

STOLPMAN VINEYARDS

BALLARD CANYON

HAIR OF THE BEAR 2017

TECH

VINEYARD COMPONENTS

Block 1 Petite Sirah, Block 3 Roussanne

VARIETAL BLEND

75% Petite Sirah, 25% Roussanne
(cofermented)

VINIFICATION

De-stemmed, foot trod, and pumped over twice
daily through Native fermentation, no sulfur
added through fermentation

FINAL ANALYSIS

alcohol: 14.5%

VATTING/FERMENTATION

Concrete open top fermentation for 30 days

COOPERAGES & ELEVAGE

67% Neutral, 33% New French Oak Barrels

RELEASE DATE

October 2019

HARVEST DATE

October 3 2017

TOTAL PRODUCTION

115 cases

BACKGROUND

We've bottled wine from the 3.5 acre 1992 planting of Petite Sirah on only a few occasions. Especially in the extremes of Ballard Canyon, winemakers must wait for the Petite Sirah skins to soften in order to avoid burly, coarse tannins. This often means picking at extremely high sugars and bottling wines with hotter alcohol levels than we prefer.

In 2016, winemaker Kyle Knapp had the brilliant idea of co-fermenting the powerful, black varietal with soft, rich, and cushioning Roussanne. Roussanne ripens extremely late here on the vineyard, so it naturally brings the sugar content down – translating to 1.5% less alcohol than if we left the Petite Sirah monocepage. During fermentation, the golden Roussanne polishes the raw power of the Petite Sirah into an elegant, fine wine.

In recognition of the winemaker's triumphant wine, artist Eric Beltz drew a rugged, older version of Kyle Knapp emerging from the wilderness with a domesticated bear by his side. A parallel to Roussanne taming the wild Petite Sirah.

The term "Hair of the Bear" described a top-notch frontiersman or trapper back in the days of the Wild West and California Gold Rush.

VINTAGE

As we rolled into the 2017 harvest, the first vintage of Hair of the Bear still sat evolving in barrel with no name and certainly no epic label yet designed. We had slated the inaugural vintage comfortably in the top echelon of 2016 cuvees, but it wasn't yet the sought after cult label it became after release. In short, we didn't scream, vomit, and fall out of our chairs when Ruben sent us crop estimates that showed a reduced yield (read heightened intensity) in our small Petite Sirah block. After all, Petite Sirah has never paid the mortgage nor has it been a significant draw for collectors here at Stolpman. Once harvested, even with the addition of 25% golden Roussanne, the fruit filled barely half of a Concrete fermenting tank. That intensified profile from low yields will be the differentiator between the 2017 Hair of the Bear vintage and others, and the one that fetches me the most hate mail over keeping the wine for wine club members only and running out upon release.

AT THE WINERY

Picking decisions are everything when it comes to this cuvee. We must get the Petite Sirah to that dark, opulent spot when the tannins begin to soften and the sugars will create glycerol richness enough to envelope any burly-ness – we then must rely on the Roussanne to bring the hedonism back in check – and because we only have that one golden tool in our tool box - we must make sure to harvest the Petite Sirah before it goes off the reservation.

If we nail the pick, all we then must do is pull up a lawn chair and watch the magical integration of co-fermentation at work. Within a day those golden grapes skins disappear, turned inky black by the all-consuming Petite Sirah pigment.

SENSORY

Deep, Dark purple sinking into an opulent milk bath so viscous you float, but not that it matters, because submerged, we breathe in oozy yumminess – this is what I want to live on one day while suspended in hyper-drive on my private intergalactic yacht. And as I close my eyes to enjoy the sensation, a hit of red fruit and Indian spice pops on the fringe of the immensely dark wine – lifting the wine back to reality and marrying the wholly intense experience with reality and perhaps a casual red meat pairing.