



HAMILTON RUSSELL VINEYARDS

Celebrating 40 vintages of Pinot noir - A Retrospective

The vintages 1981 to 1985 show evidence of young but healthy BK 5 clone vines (a Swiss Champagne clone) combined with a philosophy of relatively early picking - almost before full physiological ripeness - and fairly high percentages of new wood. The wines began life, tight and lean, even a touch austere, but have aged extremely well. 1981 is, like a vintage car, leaking oil and showing its age, but still has charm and sense of history. Recently, we have found the 1982 and the 1983, the most attractive wines of the period. Average alcohol 12.85%, average TA 6.32, average pH 3.70.

The vintages 1986 to 1990 demonstrate the increasing impact of leaf roll virus on vine health and the decline in use of new wood. Lowest average alcohols for the period were driven partly by a philosophy of early picking and partly by an increasing inability of the BK 5 clone vines to fully ripen the grapes. The wines generally had lifted, lighter red fruit aromas on release and showed a hint of volatile acid. They have all aged well, but are lean as opposed to textured. Highlights from this period would be the 1986 and 1987, which have aged remarkably well. Average alcohol 12.55%, average TA 6.24 average pH 3.61.

The vintages 1991 to 1995 characterise a period of re-planting and redefinition - a recognition of the need for greater ripeness and texture and for re-planting with the top Dijon Selection clones, 113, 115, 667 and 777. The wines in this group are fairly varied, with a spectacular 1991 and excellent 1992, showing the way for riper wines, despite being nearly 100% from the BK 5 clone. By 1995 a growth in the use of new wood, a significant reduction in volatile acid and an escalating percentage of new clonal material were clearly showing benefits. Average alcohol 13.20%, average TA 6.24, average pH 3.53.

The vintages 1996 to 2000 reflect a period of steady quality development and increasing experience with our new clonal material, particularly in terms of understanding optimal ripeness levels and wooding requirements. Enthusiasts tasting a vertical of this period have commented that it is like "walking from the Cote de Beaune to the Cote de Nuits" with the wines showing increasing structure, texture and rich dark fruit. By 2000, accumulated experience combined with an excellent vintage to produce what for us is a clear highlight for the period. Average alcohol 13.69%, average TA 6.08, average pH 3.56.

The vintages 2001 to 2005, begin to uncover and express the best characteristics of the Hamilton Russell Vineyards terroir, in a richer, more structured and concentrated style, which nevertheless retains the "European" elegance and classicism we cherish. Changes year on year for this period are more a function of vintage than viticulture and vinification developments. It was particularly rewarding for us to celebrate our 21st vintage of Pinot noir with the stunning 2001, and our 25th vintage with the beautiful 2005 - wines underpinned by years of energy, investment and accumulated experience. Average alcohol 13.96%, average TA 6.17, average pH 3.42.

The vintages 2006 to 2010 show the benefits of a subtle alteration of the clonal mix towards a higher percentage of clone 115. This clone delivers superior, rich, dark fruit aromas in our terroir without sacrificing structure. In addition, we stopped sterile filtration in 2005 and introduced an endemic Hamilton Russell Vineyards yeast for a significant percentage of the fermentation. These improvements, while subtle, have resulted in better mouthfeel, and intensity of flavour. A lot of work was done with our coopers to finesse our mix of toasting levels for more subtle wooding. In the vineyards, timely and aggressive crop thinning combined with several years of biologically farming our soils for greater earthworm and microbial activity, have further improved grape health, fruit perfume and concentration. We are proud of all the wines from this period – particularly the 2006, 2009 and 2010. Average alcohol 13.76%, average TA 6.11, average pH 3.47.

The vintages 2011 to 2015 show the benefits of careful, routine racking, initiated in 2010, as well as a longer settling and integration time in tank prior to bottling. These wines show a more pristine, well-defined and fresher perfume at bottling and beyond. This clarity and freshness has been further enhanced by a significant component of Blonde Toast (essentially untoasted) barrels. In mid-2014, the fermentation cellar was completely overhauled to create a dedicated Pinot noir fermentation area of thirteen small temperature controlled open fermenters designed to optimise cap management and enable the entire Pinot noir harvest to be processed at once if necessary. In 2015 we implemented organic viticulture across all our vineyards with some biodynamic soil treatments. All these vintages have been highly regarded, with the 2012, 2013 and 2015 being our favourites. Average alcohol 13.77%, average TA 6.12, average pH 3.45.

The vintages 2016 to 2020 demonstrate the cumulative positive benefits of organic viticulture and permanent soil improving cover crops, along with a cellar focus on restraint, purity of site and vintage expression without intrusive winemaking, acid additions and wooding. All organic, endemic or indigenous yeast fermentations, have given a layered textural mouthfeel without high alcohol. Prolonged vineyard work towards a vibrant "living soil" and regenerative farming, have doubled soil carbon and fungal and microbial diversity and quantity in most vineyards, while increasing both soil water retention, natural vine nutrient availability and natural vine disease resistance. All vintages appeal, with 2017 being a standout for elegance, purity and refinement and 2018 for true Hamilton Russell Vineyards spice, dark fruit, muscular structure and age-worthiness. Average alcohol 13.37%, average TA 5.52, average pH 3.56.

One thing is certain. We will continually agitate for positive change in every area we can, to sustainably deliver the most beautiful possible expression of our 52 hectare "monopole" on our 170 hectare property, through a single Pinot noir and a single Chardonnay.

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