

VOL. 12 | FEBRUARY 2020



VINERATION



I first met Cody and Emily Rasmussen through a Sonoma-based organization called the Historic Vineyard Society. Emily is the administrator for this professional association, which promotes the preservation of California's historic vineyards more than 50 years old.

In April 2018, I met Emily and Cody through a wine tasting event that HVS hosted in San Francisco; it was an unrivaled opportunity to taste wines from dozens of California's most respected craft wineries.


That same month, the Rasmussens released their first Desire Lines Wine Co. wines to the public. I've followed along since, and when a mutual friend reconnected us, I jumped at the opportunity to feature their wines through Veneration.

They work with some of the most sought-after old vineyards in the country, two of which you'll taste this month. I'm incredibly excited to bring you these wines, especially the Evangelho Red Wine, which is a field blend from one of California's most unique and respected heritage vineyards.

Cheers!

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THIS MONTH

Receive 10% off all Desire Lines reorders by contacting  Emily directly:
emily@desirelineswines.com

NEXT MONTH

We're traveling to the Columbia Gorge, 60 miles east of Portland, Oregon - an unconventional wine country - to meet a pioneering organic winery.



Sonoma, California
www.desirelineswines.com

You wouldn't expect some of California's most active proponents of historic vineyard preservation to hail from the corn and soybean dominated midwest town of Orange City, Iowa. But Cody and Emily Rasmussen have become exactly that since moving to Sonoma, California in 2011. It was during Cody's semester abroad experiences in Cape Town, South Africa and Rome that wine captured his fascination. Despite being an economics and political science major, he found a way to write his final thesis on terroir. These high school sweethearts married immediately after college graduation and headed west.



Future winemaker, Caleb

Emily went to work in winery marketing and Cody landed a series of harvest internships and cellar jobs before joining Bedrock Wine Co. in 2013 as the assistant winemaker. Bedrock's owner and winemaker is Morgan Twain-Peterson, a certified Master of Wine and son of Ravenswood founder Joel Peterson. The Petersons, along with Turley Winery's Tegan Passalacqua, Ridge Vineyards' David Gates, Carlisle Winery's Mike Officer, and other supporters, established the Historic Vineyard Society to promote the preservation of this unique aspect of California's history. Many of the state's heritage vineyards date to the late 1800s and were planted with grapes like zinfandel, carignan, and petite sirah by European immigrants. For the past several decades, they've been ripped out in favor of more lucrative crops like cabernet sauvignon. HVS works to tell the story of California's rich wine history, which revolves around these vineyards, and thereby increase the profitability of the old vines, preventing their removal.

Through their connection to Bedrock, Emily got involved with marketing and events for the organization. Cody, being exposed to the storied vineyards which Bedrock sources from, began telling their own tale through the bottle. They founded Desire Lines Wine Company in 2014 and released the first wines in 2018. Each vintage, they produce riesling and syrah, in addition to the mourvèdre and old vine field blend which you're trying this month.



Cody, Emily, & son, Caleb

A desire line is the shortest path of resistance a person takes to get to a destination. For example, think about a sidewalk with an unnecessary turn. People usually cut the corner and tread a visible path through the grass to avoid ten extra steps. That path is a desire line, and in this case, the Rasmussens are blazing their own trail through California's wine industry.

2018 Mourvèdre

Fred's Home Block

Del Barba Vineyard



BASICS

Origin
Contra Costa
County AVA

Varietals
100%
Mourvèdre

Production
762 bottles

SENSATIONS

Color
Violet

Acid
Medium -
High

Body
Medium

Texture
Dusty

AROMAS

Bacon

Asphalt

Black Cherry

Cocoa

From California's Dusty Roads

Mourvèdre is an intense introvert. It doesn't possess the perfume of pinot noir or the richness of cabernet sauvignon. But where mourvèdre lacks in aromatics, it compensates with a depth of savory and earthy qualities. With that in mind, I highly recommend decanting this wine for several hours. At the least, let it sit in your glass for 30 minutes to allow the shy aromas to show themselves.

This wine's color is such a dense purple that a flashlight can barely pass through it. The aromas start out subtle and tight, but given time to breathe, you'll pick up crispy bacon, freshly laid asphalt, dark cherry, cocoa powder, and pine straw. There's also an underlying hint of licorice you can catch at the end of a long inhalation. Meat and asphalt are two key aromas consistently found in pure mourvèdre, which are present here upon first opening. Amazingly, the second and third day after being opened, this wine blossomed with even stronger scents of cherry and cocoa.

This dense, dark, and savory mourvèdre nonetheless has a brightness due to the moderately high acid content and balanced tannins. Very juicy up front, the acid is felt as the wine moves back on your tongue. That helps offset the sensation of thickness. You can detect that through the "midpalate" - very literally the center of your tongue. Unsophisticated wines, especially the denser ones, lack a midpalate.

The dusty cocoa finish is beautiful for those who like dark chocolate. While the full tannins will definitely dye your teeth, they don't build up on your tongue as if you just chewed mud, like some intense red wines. Instead, this wine's structure is reminiscent of the quaint, dusty roads that run through California's rural wine regions.



MSRP: \$35

ABV: 14%

Del Barba Vineyard

I'm outspoken about my love for California's heritage vineyards. The 40-acre Del Barba Vineyard in Oakley, California is the oldest one we've featured yet. It was planted in the 1880s, and the fact that it survives today is miraculous. Located northeast of Oakland, this fertile land in the Sacramento River Delta was dominated by agriculture until the post-WWII building boom encroached. Now, Del Barba is one of the few vineyards left in town and is surrounded by suburban neighborhoods. Fourth-generation farmer Tom Del Barba still runs the property and sells fruit to a handful of local winemakers. Up through 2017, the Del Barba mourvèdre was used in Bonny Doon Vineyard's Cigare Volant red blend (the flagship wine that last month's winemaker, Nicole Walsh, crafts during her day job at Bonny Doon.)

Most of the vineyard is planted with zinfandel vines, but a small three-acre block is the source for this mourvèdre. The vines are head-trained, meaning they aren't strung along trellises or wires, but grow unsupported like a bush. This method is the old way that grapevines were grown before modern farming techniques and is reflective of the Portuguese immigrants that first planted them in Oakley. Tom Del Barba's father Fred watches over this ancient block of mourvèdre that carries his name, hence the reference on the bottle's label.

About Mourvèdre

In the November 2019 Vineration club release, we featured a GSM red blend. The "M" in the acronym stands for mourvèdre, one of the key black grapes of the Southern Rhone Valley. It's used to provide tannic backbone, dark fruits, and meaty umami characteristics when blended with grenache and syrah in wines like Chateauneuf du Pape.

Mourvèdre, while being small in global quantity, is actually widespread through Europe. In Spain, it's called monastrell and is the country's fourth most-planted grapevine. The red wines of Valencia and Jumilla on Spain's southeastern coast are based upon monastrell, where they result in softer and fruitier wines due to the increased heat of that region. Mataro is the Portuguese name for the grape, where it's only used in small quantities for blending into other wines.

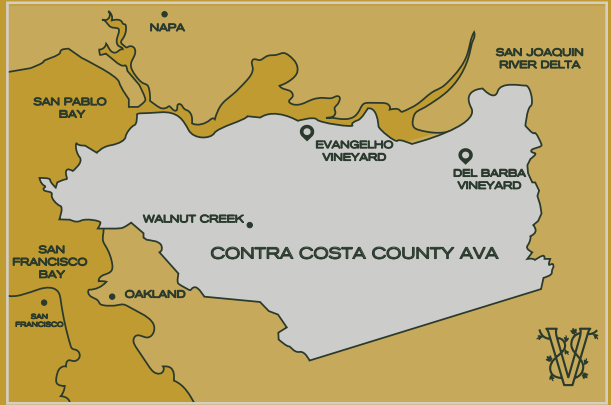
As mentioned above, mourvèdre is a key ingredient to the wines of southern France. While it is a junior partner in the GSM blends of the Rhone, it's the star of one region - Bandol. This gorgeous Mediterranean-fronting town is halfway between Marseille and Saint-Tropez. The hills outside of town are covered in mourvèdre vines, which produce dark, meaty, and long-lived wines.



Del Barba Vines



APPELLATION



PAIRINGS

Bring on the red meat, like a rib roast with extra crispy ends, burgers, or a chargrilled ribeye. The possibilities are endless, unless you're vegan.

While I don't normally suggest chocolate with dry wines, this one goes great with dark chocolate covered cherries or blueberries. Usually the tannin in chocolate augments the wine's tannins, but with this wine it curiously doesn't get more bitter.

In the cheese department, go bold. Blue cheese brings out an awesome spiciness in this wine.



COMPARE

In mourvèdre's ultimate appellation, Bandol, Domaine Tempier is the most acclaimed brand thanks in part to legendary American importer Kermit Lynch. You can find Domaine Tempier's rose and red online, and I've seen them occasionally in fine wine shops in Florida.

Monastrell from Jumilla, Spain has become widely available over the past decade. Brands like Juan Gil and Tarima are always in stock in big box retailers for under \$15, although you'll notice a big quality differential from the Desire Lines wine.

Aside from mourvèdre, California petite sirah is a fantastic wine with similarly sturdy tannins and savory flavors. It also shares a parallel history with California mourvèdre and is found in many of the same heritage vineyards. Petite sirah is available in most wine shops with good examples retailing around \$30.

2018 Evangelho Red Wine



BASICS

Origin
Contra Costa
County AVA

Varietals
90% Carignan
10% Mourvèdre

Production
1,800 bottles

SENSATIONS

Color
Ruby

Acid
High

Body
Medium

Texture
Brisk

AROMAS

Raspberry

Cherry

Clove

Violet

The Fresh Prince of NorCal

While the Del Barba Vineyard mourvèdre is a study in depth and concentration, this Evangelho Vineyard red is the embodiment of brightness and zest. Decanting never hurts, but with this bottle, it's not mandatory. The hazy ruby core gives way to a magenta rim, foreshadowing the brilliance of the taste.

Vivid red raspberry and bing cherry intermingle with spice notes of clove, anise, cedar, and floral undertones of violet. Thirty percent of the grape clusters are kept with their stems to add earthiness, which shows up as cedar and anise. Cody ages this wine for 10 months in neutral French puncheons twice the size of a normal wine barrel. This limited contact with wood and the fact that the oak had already been depleted of flavor preserves the freshness of the fruit.

That fresh factor also derives from the wine's high natural acidity - enough to make your cheeks pucker. Carignan is frequently used to add acid to blended wines, and only with vine age does that acidity become accompanied by complex flavors. The medium body of this Desire Lines wine is further enhanced by a 10% inclusion of mourvèdre to thicken the texture. As the chalky tannins coat your tongue and the roof of your mouth, they don't get bulky and don't take away from the lighter qualities of the wine. The glass finishes out with a wave of refreshing acidity, brambly raspberry, and cherry cola.

The 2018 Evangelho red has so many things that I love in an old vine wine: a delicious interplay of fruit and spice, and it preserves high acid under lots of depth. This particular wine is similar to many true old vine zinfandel field blends, which are usually interplanted with carignan. Overall, you'll be left thinking one simple thought - this wine is straight up fresh.



MSRP: \$35

ABV: 14%

Evangelho Vineyard

Just like the Del Barba Vineyard, the Evangelho Vineyard is hemmed in by modern development on all sides. The defining neighbor of this Antioch, California property is the Pacific Gas & Electric power plant to their north, whose distribution towers slice across the property and are featured on the label of the Desire Lines bottle. Although short in charm, this vineyard is abundant in terroir.

Portuguese immigrants planted mostly carignan, zinfandel, and mourvèdre vines here in the 1890s on alluvial sand deposited by the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, which converge right at the city of Antioch. Those soils are the key to the vines' long survival and special character. Sandy soils don't trap rainwater like clay-based soils do; it drains quickly and deeply. This forces the vines to send roots far down to the water table, sometimes more than 30 feet below the surface. That strong root system helps the vine weather environmental stressors. Pests, like the vine-killing insect *Phylloxera*, avoid sandy soils, which also contributes to the vines' longevity.

The Evangelho family bought this property in the 1930s and fought to keep it intact despite approaching development and rising property values. PG&E (the power company) actually owns 26 acres of the vineyard for their power distribution, although they have a long-term lease agreement to keep the old vines planted.

In 2017, the owner of Bedrock Wines, Morgan Twain-Peterson, purchased the remaining 10 acres from Frank Evangelho with the promise to continue preserving this magnificent piece of California's wine history.

About Carignan

Casual wine drinkers may have never heard of carignan, but it's one of the most widely-planted grapevines in Europe, and until 2000, the most popular grape in France. It was favored because it produces a significant amount of grapes per vine - around four times more than cabernet sauvignon vines.



Evangelho Vines

For this reason, carignan became popular for inexpensive jug wines around the world. But old vine carignan displays more serious characteristics that make it valued for fine wine across Europe and the U.S.



APPELLATION



PAIRINGS

Pair this wine with a rich red meat like BBQ ribs, pepper-crusted steak, or prime rib. The acid can help it stand up to food with fat and kick.

On the vegetable side, go for sweet potatoes. With measured tannins, it won't be too bitter for starchy veggies.

Strong cheeses like aged cheddar are ideal.



COMPARE

The Desire Lines Evangelho red nicely lines up to the Spanish wines from Priorat and Montsant. They're based on garnacha (grenache) with heavy amounts of carignan and maintain a zippy acidity among bold fruit flavors. These wines should be available in any shop that carries a Spanish selection.

For a direct comparison, buy a bottle of Bedrock Evangelho Vinyard wine online. Bedrock is Cody's day job and he produces the wine at their winery, so the styles are commensurable.

However, I dare say the student has become the master...I enjoy the Desire Lines version more than the Bedrock.

VINERATION

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