

# LONGBOARD

## VINEYARDS

### Farming & Wine

*Farming, whether my own Estate vineyards on Westside Road in Healdsburg or one of the blocks of our grower-partners, is where wine begins to form. Just as a chef is interested in ensuring nothing but the most flavorful and wholesome produce gets delivered to his kitchen, so do I look to source grapes that capture the flavor, aroma and texture that complements my winemaking style.*

*It is only recently (relatively recently, in human history at least) that agriculture and winemaking exploded from the realm of regional heritage to that of a global business. Change, at a fast pace, is everywhere.*

*Wineries have different ways of dealing with change; At one extreme, you have big, sometime multi-national companies that rely on the latest technology – from aerial photography and vineyard soil-moisture sensors to optical berry sorting machines and large focus groups to dictate popular flavor profiles of wine. On the other, you have those who believe that people in the middle ages were smarter than we are and that we should avoid the use of all technology. At Longboard, I take a balanced approach – I respect tradition and try to find the simple and least-interventionist way to grow high quality grapes and wines but I also keep an open mind to the cutting edge science that teaches us so many new ways to become better at what we do.*

*I like to call my way “Responsible Winegrowing”. I do not bother with any type of certification but I am aware that my kids play in the vineyard and drink water from the well on the property. As much as I can, I operate in a way that preserves the farm, so that one day I may proudly hand it down to the next generation and say: “Here, now it is your time to write a chapter in the history book”. In the meantime, I acknowledge that I do not have all the answers, but I get better at growing better wines with every passing season.*

- *Oded Shakked* - *Big Kahuna and amateur wine philosopher*

# The Vineyards

I have been quoted referring to Healdsburg as “The Crucible” – a town where four Sonoma appellations meet (Alexander Valley, Dry Creek, Chalk Hill and Russian River Valley). Compared to Europe, this area of Sonoma County is young from a geological point of view. We have soils from volcanic, alluvial and tectonic origins and we often find them mixed in one location. When this soil diversity is combined with a mild maritime climate and a thriving wine economy that rewards uniqueness– we get a mosaic of endless interactions between vines, climates, soils and farmers. I believe this complexity and diversity can be tasted in the wines we produce in the region.

## DaKine Vineyard

The DaKine vineyard is my own estate vineyard and site of our annual Wine Club gathering. About four acres of Merlot and just under an acre of Malbec make the bulk of the vines. The grapes were planted in the mid-eighties and were sold to Arrowood winery until 2005. These “field blended” grapes all go to make our *DaKine Vineyard Merlot*. In 2000, I planted one acre of Syrah and our special little ‘spice rack’ block of mixed varieties (Petit Sirah, Carignane, Grenache, Zinfandel and Malbec) that make up the field-blend for the *DaKine Vineyard Syrah* flagship wine.

The soils here range from alluvial loam (Yolo Silt Loam) to gravelly (Pleasanton Gravelly Loam) and a small patch of Yolo Clay Loam (where a small pond existed years ago). Even though this is the upper middle reach of the Russian River Valley appellation, where temperatures can get warm in the summer, the hills on the west shield the vines from the hot afternoon sun and contribute to a long growing season and balanced flavors. The largest part of the vineyard is old, Merlot planted on a 10' x 6' spacing, the newer Syrah is planted on 9' x 6' spacing and the little field blend block is on a 4' x 4' narrow-spaced modified Guillot system and thus has to be farmed by hand (no tractors can fit in there). Vines here, once established, need very little irrigation, normally one good “drink” in June and a sip here in there during very hot and dry years. The goal and plan is to slowly convert this vineyard to dry farming.

I like the concept and practice of field blends; not only does it begin the winemaking process by supplying grape lots with the “layered complexity” I love so much but it also provides a link to the old farming practices of the Italian grape farmers that settled in this area more than a century ago.



## Goosechase Vineyard



Named after a duck-hunting Chocolate Labrador named "Goose", this vineyard block is part of the R-Bar-N ranch, which also includes the Anderson – Webber Zinfandel Block. These vines were planted in 1998 on a friend's property in the Chalk-Hill area. The eastern part is in the Alexander Valley appellation and the western part in the Russian River Valley appellation. The soils here are very rocky, all the grapes are planted on hillside blocks and the vines struggle to survive in the poor soils, resulting

low crop levels that act to intensify flavors. Some of our best Cabernet Sauvignon is grown here, as well as killer Syrah, and small amounts of Zinfandel, Malbec and Pinot Noir. In all honesty, we are still learning how to best farm these blocks; one year we lost half the Pinot Noir vines to a herd of wild boars that broke through the fence and uprooted the young vines and two years later we "donated" half the crop to thousands of hungry starlings. Since 2010, we feel we have the correct pruning, irrigation and compost regimes that result in absolutely delicious wines. We make our *Mavericks* signature series Cabernet Sauvignon from this vineyard, at times with some help from the surfers that surf that spot.

## Ledbetter Family Vineyard

This hillside above Eastside road south of town is the site of the old Preston dairy ranch. The soils here are mixed, with red sandy loams, patches of Yolo clay-loam and even some gravel patches. I have worked with grapes from this vineyard since 1988 and made the first ever Longboard Syrah from this ranch in 1998. I purchase Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc from this ranch, farmed by the Ledbetter family. The Syrah, planted on the westernmost part of this hillside consistently produces some of the tastiest wines in our cellar, year after year. The Sauvignon Blanc (pictured below) ripens evenly and benefits from the cooling effect of the fog that characterizes this area. It produces a wine that is bright and layered with a light mineral quality.



## Sadie's Vineyard

This little (barely three acres) vineyard in Alexander Valley is owned by the Dahlgren family. It is the source of our Sadie's Vineyard Carignane - A wine bottled on its own in exceptional years and one blended into our Point Break Red Blend in others. This is one of those old vineyards, most likely over 80 years-old that was planted to a mix of varieties: mostly (about 85% ) Carignane, Zinfandel (close to 10 %), a bit of Alicante Bouchet, some Petit Sirah and a few vines of Chasellas Dorée (a white grape). This vineyard is very challenging to farm but the hard work is rewarded with a wine that is as unique and expressive of its origin as it gets... one look at these gnarly, old and wrinkled vines, and the deep flavors make total sense.



## Rochioli Family Vineyard

Just mention the name Rochioli to winemakers around here and you feel a quantum leap in respect and attentiveness. Those who've had the privilege to work with the fruit grown by Joe and Tom Rochioli and their clan know that this is not just hype. Those who haven't just keep wishing their name will one day rise to the top of the waiting list so they can score a few tons of perfectly grown grapes. Longboard produced a Cabernet Sauvignon from the Rochioli Vineyard from 1999 to 2007, when Joe ripped out the old vines and planted a new Pinot Noir block. Since then, we've occasionally gotten Rochioli's Pinot Noir fruit to blend into our Russian River Pinot Noir bottling. In 2012 we received four tons of Pinot Noir from the Sweetwater block and five tons of Chardonnay block that will now become an integral part of our program. The Chardonnay grown here has a beautiful mineral quality and produces a wine that hints of a Mersault. The Pinot Noir is floral with deep black fruit character, a slight spicy note and an Earl Grey Tea leaf finish. These wines improve exponentially as they age.

## Flying Rooster Vineyard

This vineyard, owned and farmed by the Delamontanya family is located in what we call the "Petaluma Gap" - a windswept area on the eastern part of the Sonoma Coast Appellation. Here, soils are mainly alluvial but the cooler weather and the ever present wind contribute to a late-ripening Pinot Noir that has a pronounced black cherry and cola character. The vineyard is planted with the relatively new "Dijon" clones of Pinot Noir, clones that produce darker wine with very fruit forward character. This wine's character thus leans towards a "new world" style. I find that it ages beautifully in years with good acidity and lower alcohol levels.

# Redgrav Vineyard

This vineyard tells the story of the region. Once planted to hops, then prunes and later apples, it has been planted to two clones of Cabernet Sauvignon in the early 2000's. since one lone Red Gravenstein apple tree is left at the north end of the vineyard, we decided to give it the name Redgrav. The soil here is a gravelly loam with a slight reddish tint. Close spacing and minimal intervention yield a Cabernet Sauvignon that is bright, not too tannic and has a very distinctive core flavor of red fruit, some swear it is reminiscent of a ripe apple. We only get a few tons of fruit from this site but hope to continue making about 100 cases every year.

