

Lastly, I asked him about some of his neighbors as well, as the changing landscape of Anderson Valley, which may be the most discussed Pinot Noir AVA in America today. First, he said that it was worth it to visit an old friend Toby Hill who owns and makes the wine at Phillips Hill. Toby had described the family connection a year or so to me at an Anderson Valley tasting event and Mark referred to Toby as "Tob" which reminded me a lot of how you nickname the kids a couple years behind you in school. It also reminded me how small the wine industry truly is.

Mark also talked about how his part of Anderson Valley is going to start going through their own AVA process, settling on the Comptche designation in lieu of some other options. During that process, it has also become apparent that he's like to have some well funded competitors coming into the neighborhood-he said neighbors with hundreds of plantable acres are getting up there in age and looking for a way to either cash out, of their descendants certainly will be. He wasn't sure exactly what that would mean for the wine and the status of Anderson Valley and more locally Comptche as time goes by, but personally, as long as the big boys are reasonable, it's nice to have some marketing muscle behind a new AVA. Wine lovers will search out the small producers and having Anthill Farms make a vineyard designate version of your wine, is a feather in your cap.

Summary

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