

2000 FATHOM

Santa Barbara County

Almost 20 years ago, while I was in school studying 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 my lessons from back then had to do with a paradigm: “there is no such thing as good wine made from Bordeaux varieties in Santa Barbara County.” If I remember right, the paradoxical question (the joke) was “what’s worse, a Cabernet from Santa Barbara, or from Monterey?”

About 18 years ago, I remember thinking that my lessons from that wine shop were solid. I had started making my first wines, and had met the likes of some of the local winemakers like Fred Brander (Brander Winery). Fred was actually out there proclaiming “we *will* make great wines from Bordeaux varieties, just give us time.” I was still convinced that the premises underlying the paradigm were valid.

About 12 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. The other thing was the discovery that Cabernet Franc was a pretty good grape in the middle of the Santa Ynez Valley and in the eastern reaches of the Santa Maria Valley. The word started to spread; of all the Bordeaux varieties in Santa Barbara County, Cabernet Franc is the one that likes a little cooler climate. I started to question the paradigm.

About 7 years ago, it became apparent to me that this was no fluke. I discovered that in many parts of France’s climatically cooler Loire Valley, they grow the Bordeaux variety Cabernet Franc, but they rarely grow the other varieties, 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. But as I started studying Bordeaux wineries, I became intrigued with another interesting fact. While all the wineries seem to grow at least a pinch of Cabernet Franc, they very rarely feature it as the highest percentage grape in their wines. Because of some unique soils, St. Emilion is the only Bordeaux appellation where a handful of producers do.

What I was starting to see was seemingly 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 *should be*, Cabernet Franc. The paradigm that one can not grow good Bordeaux varieties in Santa Barbara County was shattered, Fred Brander was right, and FATHOM was born. All we really needed was a pinch of consistently outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and we could rock the world. Then, kaboom! Happy Canyon.



Winery & Vineyards

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Some of the finest Merlot I have ever tasted is now being grown in the Happy Canyon area of the Santa Ynez Valley. Located in the deep interior end of the Valley, some 35 miles from the ocean, if you go much further east, you run into lake Cachuma. In this district it is (finally!) warm enough for great Bordeaux Varieties. Outside of FATHOM, my prediction is that in the not too distant future you will run into the vineyard names Vogelzang and Westerly (should be Easterly), and that you will taste great Merlot and, yes, Cabernet Sauvignon from these sources. While climatically, Happy Canyon has the mojo 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; so great that I have completely revamped my thinking. Instead of believing that FATHOM is a wine that has lots of Cabernet Franc, now I believe that FATHOM is the best wine I can make from Bordeaux Varieties, regardless of the blend.

In this new framework, it is still find the quality of our Cabernet Franc compelling. Thus, it will not necessarily have to take a back seat to the other varieties, as it does in so much of Bordeaux. Also interesting is the fact that at another Happy Canyon vineyard, Star Lane, they have planted a little bit of another less heralded Bordeaux Variety, Petit Verdot. If that stuff turns out great, we really will rock the world. I used to think that I would never make wine like this 2000 FATHOM, at least not from grapes from our area. Now I have dream that someday I will ask the wine cognoscenti the following: "what's the best place in the world for **all** the Bordeaux varieties, Bordeaux or Santa Barbara?" When I look at their faces and they are stumped, my dream will have come true.

The 2000 FATHOM is the best I have made, . . .so far.

Technical Notes

VARIETAL BLEND:

67% Merlot: Westerly Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley (Happy Canyon)

27% Cabernet Franc: Westerly Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley (Happy Canyon)

6% Cabernet Sauvignon: Vogelzang Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley (Happy Canyon)

FINISHED WINE:

Alcohol: 13.6% by volume

pH: 3.55

TA: 7.0 g/L

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

TIME IN BARRELS: 18 months; 50% New French oak; 50% Seasoned Barrels

BOTTLED: August 2002

PRODUCTION: 1,300 cases 12/750ml