



Winery & Vineyards

1999 FATHOM

Santa Barbara County

Winemaker's Notes

Almost 20 years ago, while I was going to school to study enology, I started working in a wine shop. I was exposed to so many wines, and the people working there were so gracious with their knowledge, that it was a time and place that opened my eyes. My world was not just winemaking all of a sudden. It was more of an aesthetic view of wine in general, and my horizons seemed to be infinitely broadened.

One of the lessons from back then that I will never forget was the idea that good wines made from Bordeaux varieties in Santa Barbara County did not exist. If I remember right, the paradoxical question (the joke) was 'what's worse, a Cabernet from Santa Barbara, or from Monterey?'

Roughly 15 years ago, I remember thinking that my lessons from that wine shop were solid. I started making my first wines, and I met some of the local winemakers like Fred Brander (Brander Winery). Fred was actually out there saying such things as, 'we will make great wines from Bordeaux varieties, just give us time.' I was still trying to figure out the Santa Barbara/Monterey paradox.

Then, about 10 years ago, a couple of interesting things happened. For starters, improvements in viticulture really began to accelerate all over the state of California. In some areas, where certain varieties did not enjoy the benefit of a naturally *perfect* climate, these improvements were going a long way toward the development of good wines. In Santa Barbara County, for example, we started to see some nice Bordeaux- styled wines from wineries like Brander, Foxen, and Rancho Sisquoc. Then came the discovery that of all the Bordeaux varieties, it was Cabernet Franc that was making the best wines in the middle of the Santa Ynez Valley and the eastern reaches of the Santa Maria Valley. The word started to spread. Unlike Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc seemed to like our area's cooler climates. Hmmm . . . ? I started to question my original lessons.

About 5 years ago, it became apparent to me that this was no fluke. I discovered that in many parts of France's cooler Loire Valley, they grow Cabernet Franc, while they rarely grow Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot. Thus, the red wines from appellations like Chinon are usually 100% Cabernet Franc. Ultimately, I was interested in a more traditional Bordeaux model, which would entail blending all the varieties. As I began to look at Bordeaux, however, I became puzzled by the blending formulas of most of the wineries there. While they all seem to grow some Cabernet Franc, very few feature it as the highest percentage grape in their wines. St. Emilion is the Bordeaux appellation where a handful of wineries do. The most prominent of these is Cheval Blanc. What I was starting to see was an enigma; a place, Santa Barbara County, where the potential for great Bordeaux styled blends was starting to materialize in such a way that the lead grape could be, or perhaps institutionally *should be*, Cabernet Franc. The lessons from my wine shop days were shattered, and FATHOM was born. All we needed was a pinch of consistently outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and we could rock the world. Then, kaboom! Happy Canyon.

Some of the finest Merlot I have ever tasted is now being grown in the Happy Canyon area at three new vineyards: Westerly, Vogelzang, and Star Lane. My prediction is that great Cabernet Sauvignon will follow. These vineyards are in the farthest interior end of the Santa Ynez Valley, and the climate is (finally!) warm enough for these grapes. There is also something about the soils that I have not yet pinned down into words. Suffice it to say, the wines from this area look great.

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While our area's Cabernet Franc is still by itself compelling, FATHOM is a program that has been blown wide open. I now believe that FATHOM is the best wine I can make from Bordeaux varieties, regardless of the blend. In fact, at Star Lane there is a little bit of another, much less heralded Bordeaux variety, Petit Verdot. If that turns out great, we really will rock the world. Imagine a new paradox: what's the best place in the world for *all* the Bordeaux varieties, Bordeaux or Santa Barbara?

The 1999 FATHOM is a reflection of this revolution. It features 45% Cabernet Franc with the fruit coming from my favorite sources for the variety; the cool climate Thompson Vineyard, and the warmer Westerly Vineyard. The 45% Merlot in the wine is also from Westerly, and the 10% Cabernet Sauvignon came from that year's best Santa Barbara County source for the grape, Rancho Sisquoc.

The wine is absolutely dripping with class and polish. It is full, lush, and shows beautiful berry-cherry and dark chocolate flavors. The balance is superb and the finish is quite long. Undoubtedly the best Fathom to date.

Technical Notes

VARIETAL BLEND:

45% Cabernet Franc: Thompson Vineyard, Los Alamos Valley
Westerly Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley (Happy Canyon)

45% Merlot: Westerly Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley

10% Cabernet Sauvignon: Rancho Sisquoc, Santa Maria Valley

FINISHED WINE:

Alcohol: 13.5% by volume

pH: 3.50

TA: 6.7 g/L

VINIFICATION: Average Fermentations: 8-10 days; maceration in small open top fermenters; caps punched down 1-2 times daily

COOPERAGE: 50% New French oak; 50% Seasoned Barrels

TIME IN BARRELS: 15 months

BOTTLED: February, 2001

TOTAL PRODUCTION: 883 cases 750ml; 6 - 3 Liter

RELEASE DATE: July, 2001