

# Ceritas

FALL 2009 ISSUE

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Water out of stone; the fluidity of rock stopping time; existing not on either side; but on the lines that divides; and that line takes on a dimensionality; it takes on a sense of place and shape.

Maya Lin

Dear Friends,

On a fog swept early June '09 morning, I drove through the Russian River Valley to visit three Sonoma Coast vineyards - Porter-Bass, Escarpa and Strozzi, which supply grapes for Ceritas. It was a tense ride.

During that first week of June we were already in full swing of what long time locals refer to as the "June gloom." Thick, Pacific Ocean fog almost always blankets the coastal ranges with moist salty air for several weeks in early summer. Coastal vineyards, bathed in this cool, foggy air were rife with chlorosis, a condition that causes the leaves to turn a sickly yellow on their edges. The June gloom this year seemed like it would never end—a feeling reinforced by the yellowing leaves I saw on that morning drive.

Then, several weeks later, we started to see the chlorosis retreat, and the arrival of a healthy flowering and set. The fog gave way to warm afternoons, and set continued, invigorated, under clear skies and dry weather. 2009 turned out to be one of the best seasons for set in years. Our grape clusters this year are even and vital, and edging towards what looks like a promising harvest. There isn't anything quite like six weeks of roller coaster weather to remind us how dependent we are on the natural world and how tenuous our footing is. We walk a very narrow path each vintage, and in that navigation we rediscover what's most important in our work: the utterly unique expression of each site and each vintage.

We like to think that our wines have disparate influences and elements - of vintage, place and winemaking, which essentially go into the bottle and mature together. We are always trying to balance our efforts in crafting the wines with the circumstances we're dealt in the vineyard. The process is a slow percolation of memories of past vintages, tastes of current and much older wines, and ideas traded across dinner tables with our friends. Our winemaking intuition continues to reside along a narrow path, where we find ourselves balancing art and science, winemaking and winegrowing, past and present.

## **HARVEST 2007**

### **PORTER-BASS VINEYARD CHARDONNAY**

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY | 88 CASES | \$390/CASE

Yields were down at Porter-Bass in 2007. Uneven flowering and set resulted in typical millerandage berries, or “hen and chicks” as they’re sometimes called, which means the grapes had matured to drastically different sizes.

The selected crop which remained, however, ripened beautifully under warm September weather. As we waited for the flavors to develop we noticed the grapes were retaining their natural acidity better than in years past. We harvested on September 28th. In the winery, sugar measurements suggested that the juice did indeed have a great balance between ripeness and acidity. At the press, our first delicious sips confirmed our hopes and suspicions: we knew we had a great vintage on our hands.

The wine was barrel fermented and aged for 18 months in 20% new wood. Never racked off its lees nor stirred, the wine slowly gained depth and weight while in barrel. Wine made from the Porter- Bass Vineyard often has a higher than average natural acidity and low pH when it is harvested. This typically requires extra time in barrel to fully reveal the secrets of the vineyard. Bottled in March 2009, we suggest you allow the wine to rest further. The wine possesses great aromatic range with notes of beeswax, honeysuckle, lemon curd, cheese rind and are supported by a backbone of lively acidity married with flavors of grapefruit, fresh dough, earth and lime blossom. The wine has a pH of 3.24 and a finished alcohol around 13.4%.

### **ESCARPA VINEYARD PINOT NOIR**

SONOMA COAST | 129 CASES | \$420/CASE

During the spring of 2007, after several years of courting, the owners of the Escarpa Vineyard blessed us with the opportunity to make wine from their property. The Escarpa Vineyard was planted in 1978 and has some of the oldest Pinot Noir plantings within the Sonoma Coast AVA. The vineyard lies 6 miles from the Pacific Ocean in a canyon above the small town of Occidental and just east of the ridge (home to the Summa, Thieriot and Coastlands vineyards) facing Bodega Bay.

Soils here are distinct and rarely found elsewhere – uplifted Blue Schist and quartz veins are intermixed with serpentine. The fractured soils and steep slopes allow good drainage while fine clays allow good water retention. Given the age of the vines and the situation of the vineyard, we believe the resulting wine is a unique expression of old vine Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir.

We harvested Escarpa on October 11 under cool, cloudy skies. The clusters were healthy and were free of any concerns. Immediately, upon going into the tank, we noticed pronounced aromas of rose petals and acacia blossom. The wine fermented on the skins for 23 days. Upon pressing, the wine had stout tannins and lifted aromatics reminiscent of great Burgundies. The wine spent 15 months in wood and was bottled unfinned/unfiltered.

Just beginning to show itself now after being in bottle for almost 9 months, the wine is very aromatic with notes of rose petals, bing cherry, asian spices and pine forest floor. On the palate, the wine reveals its origins further, with pure cherry fruit, good acidity and a tannin backbone that should soften with age. The wine benefits from decanting prior to being served. The wine has a pH of 3.4 and finished alcohol around 13.5%.

Ceritas has retained a long-term metayage agreement with the owners of this land and converted the vineyard to biodynamic farming methods in 2008. While in 2007, we shared this fruit source with another winery, starting in 2008, the Escarpa Vineyard is a 3.8 acre monopole (or sole ownership) site for Ceritas.

### **RITCHIE VINEYARD | RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY CHARDONNAY**

A phone conversation with Kent Ritchie revealed a great opportunity to work with Chardonnay from this well known site. Ceritas is very particular about site selection and we worked with Kent to find a part of the vineyard that we felt we could make wine that reflected Ceritas' commitment to a refined, balanced Chardonnay that emphasizes the expression of site and vintage. Our section is located in what heralded winemaker Mark Aubert calls the "Grand Cru" part of the vineyard. Topsoil here is very thin, 3-6" and changes to fractured volcanic tuff mixed with marine sediments. The volcanic tuff was deposited from ancient volcanic activity that took place millions of years ago and to the east of Santa Rosa. Ceritas was able to secure the original planting of Old Wente clone (40 years old) planted on AXR rootstock.

Thank you for your patience in receiving this release from us. This is the only release you will receive from us in 2009. As in the past, allocations of the wines is tight and should be ordered quickly. Phoebe and I thank you for your continued support.

Gratefully,  
John Raytek & Phoebe Bass