



B. Kosuge Wines

2006 MANCHESTER RIDGE MENDOCINO PINOT NOIR

I don't know why I end up working with vineyards that are far away from my house. When I began working with Hirsch vineyard I thought it was an impossibly long drive, but this one is even more remote: First, drive up to the Anderson Valley, which is a long drive from almost anywhere. Then, take a torturously narrow and winding road from Boonville out towards the coast. Fourteen miles down this road, turn onto a rutted dirt road and drive another eight and a half miles up and down ridges, out to the vineyard. From my house this takes about three hours. Manchester Ridge is the name of the first ridge in from the coastal plain to the northeast of Point Arena, and it is also the name of the vineyard. From the edge of the vineyard you can see down to the beach, which as the crow flies, is about three and a half miles away and 2000 feet down. Somewhat mysteriously, there is a giant swing set made from telephone poles, painted blue, perched on the edge of the cliff. The seats are locked to prevent the unsupervised from launching themselves into the void, so I have not yet ridden this swing.

I found this vineyard through my friend Martin Mochizuki, who has been working in vineyard management for about as long as I have been a winemaker. When I asked him about it, he warned me that it was a long way out in the middle of nowhere, but that it was a pretty interesting site: high elevation, for coastal California, but close to the ocean. Because it is on the top of a ridge, the soil is pretty weathered, and well drained. Like the Sonoma Coast, the climate at Manchester is less dominated by the marine influence than the valleys further inland, because it is often above the fog. So there is a lot of sunlight, but because it is close to the ocean it is not too hot. The season seems to be compressed up there, starting later but moving faster during the middle of the summer so that by the end of the season it has "caught up," with harvest coming around the end of September. Also like the Sonoma Coast, it is difficult to set a large crop up there because spring weather is more extreme than down in the valleys, so yields are naturally low.

I have long admired the wines of the cooler parts of Mendocino County, like the Anderson Valley, for their "lightness" (by that I don't mean light bodied) and perfume. They seem to dance across the tongue, especially the Pinot Noirs, without sacrificing richness or body, which seems to me to be the definition of great Pinot Noir. The wines from Manchester are somewhat more sinewy than their counterparts from down below. Incidentally, Manchester Ridge is too far out towards the coast and too high in elevation to be called Anderson Valley, which is why I use the appellation Mendocino. The 2006 has a lovely perfume, is medium bodied and, like my other 2006 Pinots, has a lot of flavor packed onto a lithe frame. When the grapes came across the sorting table at the winery, they were the most perfect looking clusters I had seen in a long time. Even my fellow winemakers noticed and asked me where they could get some. Now, pretty grapes don't automatically translate into beautiful wine, but in this case there is an unblemished purity to the flavors in this wine that I find pretty irresistible. 300 cases.