

Caleb Leisure 'Ah Um' 2020

Producer - Caleb Leisure

Provenance: Calaveras County, Sierra Foothills, CA

Farming: farmed biodynamically on a lease by Caleb

Grape(s): 35% Syrah, 40% Viognier, 25% Mourvèdre

Vineyard: Joshua's Starry Night vineyard located at 1600 ft elevation on a slope with 17 year old vines in gravelly loam and schist.

Fermentation/ Aging: Mourvedre juice was pressed directly into a qvevri with whole clusters of Syrah, Viognier was whole-cluster stomped and pressed after 1-2 days. Aged in a 50/50 mix of qvevri and steel.

Sulfite: none added.

Name: Caleb chose the name for the 1959 Charles Mingus record 'Mingus Ah Um' as a reflection of the fact that there were a lot of ideas working at the same time and his ideas kept shifting.

Label: Caleb's mother is a visual artist and he matches the labels she designs with the quirky names he picks: "it's the one pretentious affectation I allow myself."



The Producer:

"Once upon a time I was a novelist," Californian winemaker Caleb Leisure tells us, "I still write and I'm always at work on something." Caleb was attracted to the blending of ephemeral and tractile found in wine. "I never had big plans," Caleb says, "just kept following an interest and this is where it got me." His meandering path brought him into Tony Coturri's employ. When Caleb arrived, Tony hadn't made much wine in several years: "It was like a place trapped in time" there were 5-7 years old that had just been sitting in barrel." After a few, dense years he was ready to move on and founded his eponymous company producing 15,000 cases of zero additive wines a year.

"Making wine in California can be such a schizophrenic experience," Caleb says, remarking on the range of available terroirs, varieties and vineyards in his home state. Though part of him longs for the structure of an AOC to narrow the choices, Caleb has found his stylistic anchor in his work with

Georgian qvevri. “The qvevri have functioned as the through line and the binding agent of what my project is about,” Caleb tells us. Although there are other American producers working with modern amphorae, Caleb is America’s first winemaker so wholly dedicated to the more rustic, porous and care intensive qvevri.

The Vineyard:

Joshua’s Starry Night vineyard in Calaveras county is situated at 1600 ft elevation on a slope with 17 year old vines in gravelly loam and schist. Caleb took over farming after Noel Diaz of Purity Wine moved on to pursue different vineyard sources. Noel had decided to completely do away with irrigation and fertigation and as a result the vines are extremely devigorated. Much of Caleb’s work over the three years he managed the vineyard was trying to account for this. As of 2022, Caleb no longer farms any of his leased vineyards so that he can focus on his young family and take the time to consider next steps.

The Winery:

Caleb has aimed to make three wines from this vineyard in the past but with 2020’s exceptional challenges due to wildfires he was only able to make ‘Ah Um.’ The Syrah and Mourvedre were picked together, meaning the later ripening Mourvedre was more or less at rose level and was pressed directly. Whole clusters of Syrah were loaded into the qvevri with directly pressed mourvedre and syrah juice poured over with extra syrah skins added back in. The viognier was picked a week earlier, foot stomped in whole clusters and pressed after a 1-2 day presoak. The wines were aged in a mix of qvevri and steel (50/50) through the spring, racked to blend and then bottled. No fining, filtration or added sulfite.

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