

Margins 'Neutral Oak Hotel' 2020

Producer - Megan Bell

Provenance: Santa Cruz Mountains

Grape(s): 72% Cabernet Franc (Santa Cruz Mtns)/7% Mourvèdre (Santa Clara Valley)/7% Counosie (Santa Clara Valley)/7% Chenin blanc (Clarksburg)/7% Muscat blanc (Contra Costa County)

Vineyard: The two Cabernet Franc vineyards that define the blend are located 15 minutes apart from each other on the inland side of the Santa Cruz mountains. Demouni vineyard is the primary source for the wine and it is extremely steep and cannot be cultivated or harvested with the aid of any machinery.

Vintage: In 2020, Megan doubled her production, moved to a new winery and was forced to evacuate her home due to wildfires just after the first pick. The growing season also presented challenges with heatwaves and a powdery mildew pressure across the Santa Cruz Mountains, she was obliged to pick earlier and find ways to manage alkalinity.

Fermentation/ Aging: destemmed and fermented in macro bins with one punch down per day. Pressed after about 10 weeks as the ferment goes dry into neutral barrel for 9 months aging on gross lees. The small lots were fractions of her core wines rather than unique methods (Chenin, Muscat were directly pressed).

Sulfite: 25 ppm added periodically during the aging period to account for the volatility and high brett influence of the core Cabernet Franc lots in the blend. A final 20 ppm was added a week before bottling

The Producer:

“Complicated things don’t really interest me,” Megan muses “I want wine to be thought of as something that’s very not complicated - that’s something that affected me a lot at the beginning.” Megan’s interest in wine grew out of high-school brewing experiments to studies at UC Davis. From the beginning she found the pall of mystery that hung over wine to be discouraging and totally unnecessary. Her project, initially funded through a crowdsourcing campaign, is dedicated to the less evangelized regions of California and their scrappy mom ‘n pop vineyards. The wines are delicious, totally unfussy and super clean.

The Vineyard:

The two Cabernet Franc vineyards that define the blend are located 15 minutes apart from each other on the inland side of the Santa Cruz mountains.

Demouni vineyard is the primary source for the wine and it is extremely steep and cannot be cultivated or harvested with the aid of any machinery. Surrounded by oak trees and mountains, the intense angle of the slope demands that during harvest, the picking team is split between people plucking clusters and another crew running those clusters up and down the hill. It’s an



intense vineyard but it's beautiful and boasts an actual, literal, real castle. "It's a bit hokey," Megan says of the 1980's castle (yeah you read that right) overlooking the Silicon Valley. Megan associates the vineyard with a high amount of Brettanomyces.

2020 was an especially challenging year for Megan. She moved into a new winery space with a friend which brought with it the joys of permitting and licensing paperwork, and doubled her production from 1,000 cases to 2,000 cases without hiring additional help. 'I didn't quite realize how much that was going to be for one person' she told us. To further complicate matters the neighborhood where she lives was evacuated due to wildfires after the very first pick. With 27 tons left to pick and process, Megan was living in a friend's guest room while managing a new workflow in a new space.

The Winery:

The blend of 72% Cabernet Franc, 7% Mourvèdre, 7% Counoise, 7% Chenin blanc and 7% Muscat blanc is the result of the fact that the fires caused her to press the Cabernet Franc from Demouni later than she felt she should have. She had two solid barrels of Cabernet Franc from another vineyard 15 minutes away from Demouni but needed to balance the intense VA and Brett influence. She decided to blend the lots of Cabernet Franc together with small leftover lots of her other wines, aiming for high aromatics. The wine would have been pure vinegar in her estimation if she hadn't blended or added sulfite during the process. Sulfite additions before bottling amounted to a total of 25 ppm and after 9 months aging, base wines are racked into tank with an addition of 20 ppm sulfite and bottled a week after without fining or filtration.

Megan doesn't like green character in wine and given a natural leaning towards a brambly character in most of the fruit she works with, she does not ferment anything whole cluster. The reds are essentially made the same way with alterations made when logistics demand: destemmed fruit is fermented in polyethylene macro bin. "I found a style and I'm sticking to it!" she says with enthusiasm. During fermentation she uses a metal tool for gentle, daily punchdowns. "I'm literally punching each section of the cap once," she says "not mixing it up, not trying to introduce air. Very very gentle maceration, to get as little extraction as possible." Macerations typically last the duration of the ferment (around two weeks) and base wines are pressed into neutral barrels for lees aging.

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