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2001, FATHOM

WINEMAKER'S NOTES

Almost 21 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 had to do with the paradigm "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 19 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 convinced, however, that the premises underlying the Santa Barbara-Bordeaux varieties paradigm were still valid.

Then, about 15 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; of all the Bordeaux varieties in Santa Barbara County, Cabernet Franc is the one that likes cooler climate. I started to question the paradigm.

About 10 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. 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. St. Emilion is the Bordeaux appellation where a handful of wineries do.

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 paradigm that one cannot grow good Bordeaux varieties in Santa Barbara County was shattered. Fred Brander was right and, consequently FATHOM was born. All we needed was a pinch of consistently outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and we could rock the world.

Some of the finest Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon I have ever tasted is now being grown in the deep interior of the Santa Ynez Valley, some 35 miles from the ocean!

In this new viticultural area it is finally warm enough for great wines from all of the Bordeaux varieties. Outside of FATHOM, my prediction is that in the not too distant future you will run into the vineyard names Vogelzang, Estrella, and Westerly (should be Easterly), and you will taste great Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon from these sources. While climatically this end of the Santa Ynez Valley has the mojo for these grapes, there is also something great about the shallow rocky soils. Suffice it to say, the wines look great; so great that I have completely revamped my thinking. Instead of believing that FATHOM is a wine that features Cabernet Franc, now I believe that FATHOM is the best wine I can make from Bordeaux varieties, regardless of the blend.

At another Happy Canyon vineyard, Star Lane, they have even planted a little bit of another less heralded Bordeaux variety, Petit Verdot. If that turns out great, we really will rock the world! I used to think that I would never make wine like this 2001 FATHOM, at least not from grapes grown in Santa Barbara County. Now I have a 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.

FACTS

name:	2001, Fathom "Boudreaux Blend "
item number:	01FATH
composition:	53% Merlot - Westerly Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley (Happy Canyon) 35% Cabernet Franc - Westerly Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley (Happy Canyon) 12% Cabernet Sauvignon - Vogelzang Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley (Happy Canyon)
alcohol:	13.8 % by volume
production:	1 559 cases
release date:	Fall 2003
price:	See pricelist