



B. Kosuge Wines

2015 Carneros Gamay Noir

Anybody who has met me knows that I have a love of Cru Beaujolais that borders on the pathological. Of course, the grape that makes Beaujolais is Gamay Noir a jus Blanc. Not to be confused with Napa Gamay (now more accurately known as Valdiguie) or the Gamay Beaujolais clone of Pinot Noir, both of which were once called Gamay in California. "True" Gamay has been around Burgundy for a very long time, and is thought in some quarters to be a cross between Pinot Noir and Gouais Blanc, a not-very-highly-regarded Central European variety. At any rate, it makes very special wine in its long time home, Beaujolais.

Why do I love Beaujolais and the Gamay grape so much? Because it has that rare combination of seriousness and joy that I find gives the most pleasure in wine. In Beaujolais, when taken seriously (that is, not made into Nouveau), it can make concentrated, even profound, red wine. But it is such a lively, fresh, exuberant variety that it is impossible not to like, even when young. Over the past few years I found myself drinking, and talking about, Gamay so much that I finally decided I should put my money where my mouth is and try to make some myself.

Gamay is not widely planted in California. In fact, I could not find any in Napa or Sonoma County. As of two years ago, when I first decided to try to make some, I could only find quality fruit in the El Dorado foothills, in some high elevation sites east of the town of Placerville. They are on granitic soil, like in Beaujolais, which was appealing, but El Dorado is far away from my home in Napa and I thought it would be nice to have some closer to home. So I bought some cuttings from a man named Ron Mansfield (he farms those foothill Gamay plantings, along with several other vineyards--and some amazing orchard fruits too) and brought them down to The Shop in Carneros, where the owners graciously agreed to graft about half an acre for me. This all happened in the winter and spring of 2014, and in 2015, we had our first crop.

So this is the first crop of Gamay from the Shop. But the roots are 15 years old, so it's not quite "young vine" fruit. Still, I approached this first vintage with some caution, and only bottled 75 cases of the approximately 125 cases worth of wine that I had from 2015 (the rest I snuck into the Shop Pinot Noir). Raised entirely in concrete, with a small amount of Pinot Noir blended to soften the acidity (Gamay, I have learned has a lot of acid!) this wine is packed with fresh red fruits, and a bit angular in its youth. It's a new world interpretation of Beaujolais, but it's not meant to be an imitation. Maybe an homage. I decided to take an especially hands off approach to this wine, with little added sulfur, no added yeast or bacteria (the same as my other wines), lots of whole clusters—although to be honest, I had no idea how this would all play out in the wine. The result is exhilarating—vibrant, grapy flavors, a hint of spice from the whole clusters, mouthwatering acidity, modest tannins, wonderfully juicy and quaffable. It different than Beaujolais, as you would expect, but evokes the same response in me—pleasure.

75 cases