

Wine Club Selections for the Whites Roder

In my September newsletter I poetically reinforced my endless optimism and sincere enthusiasm for the 2023 vintage. I dismissed the worry at the time, smoke, and even alluded to a forecast of impending rain which was likely to clear the foul air from our valleys.

Boy am I good at this.

The rain did come, it did clear the smoke away, and then, just to make sure, it came again, waited two more weeks, and then returned once more. All in all we had five rain events between early September and our last harvest, which was in the first week of November. The drama made for an exciting season. We picked in waves, each time waiting until the last minute, so we could get the fruit as ripe as possible. Over a third of all our red fruit was picked just before the last weekend of October, making that last week extremely intense.

At this time, we've pressed and barreled almost everything. Only one lot from Quady North remains in fermenter, a batch of Grenache from Mae's Vineyard which was picked later than the rest of the lot. This wine falls into the category of happy accidents, of which we've had many over the years. I, the crew leaders, and the rest of the crew were all in the vineyard on the morning of picking and we all agreed as to where the Grenache ended, and the Petite Sirah began¹. And yet, a week later, on an afternoon stroll around the vineyard with Cecily the dog, I happened to walk down a row and found about three rows of Grenache still unpicked in the vineyard. The crew came in and dutifully harvested the remainder. Between the first and second picks, a week, a rainstorm and a mild frost had all occurred. Nevertheless, the second picking was both riper and more concentrated than the first. Nichole Schulte and I tasted it yesterday and agreed that a single vineyard Grenache from Mae's is likely in the cards from this year.

Other exciting new wines from the 2023 vintage include our first Chenin Blanc, from the Four Diamonds vineyard, a new planting that I designed and developed through our sister company, Applegate Vineyard Management. The planting also included Mourvèdre (for GSM Rosé), Cabernet Franc and Gamay Noir (for Battalla²) which were all excellent. Last of all (literally), is a late harvest Riesling, from the Layne Vineyard, made in the *Auslese* style.

Another vintage, with its own set of unique challenges, is in the books and with it, another set of delicious wines. In the end, the best sites, best suited varieties, and the best winemakers, always deliver, despite the conditions. It's no wonder I can be optimistic.

¹ This is not a simple thing at Mae's Vineyard. An ambitious block design and some varietal interplanting have created a complex tapestry of varieties. I'm pretty sure that I'm the only one who knows what is what out there, and, obviously, that's not entirely accurate either.

² Beginning in 2022, the *La Battalla*, will include Gamay Noir as well as Cab Franc and Malbec. This is to better emulate the wines of the Loire Valley, which was the inspiration for this wine.

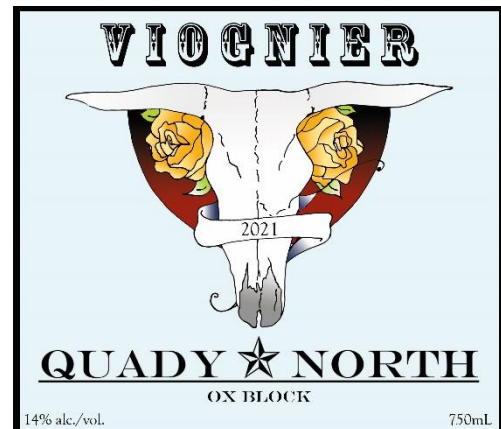
From the onset, we've made delicious Syrah and Cabernet Franc. The red wines from the 2006 vintage were delicious. They scored well, won awards, and were pretty well appreciated.

Viognier, on the other hand, has been a work in progress.

When I started out, I was heavily influenced by California wineries Miner and Darioush, both big, impactful Viogniers that had a lot of barrel influence. I decided to pick late and barrel ferment my Viognier in new, 90-gallon French Oak casks to try and approximate these wines. It wasn't a great idea. The wines were a bit clunky and awkward, and high in alcohol. Fortunately, I didn't make much.

By 2007, I had corrected, picking earlier and fermenting in stainless steel. The 2007 Steelhead Run Viognier was solid. It tasted like the variety, and was pretty and refreshing, but I still felt like it was missing something.

Every time I used even a little bit of French oak, I found it heavy and distracting. A big breakthrough came in 2013, when a friend of mine, Thomas Houseman, suggested I try barrels made from Acacia wood. The Acacia barrels solved most of the problems, giving us texture from lees contact without the clunky woody notes we got from oak. Steelhead Run gave us consistently good fruit, and a 2015 we made from Steelhead was even recognized as a Top 100 wine by Wine Enthusiast. However, the Ox Block was more troublesome. The hillside received a lot of sun, and was low yielding, this made for rich wines and more than a little tannin. I realized that we needed to modify the fruit composition. Beginning in 2017, I altered our farming practices to try and increase berry sizes and create more canopy. I wanted to push the Ox Block just a little to make it a little more delicate and subtle. We kept working on it in the winery too, employing a type of amphora made from *cocciopesto*³ as a fermenter. The amphora worked like the Acacia barrel, giving texture, but also a rich, creamy note. 2021 is the vintage that I feel has brought all those things together. Our winemaking is working with our farming to bring out the best in a tricky variety. Stonefruit and citrus notes combine with a rich, creamy texture. This Viognier, such a tricky variety, will pair well with tricky dinners. Choose it to accompany fish tacos with salsa, creamy shellfish pastas and scallops.



2021 Viognier, "Ox-Block"
Applegate Valley, Southern Oregon
\$25/\$20 (Underground)

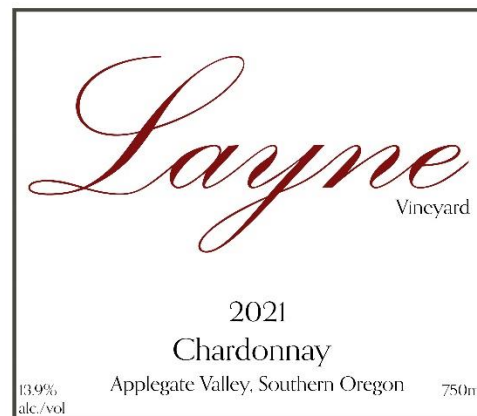
³ *Cocciopesto* is a building material first used in ancient Rome. It is a form of Roman concrete, the main difference being the addition of small pieces of broken clay pot, tiles or brick, instead of aggregate. The *cocciopesto* is semi-porous, letting small amounts of air to exchange with the wine, similar to the effect of barrel fermentation.

Perhaps more than any other variety, Chardonnay is reflective of the winemaking process. It's capable of undergoing extreme divergence depending on the choices of the winemaker. In Oregon, a deep divide exists: Oak or No Oak. Proponents of the latter advocate that stainless steel fermentation and aging better showcases purity of fruit. Followers of the former method argue that oak creates texture and layers of complexity.

At Quady North, we have firmly placed our flag in the pro-oak camp. I find that Chardonnay and oak work very well with each other, although certainly more is not more, and the choice of barrels is incredibly important. The goal is to create a wine where oak acts to make the wine richer and more textured than it otherwise would be, but where you can't taste the barrel itself. This is easier said than done, but is possible by choosing the correct cooperage.

It is said that most of the trees from which we source barrels from today were planted by Napoleon, who wanted to ensure that the France of the future would always have the world's best navy. His efforts resulted in a system of oak forests in France that are owned and managed by the central government, each with its own quality and characteristics. Indeed, the world of barrels is wonderfully complex. Coopers put incredible amounts of thought and research into a myriad of factors, including which forest the wood is sourced from, how tight the wood grain is, how many years the wood is "seasoned" (aged outside) and the amount of toast to which each stave is subject.

The 2021 Layne Chardonnay was ultimately aged in only four barrels, one of which was new. That barrel creates most of the oak influence in the lot, although not all of it. The new barrel was coopered by Damy, a historic cooperage in Burgundy, that specializes in barrels for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Damy barrels are known for subtlety and balance. This one was aged for three years, with tight grain staves and toasted at a "medium" level. It was designed not for impact, but for grace, and I believe it serves that function well in this wine.



2021 Chardonnay, Layne Vineyard
Applegate Valley, Southern Oregon
\$32/\$25.60

Readers of previous newsletters will remember that a good portion of my narratives regarding our sparkling wines are dedicated to communicating the volume of such wines that are consumed in my household. Last November, we had just released the 2019 Layne Brut Sparkling and I mentioned that “Meloney and I have begun to enjoy sparkling wine on afternoons and evenings of days that are not listed as holidays on any official calendars.” I can tell you, dear reader, that this trend did continue throughout 2023, and is in no danger of letting up.

Along the way, I have been purchasing and sampling sparkling wines from other producers, both to add some variety, as well as to understand the landscape of sparkling in general. Many of them have been on the “affordable” side.⁴ Others have been more expensive, from reputable producers in Oregon and California. As I perform this important market research, I’ve become more and more happy with the quality of our sparkling. I’ve always liked it, but it’s important to have context and be honest with oneself. I’m enjoying it even more, lately, as it ages in the bottle. In fact, having tasted many a sparkling this year, the overriding conclusion I have come to is that, by and large, sparkling wine greatly improves with age. Barrel age, *En tirage* (the phase in which the wine sits on the yeast lees in the bottle before disgorging) and post-disgorging are all critical phases for sparkling, and, generally, the wine is improved in each of those stages by aging. Pol Roger, a classic producer, is only now releasing their 2018 *Rosé*, and, apparently due to demand, this is a year earlier than they usually release. Many classic producers are only now releasing their 2016’s, and the best are offering 2014 and even 2013 vintages as current releases.

As a relatively new producer of sparklings, we have a bit of catching up to do in this department. In order to give additional aging time to our wines, we are extending the release windows and staggering them between our Sparkling Franc, the Layne Brut, and the Chelsea Rose Pet-Nat. Thus, instead of releasing the 2020 Brut Sparkling, we continue on with the 2019. The upside is all to you, as you will undoubtedly find it to be markedly improved after the additional year in bottle. We are now seeing the slight yeasty/bready notes that accompany fine *Methône Champenoise* wines. The texture is smoother, the bubbles more of a mousse than previously. Indeed, this wine is growing up nicely.

I think we have enough to make it available through the middle of next year. We will then release the 2020 during this time in 2024, then sell it over the next two years, letting us add an additional year of aging. I plan on continuing this over the next several years, evaluating the wines in order to produce the very best version of sparkling that we can. Along the way, Meloney and I will dutifully continue to perform the ever-important market research, critically evaluating sparkling wines from around the world. It’s a tough job, after all....



2019 Sparkling Wine, Layne
Vineyard
Applegate Valley, Southern Oregon
\$49.00/\$39.20

⁴ This would be Cava, not Cooks. We do have standards, after all.

