

HMR ESTATE VINEYARD

Most of the wine world is aware of the 1976 Paris tasting where a Napa Valley Cabernet and Chardonnay upset their French counterparts, but few have heard of *Gault Millau's* 1979 des Olympiades du vin that selected a Paso Robles Pinot Noir over some highly rated red Burgundies. The pinot noir was crafted by legendary Winemaker André Tchelistcheff from grapes grown on the Hoffman Mountain Ranch (HMR) in the Adelaida district. Fittingly, the winemakers behind the 1976 champions, Mike Grgich and Warren Winiarski, learned the trade while serving under Tchelistcheff at Beaulieu Vineyards in the 1960s.

"I planted pinot vines in 1963," says Dr. Stanley Hoffman, making HMR the oldest pinot noir vineyard on the South Central Coast (San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties). Tchelistcheff was hired as consulting winemaker in 1973.

Dr. Hoffman's vision should not to be taken for granted. The Adelaida area was a rugged place in the early 1960s and the least likely of places to cultivate the temperamental pinot noir grape. It was mostly barren ranch land with few paved roads, some beef cattle, and large patches of live oak, alder and manzanita.

Three years after acquiring Adelaida Cellars in 1991, the Van Steenwyk family purchased a 400-acre portion of the Hoffman Mountain Ranch, including all of the original pinot noir planting. Substantial care, investment and patience were necessary to return the vineyard to its former glory, but the family's vision and the talent of their viticulturists have paid off. Exceptional pinot noir once again bears the HMR Vineyard designation.

HMR enjoys one of the coolest climates in West Paso Robles. It is situated 16 miles from the coast at 1,700 feet of elevation at the southern end of the Santa Lucia Mountains. The pleasant conditions are profoundly affected by the dynamics of California's vast Central Valley. Driven by the force of hot air masses rising above the valley during the growing season, cool ocean breezes funnel through the Templeton gap to temper warm afternoons. Temperatures drop by as much as 50 degrees overnight, making it one of the most extreme diurnal variations in the state. The marine layer insures the development of essential grape acidity and ideal ripeness. Yearly rainfall is over 25 inches and fog is rare.

Planted on their own roots in a widely spaced configuration, the 32 acres of pinot noir vines grow on steep, rolling ridges that face south-to-southwest. Clay loam soils of only six-to-nine inches, infused with fractured limestone shale, lie atop boundless layers of chalk-white bedrock. "The rocky calcareous soils of these historic vineyards controls their vigor," says Winemaker Terry Culton. "This results in added vine stress and lower yields, but produces more intensely flavored fruit. In keeping with the winery's sustainable philosophy, the vineyard is not tilled, encouraging native grasses, wild sage and rosemary to flourish between the rows." Furthermore, no chemical sprays or fertilizers are applied.

Quite rare in California, the underlying limestone of the Adelaida district is part of a narrow coastal strip that extends from San Diego to Monterey. Tectonic plate movement over the past 20 million years has pushed these deposits north from their origin in the vicinity of modern-day Mexico.¹ Geologists from California State University San Luis Obispo believe they were spawned in the underwater canyons of warm, shallow seas during the Upper Cretaceous period.

The shallow, well-drained soils associated with these formations (the Linné-Colado series) were formed from weathered calcareous shale and sandstone. They lie on hills and mountains with slopes up to 75% and pH ranges of 7.0 to 8.5. The native vegetation is oak woodland. Because of the rocky nature of the higher elevations, the settlers who cleared the area farmed only the lower valleys.²

The story behind HMR Vineyard begins with ancient soils, was given breath by an intrepid winegrower, and ceremoniously continues in the capable hands of Adelaida Cellars. Each wine bears the unique signature of exotic limestone, venerable vines, chilly nights, and a standard of excellence established by Dr. Hoffman over 40 years ago.

1. Grove, K. and Graham, S. *Geology of Upper Cretaceous and Lower Tertiary Rocks near Lake Nacimiento, California*. 63 pp. Pacific Section Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists. (1986)

2. Lindsey, W.C. *Soil Survey of San Luis Obispo County, California, The Paso Robles Area*. 236 pp. US Dept. of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. (1977)