

Martha Stoumen 'Mendocino Benchlands' 2019

Producer - Martha Stoumen

Provenance: Mendocino

Farming: Organic

Grape(s): 60% Nero d'Avola, 40% Zinfandel

Vineyard(s):

22% Benson Ranch - ~15 year old, head trained vines, dry farmed in free draining gravelly loam

8% Fox Hill - 33 year old vines in sandy loam

70% Chiarito Vineyard - 27 year old, head trained vines in sandy loam soils, irrigated and farmed without tillage.



Vintage: "Really beautiful year in terms of weather" Martha tells us. Slow and steady, with a little ripening delay but not so much that harvest was compressed.

Fermentation/ Aging: The Nero d'Avola was vinified with a semi-carbonic maceration of ~7 days before press at 13 brix and alcoholic fermentation as juice. The Zinfandel was destemmed and fermented on skins in macro bins until dry. Aged in barrel on gross lees and blended in January.

Fining/ Filtration: none.

Sulfite: 23 ppm

The Producer:

Martha comes to wine from a broader passion for agriculture and the Italian language. Her path led her to a farm in Tuscany where the singular nature of the grape vine took hold. From there she headed to Sicily where she apprenticed under the great Giusto Occhipinti whose humanistic approach to clean viticulture forms the basis from which Martha evolves her own approach: "you're a human being, you know when fruit is ripe!"

Up until 2017 Martha was doing literally 100% of the work herself, producing 2,500 cases a year. With 2018's harvest she doubled her production, working in the shared space at Pax and has hired Tim Lyons as her assistant winemaker. She sources grapes from parcels she leases and farms herself as well as vineyards with multigenerational farmers working cleanly.

The Vineyard

22% of the blend is Nero d'Avola from Benson Ranch, a 5 acre site Martha has leased since 2015 and farms herself. The dry farmed, head trained vines were planted from cuttings from Fox Hill in free draining sandy loam without the customary water retentive

clay layer for the area so there's very low mildew pressure meaning very little need to apply sulfur. The Benson fruit carries a wilder level of acidity.

8% of the blend is Nero d'Avola sourced from Lowell Stone's iconic Fox Hill vineyard celebrated for its encyclopedic range of Italian and Portuguese varieties. The Fox Hill Nero d'Avola vines produce bigger berries with less acidity and more defined tannins, a nice contrast to Benson Ranch's raw acidity. This is the mother vineyard for both Benson Ranch and Chiarito Vineyard.

30% Nero d'Avola and 40% Zinfandel come from What Martha now calls Chiarito vineyard, the elder sister to Benson Ranch planted in Talmage just to the South East of Ukiah on the eastern side of the Russian River. The vineyard was started nearly 30 years ago with cuttings from the legendary Fox Hill, a vineyard of huge historic significance that was started with dozens of vine cuttings smuggled back to the US in Lowell Stone's suitcase. Mostly sandy loam soils with gravelly parts. Head trained and irrigated, Martha leases and farms this site without tillage.

The Cellar

The Nero d'Avola is made just like Martha's Benson Ranch Petite Sirah using a riff on Carbonic Maceration. Whole clusters are very lightly foot crushed and the tank is flooded with some CO2 to supplement the off gassing of the alcoholic ferment in the bottom of the tank. As the fermentation continues, the lid will be slightly opened and juice from the bottom will be quickly pumped over the top. After 7 days of this, the wine is pressed and fermented as juice. The Zinfandel is destemmed into polyethylene macro bins with twice daily punchdowns until dryness. The base wines are aged on gross lees in barrel and blended together in January.

Stoumen's barrel program was influenced by her time working at Broc: she looks for wineries that take the best care of their wood. Mostly sourcing from wineries she's worked with like Chalk Hill whose Chardonnay barrels she's fond of. Every month she'll taste and top up each barrel. If a particular barrel feels a little funky she may decide to add somewhere between 15-30 ppm sulfur. The only other sulfur addition will be made just before bottling. The decision is mostly based on taste and smell although she does factor pH into the decision. Unfined and unfiltered.

For more email info@OlmsteadWine.com

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