

Beaux Freres and the 2005 Vintage

Often we read these winery vintage notes and wonder if there is ever a difficult vintage anywhere. It seems as though every vintage, year in and year out, is the best vintage that anyone at the winery can remember. How is this possible? Has the challenging vintage gone the way of the \$2.00 gallon of gas? Have modern viticulture, winemaking, and years of experience rendered the challenging vintage obsolete? Or are our memories too short and jaded by ceaseless marketing clamor? Actually we believe all of these things to be true in varying degrees, but would ask you to consider this thought for a moment.

Does a challenging vintage necessarily equate to a mediocre wine? While the best things in life may be free they are definitely not always easy.

Could it be that somewhere in the midst of adversity something really good or even great might emerge? If nothing else, perhaps the attributes and qualities that define a vintage as unique are forged.

In Mike Etzels' opinion 2005 was a challenging vintage – And yet one of which he is extremely proud. Following a sometimes stressful growing season; the set was less than perfect, the threat of mildew high, he persevered and finally things settled down. By the end of August a promising, slightly late harvest seemed to be at hand. September brought mild daytime temperatures and chilly nights. The weather was excellent for ripening, although very slow. On September 30th, with a mere 10% of their harvest completed they got their first real rain. This was followed by day after day of cool, damp drizzle. Optimistic forecasts of warmer, sunny weather failed to materialize, only to be reforecast to the same end. Michael waited, spirits began to dim; doubt began to creep in.

As the color of the vineyard canopy changed so did the color of everybody's hair, the leaves to yellow, theirs to grey.

Finally they began to see signs of botrytis – the waiting game was up. The plants had given 'em all they could and now it was the winery's turn. The chemistry revealed the lowest sugars in 7 years.

At this point, he couldn't say that he did not consider abandoning their naturalistic approach by taking advantage of modern technical procedures. But Michael stuck to his (and Parker's) principles, and we are all glad they did. These wines have far surpassed anybody's expectations.

Although the sugars were modest, the phenolic maturity of these wines was outstanding, giving them great balance, purity, and presence. These wines are, as always a reflection of a time and place, made all the more unique by the idiosyncrasies of the season. This vintage was a challenge, but Michael thinks that all of the effort was worth it. Ultimately you are the final arbiter. Taste these wines, decide for yourself....

The Winemaking

Please remember that Beaux Freres uses very traditional vinification techniques in the cellar. They do not fine or filter their wines before bottling. In addition they use the lowest possible levels of sulphur in their wines. To achieve this Michael intentionally leaves higher concentrations of carbon dioxide, (CO₂) in his wines when he bottles. CO₂ is a by-product of fermentation and functions as a natural preservative protecting the delicate aromas and purity of fruit. If you are planning to drink these wines within two to three years from the vintage date, I suggest a decanting for air as this quickly dissipates the CO₂ and allows the wine to open.

The Wines

#4243 2005 Beaux Freres Pinot Noir - 6btl case - \$61.50 per bottle / \$369.00 per case

This wine is made from fruit grown on the original estate vineyard. It consists primarily of Pommard & Wadenswil clones on their own roots planted between 1988 and 1995. Mike Etzel farms organically, does not irrigate, and is beginning to follow the path of Biodynamic farming. After 16 vintages it would seem easy to compare the 2005 with a previous year, but it is actually quite difficult. They have had vintages where the wines are delicate, light, and feminine. And in other years the wines are powerful, rich, and dense. 2005 appears to be a blend of both styles. The color is dark ruby with plenty of purple highlights. The nose is very extroverted and shows no intention of shutting down. At present the wine reveals pure blue and black fruits, (primarily black cherries, raspberries, and a hint of blackberries) along with tell-tale beet root, earth and herb notes. In the mouth the wine is rich and full bodied, yet displays a lighter, more delicate finish. It is somewhat of a paradox that such an intense wine could also be light on its feet, but that is the style of this vintage. Michael believes that this season's unique growing conditions gave him the ideal grapes to produce a wine with impeccable balance in acidity, alcohol, tannin, and depth of fruit. 2700 Cases Produced.

#4293 2005 Upper Terrace Pinot Noir - 6btl case - \$73.00 per bottle / \$438.00 per case

The Upper Terrace Vineyard is planted on a steep South facing slope to Pinot Noir Dijon clones 113, 114, 115, 667, 777 on three different root stocks. The site has sedimentary soils and a slightly higher elevation than the original Beaux Frères vineyard. The 2005 Upper Terrace has much of the Beaux Frères Vineyard's character, but exhibits a deeper color, more depth, and even more color and richness with unmistakable floral and forest floor components that clearly suggest a grand cru red Burgundy from the Cotes de Nuits, notably Vosne-Romanee or Flagey-Echezeaux. Mike Etzel believes that it is because the Dijon clones, which are the best materials from Burgundy, seem to be best suited for Oregon's cooler climates. With these clones planted in the steeply sloped vineyard, this wine always comes across as meaty, rich, and full. The wines from this vineyard exhibit a Burgundian aromatic profile and the vineyard tends to crop lower almost naturally, so the wine seems to have even great density, and richness. 880 Cases Produced.

#4200 2005 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir - 6btl case - \$38.50 per bottle / \$231.00 per case

This cuvee – formerly known as Belles Soeurs features fruit grown on select vineyard sites in Yamhill County. The wines benefit from the same integrity in the winemaking process as the estate wines. The sites are farmed sustainably and managed to very low yields. It is not fined or filtered. They age the wines in the same French oak barrels used in their estate bottling, however the percentage of new oak is intentionally lower. This wine is deep ruby to the rim, with sweet black cherry and cassis fruit. Not quite the same degree of nuance of the Upper Terrace, or the earthy terroir-driven character of the Beaux Frères Vineyard. The Willamette Valley Cuvee is an up-front wine with medium to full body, beautifully pure fruit, supple tannin, and a good vibrant acidity giving the wine a freshness to go along with its fullness and palate-pleasing style. 1400 Cases Produced.