

## Frenchtown Farms 'Pearl Thief' 2020

**Producer** - Aaron and Cara Mockrish

**Provenance:** Sierra Foothills, California

**Farming:** Organic, dry-farmed

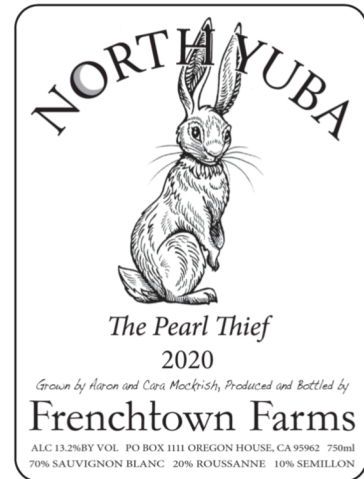
**Grape(s):** 70% Sauvignon Blanc, Roussanne, 10% Semillon

**Vineyard(s):** Terraced vineyards at Renaissance with red, granitic soils. The Roussanne and Sauvignon Blanc are grown together at block 23 and an additional, lower slope Sauvignon Blanc block was introduced in 2020.

**Vintage:** 2020's 'Pearl Thief' sees a greater portion of Sauvignon Blanc thanks to the successful reclamation of a lower slope Sauvignon Blanc block. The wine is also treated more like a white and less like a leesy orange wine.

**Fermentation/ Aging:** whole cluster foot crushed in polyethylene macrobins. Pressed at the first signs of fermentation into a large format, hand welded steel tank for fermentation and transferred to neutral barrels for 9-10 months. Racked into heavy duty Flextank for assemblage before bottling.

**Fining/ Filtration:** none.



### 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 Farm. 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.

In 2020, a multiyear project of reclaiming a lower slope block of Sauvignon Blanc yielded its first crop. The block had been overgrown with blackberries and trees, requiring significant labor to free up the vineyard so that they could begin farming and harvesting the block. The new block has greatly increased the portion of Sauvignon Blanc in the wine relative to previous vintages.

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 Cellar**

Whole clusters are foot crushed then soaked for several days until fermentation starts. Pressed in steel, Lancman bladder pressed into a hand welded, Renaissance made steel tank Aaron says looks like a lunar lander. Transferred to neutral French oak barrels with a small portion of lees reintegrated by hand both to protect the wine and enrich the texture.

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.” Just before bottling an additional 10 ppm sulfite is added. 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.

Although previous vintages of ‘Pearl Thief’ have been more in the orange wine territory, they have greatly reduced maceration times so as to produce a more transparent rendition of North Yuba’s terroir. Aaron says, ‘the more I learn about our fruit, the texture, richness, tannin and agability are not dependent on soaking on the skins.’ Additionally, the new block of Sauvignon Blanc has made 2020’s ‘Pearl Thief’ the largest cuvee they’ve ever produced, necessitating a shift to large steel tanks for fermentation.

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