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"Weathering" vintage variation

While the giants of the wine industry strive to deliver consistency from year to year through extensive blending, the boutique producer celebrates the uniqueness of each vintage. Admittedly, the unpredictability of the weather is what often keeps us up at night. As our next-door neighbor was fond of saying, "Nature rules and farmers drool." Indeed, the weather can affect how the grape ripens (e.g. the balance of acid and sugar), the concentration of the berries (the juice to skin ratio), and even the amount of tannin in the skin, all of which directly influence the profile of a wine.

Mother Nature is famous for throwing curve balls, but the challenge of working with each vintage of grapes is partly what makes being a winemaker so exciting. It is where our skills and creativity are put to the test, and where we can strive to make the best wine possible, based on whatever nature delivers.

For the fall shipment, we decided to offer a case study of vintage variation. Our mid- and upper-tier members will receive a "library vertical" offering of our Estate Petite Sirah as part of their selection. While our Cellar Groupies will get a single library vintage, additional vintages are available to add on, for those who are interested in exploring this fascinating topic. All these vintages are delicious yet intriguingly different.

Estate Petite Sirah, Library Vertical

2012 Vintage (Ambassador shipment)
This was a "Goldilocks" sort of year for classic-style winemaking—a long growing season with relatively mild temperatures, at least in our area. It produced an abundantly healthy crop load with just the right balance of everything. The absence of extreme heatwaves preserved the grapes' acidity and skin-to-juice ratio, moderating the tannins and creating an elegant, classic structure. When we recently opened our 2012 Petite Sirah, we could clearly taste the vintage. This bright, clean wine has mulberry notes and drinks like an Italian red, making it an exceptionally food-friendly vintage.

2013 Vintage (Ambassador shipment)
This was one of the driest years on record. A warm spring brought early budbreak and, consequently, an early harvest. In the vineyard, the warmer temperatures and dry conditions translated to smaller berries with an increased skin-to-juice ratio. This concentration of tannin and color shows itself in our 2013 Petite Sirah, along with softer acidity caused by heat and dehydration. This wine is rich and decadent, very deep in color, with an intriguing hint of vanilla.

2014 Vintage (Ambassador and Professional Wino shipments)
2014 saw deepening drought conditions and record statewide average temperatures. As with 2013, budbreak was early following a mild winter, triggering an early harvest. Despite the stresses in the vineyard, summer proved to be relatively cool and free of extreme heat spikes, preserving the acidity in the grapes. The resulting wine has the richness of the 2013 vintage due to small, concentrated berries, but with brighter acidity. The tannins are velvety and the fruit notes lean toward boysenberry. This wine would pair with eggplant parmesan or a rich lasagna!

2015 Vintage (Ambassador and Professional Wino shipments)
This was a challenging growing season, considered the fourth consecutive year of drought that deepened the stress in the vineyard. May was unusually cold, affecting pollination which led to uneven berry development. While many vineyards saw a reduction in crop load, our Petite Sirah yields were high. Despite the cold start, the intensely hot summer sped up ripening, contracting the growing season and bringing harvest forward. The resulting wine has an almost late-harvest ripeness to it, with a hint of raisin due to dehydration in the vineyard, but this is balanced out by a decent acidity.

2016 Vintage (Cellar Groupie shipment)
After four years of historic drought, 2016 brought relief to winegrowers and was considered an exceptional, balanced, "no drama" vintage. A warm spring brought early budbreak, but milder, steady summer temperatures stretched out the growing season and allowed for gradual phenolic development with everything in perfect balance. The acidity of this vintage is outstanding, similar to the 2012, while the tannins are a little bolder due to its relative youth (a "mere" decade!).

Also in your shipment:

2020 Semillon, Estate

Harvest Brix: 23.2 pH: 3.73 TA: 5.55 Alc: 13.9% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases: 194 Aging: 2 years in stainless steel and neutral French oak

Medium-bodied with layers of apricot and citrus fruit notes, our Estate white Bordeaux is our "go-to" Thanksgiving wine. Enjoy with turkey and all the classic accompaniments!

2020 Cabernet Sauvignon (new release)

Harvest Brix: 25.1 pH: 3.82 TA: 5.29 Alc: 14.5% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases: 130 Aging: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

Our exciting new Fair Play Cabernet is everything we want in this varietal—lush cherry fruit, good acidity and smooth medium tannins, creating an elegant, classic structure. Ideal for your holiday roasts, beef stew and mushroom dishes.

2014 Library Cabernet Sauvignon (Ambassador and Professional Wino shipments)

Harvest Brix: 25.6 pH: 3.52 TA: 5.56 Alc: 14.9% RS: 0.0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 189 Aging: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

We dug into our wine library for our mid- and upper-tier clubs, splitting your Cab offering with a golden oldie. This vintage is full-bodied and decadent, while still possessing its hallmark classic acidity and cherry fruit.