

October 21, 2020

HARVEST 2020 UPDATE

The 2020 harvest began the week of August 17th – the same week the Walbridge Fire, also referred to as the LNU Lightning Complex, started. The Walbridge fire was in the rugged hills west of Healdsburg and north of Guerneville. From Arista, we could see the smoke rising a few hillsides behind our estate while we continued harvesting grapes and winemaking work. Fortunately, it was contained to the remote hills west of us, and although some houses were destroyed, it did not reach hundreds of homes, wineries and vineyards in the Russian River Valley and Dry Creek Valley.

The smoke from the Walbridge fire lingered in the air long enough for growers and winemakers to realize that all grapes and wine would need to be analyzed for potential smoke taint. Sadly, we received smoke taint numbers from many of our Pinot Noir Vineyards at levels considered too high for quality wine production. Chardonnay was much less of a concern as it sees almost zero contact with skins during fermentation, and we have seen no issues thus far with any of our Chardonnays fermenting in the cellar. (Note: The chemical compounds that cause smoke taint are found in grape skins. During fermentation, red wines remain in contact with the skins longer thus are more susceptible to smoke taint than white wines.) As a result, we made the difficult decision in agreement with our growers, to not pick a majority of our Pinot Noir vineyards.

The fruit that was picked and brought into our cellar was confirmed by multiple tests to not be tainted by smoke, making it safe for high quality wine production. Over the coming months, we will continue to analyze the wines that are in the cellar and monitor for any sign of smoke. We are fully committed to only bottling wines that are sound and reflect no smoke influence. We pride ourselves in the reputation we have worked hard to build as one of California's benchmark producers of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. We will not bottle a wine that we feel is less than 100% quality and reflective of the site from which it comes.

What this means for certain is that there will be significantly less Arista Pinot Noir produced from the 2020 vintage. While it is far too early to know exactly how much Pinot Noir will be bottled, it will be significantly less than most previous years to date. On a positive note, we were able to secure additional Chardonnay from the Ritchie and U.V. El Diablo Vineyards. The Chardonnay fruit looked amazing and is smelling and tasting delicious in the cellar!

A-List Members can continue to look for emails from us in the future months with any updates pertaining to the 2020 vintage.

Sincerely,
Mark and Ben McWilliams



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