

## Frenchtown Farms ‘Cecilia’ 2020

**Producer** - Aaron and Cara Mockrish

**Provenance:** Sierra Foothills, California

**Farming:** Organic, dry-farmed

**Grape(s):** 60% Syrah, 20% Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Grenache with small amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot

**Vineyard(s):** High elevation red, granitic terraced vineyards at Renaissance.

**Vintage:** ‘20 ‘Cecilia’ is more than ever a blend of all the red varieties they grow

**Fermentation/ Aging:** Sauvignon Blanc is whole cluster fermented in polyethylene macobins. Red varieties are all directly whole-cluster pressed in Lancman bladder presses. Base wines are aged into neutral barrel for 9-10 months on the lees. Racked into heavy duty Flextank for assemblage before bottling.

**Fining/ Filtration:** none.

**Misc:** Cecilia is Cara’s middle name and the label is a reference to the curious relationship between the bees and a pesky nettle. It’s frustrating and uncomfortable for the farmers but the nettle is the main source of food for the bees during the dryer months.



### The Producer

In 2015, 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 Farms 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. From their blocks 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 to find water and increase complexity.

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 Grenache is basically water’ Aaron says about the super early pick, ‘it’s like rainbow colored when we pick it with no green qualities ‘cuz the skin to juice ratio is so low.’ As a result the fully ripened Syrah has an especially loud voice. In 2020, the blend has shifted to include Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in small amounts.

### **The Cellar**

‘Cecilia’ follows a simple idea: white grapes (Sauvignon Blanc) skin fermented in whole clusters (red winemaking) and a mix of all red varieties grown directly whole-cluster pressed (white winemaking). Base wines age in neutral French oak barrels for gross lees aging for 9-10 months and are then gravity transferred to heavy duty Flex tanks (less oxidative) for 5-6 weeks of assemblage. One of the most significant lessons of their 2019 trip to France was an emphasis on longer assemblage as a key to integration. Aaron tells us that as they taste during assemblage “I feel like the wine goes through 9 months of aging in one month.” All wine at Frenchtown Farms is transferred by gravity or by a nitrogen wand that impels the wine more gently than even a peristaltic pump.

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