

FIDDLEHEAD CELLARS

Styles in Sauvignon Blanc... the History of Hunnysuckle Sauvignon Blanc

Hunnysuckle Sauvignon Blanc is made to be a rich, textural Sauvignon Blanc (somewhat like a Chardonnay, but with the minerality of Sauvignon Blanc). It resembles the structure of the lavish, white wines of Bordeaux (which some may be surprised to learn are Sauvignon Blanc based). Using Haut Brion Blanc as a model, I set out to simulate making similar luxurious wines using Happy Canyon Sauvignon Blanc grapes.

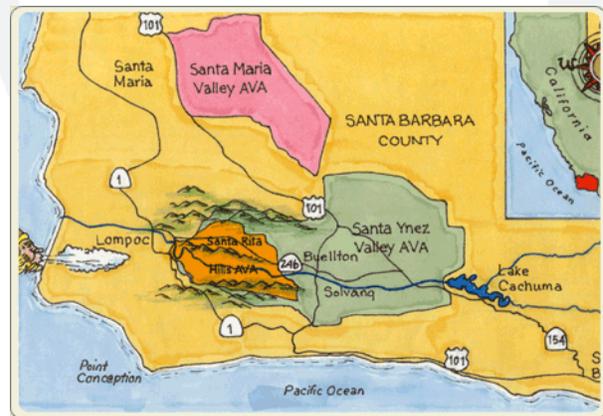


In 1989 when I started Fiddlehead the Sta. Rita Hills and Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara were not recognized as AVA's. Today, they are internationally credited for their unique micro-climates which influence exceptional wine grape quality (AVA designation awarded in 2001 and 2009, respectively). I am very pleased to have discovered and promoted these exceptional places many moons ago.

I very purposefully chose to focus on two varieties, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. Why? These were internationally successful varieties that were underrepresented in our domestic market, noticeably absent as a "reserve" style, meaning as serious wines of texture, balance and longevity. I observed that these two varieties are great partners with each other in terms of weight and potential layers and complexity, and they both are seriously impacted by where they are grown and how they are farmed. Some remark it is unique to focus on the white wine of Bordeaux and the red wine of Burgundy...but no more unique than a Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon partnership.

So my mission has always been to make Sauvignon Blanc that is beyond the ordinary, to make Sauvignon Blanc that has unique expression and textural rewards. My primary focus is to make a wine that is attractive to all discriminating palates. I am looking to make a wine with modest alcohol and layered fruit. I want to sidestep the "big", "extracted" and "overworked" in lieu of "elegance" and "seamless expression of place". And over the years, I have been able to explore creativity in the cellar and implement choices that create compositions that satisfy the palate of red wine and white wine drinkers alike.

In the early Fiddlehead years of discovery and exploration, I was fascinated with the fact that Santa Barbara County (and more specifically Santa Ynez Valley), was geographically unique by virtue of its east-west running transverse valley (contrary to all other wine valleys on the west coast). The cooling, evening fog penetrates the eastern bowels of the valley where Happy Canyon is defined, but the cooling ocean breezes only make their way as far as the Sta. Rita Hills AVA (orange section on map). For every mile or so that you travel from west to east, you gain a degree or so in temperature. When Fiddlestix is 70 degrees Fahrenheit, Happy Canyon is easily 90 degrees.



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The impact on Sauvignon Blanc grown in warmer districts is a desirable shift from green, grassy aromatics to more fruit driven, slightly tropical laced aromas of peaches and pineapple. The cool evenings allow for the preservation of the natural grape acidity. A revelation came when I discovered that, with fruit from the Santa Ynez Valley, I could create three unique personalities by varying the vineyard source and choices in the cellar. This was definitely an artistic winemaking opportunity waiting to happen. **Sauvignon Blanc for the serious palate.**

Working with 3 vineyards in Happy Canyon, I have learned to customize their expression in wine. Most importantly, the three vineyards – Grassini, McGinley and Vogelzang – custom farm to my specifications. I have designated rows in each vineyard which I contract by-the-acre and control the farming and harvest specifications. Each is farmed independently and the fruit from each is fermented in both stainless steel and in French oak. The wines in oak age on the yeast lees 8-9 months (to create creamy textures, much like that of great Champagnes), and all wines are nonmalolactic to preserve the varietal expression.

Then I taste each component, looking for which is a best fit for each of my Sauvignon Blanc styles.



“Hunnysuckle”: Bordeaux-style, rich and luxurious to the palate, without the Semillon. Limited 100-150 case bottling, selected from new French oak and given added bottle age. Starting with the 2006 vintage, I redesigned the label to focus on the importance of the style of this wine that has captured the hearts of many chefs.

“Happy Canyon”: Loire Style...kind of like a Pouilly Fumé. Modest weight, layered, mild fruit-driven aromatics, moderate, slightly creamy mid-palate weight, and refreshing mineral-based finish. The marriage of 1/3 stainless fermented for aromatics, 1/3 fermented in New French Oak for textures and 1/3 fermented in neutral French Oak. Modest bottle age to integrate the oak layers. Friendly to most palates, all of the time!

“Goosebury”: Most tropical in aromatics, lively, cleansing acidity, somewhere in between Sancerre and New World. Limited 200 case bottling that selects from Stainless steel for the purity of the grape expression, and released young and fresh.

Enjoy all 3...with different moods, different food pairings and with different company. Why limit yourself to one flavor when you can have 3?!

Cheers,

Kathy Joseph
Winemaker

