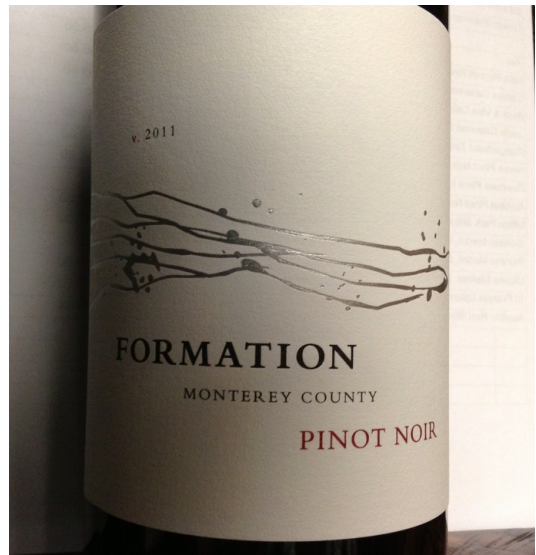


The Line Forms Here!

We're still in California this week. A bit further south, on to another grape variety, and a new wine with some really interesting tidbits. So, off we trip, lessons and drinking. Life is good.

Our wine is from Monterey. Monterey is a county in California, with an AVA named for it that is part of the larger Central Coast AVA. The Monterey AVA was established in 1984 and runs for about one hundred miles from its northern point at Monterey Bay to its southern end at Paso Robles. About forty thousand acres of wine grapes are grown in this AVA. The northern part of this area is cooler with daytime temperatures that rarely go over seventy-five degrees, while the southern part can go over one hundred degrees. Over fifty percent of the grapes grown here are Chardonnay, with Pinot Noir coming in second. The Pinot is grown mostly in the northern part of the region as it does better in cooler climates.



Part of what I wanted to talk about this week is what's called the Blue Grand Canyon. This is one of the world's deepest marine canyons, with deep cold waters that influence the weather throughout Monterey County. This is the only marine canyon that directly effects a major wine growing region. It is hidden below the surface of Monterey Bay and is sixty miles long and two miles deep. That makes it the largest and deepest on the west coast. (Actually, it is comparable to "the" Grand Canyon in Arizona.) The Blue Grand Canyon is also unique because it is so close to the shore. Protected as a National Maritime Sanctuary, this canyon is a geologic wonder. The BGC (thank goodness for nicknames) provides a pathway for the climate to travel from the sea to the Monterey vineyards. Its three hundred cubic miles (miles, not feet) of ice cold water result in fog, wind, lack of rain during the growing season and moderate temperatures. Wines from this area, if allowed to show their origins, "terroir," are as unique as their home. (If you've ever visited the Monterey Bay area, you have seen and felt the effects of this marine canyon. Personally, I never knew to look for it. Which means I might need to go for another visit. Yay!)

The climate in the Monterey AVA is called a thermal rainbow. Going north to south, there can be a forty degree difference in temperature. The ocean winds act as a air conditioning system, and can extend the growing season. In the mornings, the whole AVA, north and south, is cool, about fifty-five degrees, and mostly covered with dense fog. As the sun rises, the heat burns off the fog and the temperature in the southern part of the valley starts to go up. As the heat increases during the day, warm air is forced up and there is a low pressure effect. Cool air is drawn into the area from off the water, funneled through the mountain ranges, and pushed down the valley with increasing force (up to thirty miles per hour) as the day gets warmer. This cool air, and the wind it makes, works to cool parts of the area. The forty degree difference in the tempera-

tures is due to these cool winds. Cooler temperatures determine which grapes do better in which parts of the AVA. Cooler grapes ripen more slowly and gently and intensify their flavors.

In addition to its effects on the climate of the Monterey Bay area, the BGC has its influence on the soils here. There are eight different soil types (mostly loam and some sand) and eighty percent of the vineyards in the Monterey AVA have all eight in them. These soils are alluvial, porous, granite and limestone rich. All of them are ancient marine layers, the results of primordial sea life and coral beds over volcanic crusts. Geologic treasures. All perfect for grape vines.

Moving on, despite the uniqueness of the Blue Grand Canyon, we need to get to our grape for this week - Pinot Noir. I know we've talked, several times, about Pinot Noir, and I don't want to repeat too much. Boring is as boring does. But, let's just remember that Pinot Noir can be a very difficult variety to grow, but it is also one that can express its origins more than most other varieties. It has a wide range of bouquets, flavors and textures. The wines tend to be light to medium body with aromas of light to dark cherries, raspberries, some currants. Depending on clone usage, the wine's color can be light, garnet, to deep ruby. The California style of Pinot Noir can be more powerful than its European cousins, fruit forward and darker colored. In keeping with this style, many California Pinot Noirs are not one hundred percent that variety. Small percentages of Syrah or Merlot, and other varieties, are used to intensify colors, aromas, flavors and body weight. (Remember, by law in the United States, a wine has to be a minimum of seventy-five percent of the grape named on the label. The remaining twenty-five percent is open to the discretion of the wine maker.) The Monterey AVA is the fifth largest California area for Pinot Noir wines.

And, now, we can form our line for this week's wine. Formation Pinot Noir. This Pinot Noir is a great example of what Monterey's cool climate can do for this variety. The grapes for this wine, one hundred percent Pinot Noir, are sourced from several vineyards. All of them Formation estates. The grapes are hand picked and hand sorted. Then, the juice is gravity fed, no heavy pushing or pressing, and cold soaked. They are fermented in small lots in open-top fermenters and punched down while fermenting. The blended wine, blended vineyards of Pinot Noir, is aged in French oak. All of this making only five thousand cases. The resulting wine is true Pinot Noir, NSA (no Syrah added). It has clean fruit aromas and flavors of ripe black cherries and an earthy complexity. There is a great balance between the acidity and structure with mild tannins. And, the best part, a smooth, silky texture. In the world of red wines, we will probably classify the Formation Pinot Noir as a bit lighter bodied than most. But we have to realize, all wines are not meant to be heavy, and, in this wine we have a great example of what good, lighter bodied wine can be. Full flavors, beautiful texture. And just right for warm weather meals and sipping. For \$15.99. So, the line forms here for Formation Pinot Noir. Who's first? Enjoy.

From the May 2, 2013 edition of The Island News, by Celia Strong.