

FEB. 2018 - #79

I'm excited about and proud of the wines that we're bringing you in this shipment: 2014 Archaic and Hone #2: "Shimmer" (2015 Russian River Valley Syrah). I have a lot of affection for these two wines; they both represent pieces of my personal history as a winemaker that I look back on fondly.

Just over a decade ago, I was finishing up my first harvest back in the winery after college and had made the first wines for what would become my label, Lucas J. Cellars (with a whole lot of help from my Dad and his co-winemaker at the time, Matt Blankenheim). One of those wines was a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. I would tell you the full origin story of how this wine came to exist, but the facts of that story are in eternal dispute and my dad would, upon reading this (hi Dad), certainly insist that my version of the story was wrong (it's not) and insist I change it to match his version. So to keep the peace, I'm going to gloss over the details and say that it is both crucial to this story and kind of interesting that up until the year where I started actually making Pinot Noir, I was not particularly interested in making Pinot Noir.

The Pinot Noir craze that is still rolling at full-steam today started in the mid-2000s and probably peaked in 2007-2008, from a grape demand perspective. That boom was a result of the then-new generation of wineries focusing on Pinot Noir who had started to push hard into new frontiers of what California Pinot Noir could be. Long story short, that momentum and trend were very tangible around the industry when I was working our tasting room in the summer of 2006.

Many of those Pinots were too fruit-forward for my liking and lacked the tannin and structure that I had grown up around. One of the other folks working in the tasting room was a huge fan of those wines, and made it his mission to convert me. As



a result, we tasted wines from dozens of wineries specializing in Pinot, many of which also focus on Syrah.

My feelings about Pinot Noir evolved a lot that summer and that learning process taught me a lot about wine in a broader sense. Ironically enough, however, the wine I remember best of all from my coworker's make-Lucas-love-Pinot crusade was a Syrah. That wine was a 2004 (I think!) Christensen Family Vineyard Syrah. It was one of those special, extra-memorable moments that come from drinking wines that feel like they're opening a door to a room you didn't know existed in the house you grew up in. That wine taught me incredibly quickly what Syrah could be when grown immaculately in a cool climate. It also sparked a fascination with cool climate Syrah that continues to this day. It's one of the most memorable tasting experiences I've ever had.

So, when Sharon Christensen called almost ten years later to ask if we wanted to purchase her Syrah, at first I said no, but when I heard the vineyard name I couldn't have changed my mind any faster.

The second wine in this shipment, Archaic, is another wine that has its roots in my first vintage making wine in 2007. Once we were selling the 2007s, I was offered the opportunity to participate in a festival both with Meeker and Lucas J Cellars. This festival had three different events, and all three events needed three wines from any participating winery. So, I started leafing through our barrel inventory to see where there might be a few extra barrels I could propose "repurposing" from Meeker and into a Lucas J. Cellars wine in order to take part in these events. It seemed like the strategy most likely to be successful was assembling a blend, as that would result in a wine that didn't directly compare to any of the Meeker wines already in process.

I can honestly say that I fully expected the result of this proposal to be a resounding "no." But, instead, what came of that conversation was the 2007 Archaic, a blend of one barrel each of Dry Creek Zin, Carignane, Grenache, and Petite Sirah.

You might remember that our Hoskins Ranch Grenache is the result of a 2010 conversation that went roughly like this:

Harold Hoskins: "I'm going to bud over my Merlot to something else, any ideas?"

Me: "GRENACHE!!!"

What you might not know is that Harold also put in two rows each of the remaining varieties that made up the original Archaic.

Archaic is a wine that pays homage to the old Dry Creek Valley: rustic, pragmatic, unassuming. It's a wine that reminds me of the Dry Creek Valley I knew as a kid: dusty July afternoons spent running barefoot around head-trained vines on 8' by 8' spacing. It's hard to explain how a wine can feel like that, but it does, and it makes me happy.

 LUCAS MEEKER

Christensen Family Vineyard Syrah hanging out on September 21, 2015, the last vineyard check before picking.

THE WINES

2014
archaic.

HONE: #2
"SHIMMER"

2015 SYRAH (100%) · CHRISTENSEN FAMILY VINEYARD
RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY · SONOMA COUNTY

This wine carries on the spirit of the field blends planted by local farmers for generations in northern Sonoma County. Blackberry fruit and spice on the nose folds into a classic Dry Creek mid-palate of bramble and earth. Bright and warm on the nose and round through the middle, this wine carries a lot of intensity into a firm tannin peak at the beginning of the finish.

Equal parts Zinfandel, Grenache, Carignane, and Petite Sirah, the strengths of each combine to make an incredibly well-rounded wine that has structure and acidity enough to age for at least a decade in the cellar, even though it's incredibly friendly right now. It will pair very well with most things cooked low and slow and/or by an insistent grandparent who has a magic touch in the kitchen.

Retail: \$45.00, Tribe Discounts: \$36.00/\$33.75/\$31.50

Welcome to the dark side... This wine embraces the elegant, brooding nature of cool climate Syrah in the most fantastic way. The nose of this wine quickly hopscoches classic Syrah fruit to saunter into a wound-up blend of leather and baking spices. On the palate, the wine shows fruit of dried cherry and cranberry with a long, lean slope into a dark, mineral mid-palate before rolling into a super-long, elegant finish that is beautifully integrated and austere.

This wine will continue to evolve and age for at least 12-16 years. While it could easily pair with bigger meat dishes, it would probably show best with something like cassoulet, game meat, or roasted root vegetables.

Retail: \$42.00, Tribe Discounts: \$33.60/\$31.50/\$29.40

FROM EL JEFE

One of the wines in the current Tribe shipment, labeled "Shimmer", has been produced from Syrah grapes grown in Sonoma County's Russian River appellation, which is a relatively cool-weather appellation. Syrah is also known, particularly in Australia, as "Shiraz". I am a fan of Syrah wine, and for those of you who are not intimately familiar with this varietal, I want to provide some interesting information.

Syrah first came to prominence during the 18th century in France's Rhone Valley, where wineries in the town of Hermitage began to produce a red wine made from 100% Syrah grapes. Today, "Côte Rôtie (also known as the "roasted slope") in the Northern Rhone is one of the most important French Syrah appellations, along with Hermitage and Cornas. Syrah is also used as an important blending grape (frequently together with Grenache and Mourvedre) in wines from Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Gigondas and Côtes du Rhône.

Outside of France, there are more than 100,000 acres of Shiraz vineyards in Australia, where these grapes are frequently blended with Cabernet Sauvignon. (Australia is

where Molly and I got the idea for our Meeker "Fossil" blend of 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot and 25% Syrah.) Meaningful amounts of Syrah are also grown in Spain and Argentina, as well as in the Columbia Valley of Washington and, of course, in Northern and Central California.

Syrah grapes are generally small, thick-skinned and black. Syrah flavors and aromas vary depending upon the climate in which they are grown, but normally feature peppery spice and herbaceous characteristics, as well as flavors and aromas of red berries, currants and chocolate. As noted above, the Shimmer grapes came from the Russian River appellation, and I expect that you will note interesting differences between Shimmer and previous Meeker Syrah wines grown in warmer Dry Creek Valley.

Syrah wine marries well with the flavors and aromas added by aging in oak barrels. Shimmer was aged in oak barrels for 27 months. After being bottled, Syrah wines also age well and are long-lived.

I wish you great Shimmer enjoyment!



CHARLIE MEEKER

NATURE REPORT

Last week, Molly was driving home from the tasting room in the twilight – a little darker than sunset but not yet night. As she was cresting the hill on Canyon Road, whitish blurs started flying into her headlight beams. They looked like a heavy flurry of snowflakes being driven into the front of the truck. But of course, it wasn't snowing in Dry Creek Valley – in fact, it had been a lot warmer than usual. When she got home, there were hundreds of the same light gray and black patterned moths clustered, wings beating frantically, around the front porch light. It was impossible to go inside without letting several moths in as well. Later that evening, there were hundreds more moths – all of the same coloration – frantically beating their wings and themselves around the floodlight on the back porch when she let the dogs out. When she turned on her kindle to read in bed later, moths drove her so crazy, she had to turn the screen off.

A little research has revealed that these are most likely California oak moths (their coloration looks just like oak bark) and in the moth stage, as opposed to larval, they don't eat – only drink water or nectar to keep from drying out. The moth stage is purely for sex. They mate and lay eggs on the oak trees and the larvae eat the oak leaves. Dry Creek Valley is apparently having a large outbreak this year. These moths are intense about their attraction to light and each other. The

Meekers are having moth orgies on the walls of their house. This is the first time in her nineteen years of living in Dry Creek that Molly has noticed this insect reproductive frenzy.

The Pacific chorus frogs, however, are noticed every year. It can't be helped. Sometimes, when outside on a February evening, the little devils are so loud they drown out conversation. This noise, of course, is about sex. The male frogs are calling out to the females about their wonderfulness and the wonderfulness of their territory. During the drought, and in the wake of reading about the decline of frogs all over the planet, Molly created frog habitats to help the tadpoles survive. Female frogs will lay their eggs in any convenient puddle, no matter how evanescent. She found eggs in plant saucers, the bottom of her garden wagon, the inside of a half-barrel planter, and a watering can – anywhere more than an inch of water collected. In an effort to help more of them survive, Molly created two or three more substantial containers of water complete with built in steps to help the newly-legged, former tadpoles, crawl out of the water. Of course, mosquitos also breed in these containers – and the tadpoles are vegetarian (though the frogs are not) – but you can't have everything. Or you can, and you have to grin and bear it.

Maybe this year the mating frogs will eat the mating moths, and there will be a bumper crop of everybody!