
BUCKLIN

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Bucklin Winery's Old Hill Ranch Vineyard Map Documents 150-Year History and 25 Varieties

—Two Year Project Leads to a Vine-by-Vine Mapping of Bucklin's Old Hill Ranch—

(Glen Ellen, Calif)—How important is vine age in determining a vineyard's terroir?

"When I tell buyers that Old Hill is probably the oldest vineyard in Sonoma, their eyes light up," says Will Bucklin, winemaker at Bucklin and vineyard manager for Old Hill Ranch. "But when I tell them 'the vineyard is a field blend that consists of over 26 grape varieties and more than anything, even the vines' age, it is the nature of the field blend that dictates the terroir of Old Hill,' they seemed less impressed." Will needed Visuals.

Will had a simple idea that evolved into a two-year project. Why not document each and every vine in his field-blend and make a map showing their locations in the vineyard? Such a map would help people understand the uniqueness and complexity of the vineyard, document the vineyard's makeup for historical purposes, lead to a better understanding of what the founders of the vineyard were thinking and create a knowledge foundation for better farming of the vineyard.

The result of Will's effort presents an intimate understanding of the famed Sonoma Valley vineyard. The new map is available at Bucklin's website: <http://www.buckzin.com>.

DOCUMENTING HISTORY

"When I returned from making wine in Oregon to help start our family's winery I wanted to learn everything I could about our vineyard. On my first trip to the library history annex I couldn't believe what I uncovered," Will recalls.

Old Hill Ranch was founded by William McPherson Hill in 1852. It was the first vineyard in Sonoma to be planted with non-mission varieties and it was recognized in the 1860s as a source of some of California's finest wines. More recently wine historian Charles Sullivan called Old Hill the source of "California's first really famous Zinfandel."

While Old Hill Ranch has always been recognized as a Zinfandel "field blend" containing a number of different varieties, the true extent of the field blend was only uncovered when Will finished his survey of the vines.

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TWO YEARS AND TWO DOZEN GRAPE VARIETIES LATER

Bucklin's new Old Hill Vineyard Map, entitled "Anatomy of a Vineyard", was two years in the making.

"The more intimate you become with a vineyard the better grapes you can grow and the better the wine that can be produced," says Will. "We can now literally tend this vineyard vine-by-vine and treat each vine differently based on the needs of the variety."

While Zinfandel is by far the most widely planted variety at Old Hill Ranch, Will also found Alicante Bouschet, Petite Sirah, Carignane Noir, Grand Noir, Barbera, Grenache, Mourvedre, Trousseau, Tannat, French Colombard, Cinsaut, Charbano, Palimino, Catwaba, and various types of Muscat, among others.

SEEKING AUTHENTICITY THROUGH ORGANIC AND DRY FARMING

It is this unique blend of grapes in the vineyard, Will believes, that makes his Bucklin Old Hill Ranch Zinfandel such a unique wine. The interplay between the different varieties that make up the blend, combined with the extreme age of the vines makes for a wine that is not so much "Zinfandel" as it is "Old Hill Ranch." The vineyard is also dry farmed and certified organic, an approach Will believes is a factor in making the wine produced from it particularly authentic and indicative of the vineyard and its terroir. "Not to mention it would have been certified organic in 1860. Dow Chemical wasn't around then," Will notes.

"Our family believes we are as much preservationists as we are winemakers and grapegrowers," comments Will. "History and culture is often something you look at from behind ropes or read about. In the case of the Bucklin Old Hill Ranch Zinfandel we are proud to produce history that can be drunk."

The Bucklin family has placed its Old Hill Ranch into the Sonoma Land Trust, a move that will assure it is never developed.

Bucklin Winery and Old Hill Ranch are located in Glen Ellen, California. The winery was founded in 2000 and produces about 3000 cases of wine. In addition to the Old Hill Ranch Zinfandel, Bucklin also makes an Old Hill Mixed Blacks, Gewurztraminer and Cabernet Sauvignon.

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CONTACT:

Tom Wark, Wark Communications
707-933-9313 • tom@warkcommunications.com

Will Bucklin, Bucklin Winery/Old Hill Ranch
707-933-1726 • will@buckzin.com