



Marginalia

2019 Amber Wine

100% Marsanne from Rockgarden Vineyard
Whole-cluster fermentation
Walla Walla Valley AVA
552 bottles produced

17.5° Brix at harvest
pH 3.59 at harvest
TA 3.9 g/L at harvest
9.6% abv after fermentation

The 2019 Marginalia Amber Wine is a happy accident. I had originally contracted for the Roussanne block at Rockgarden Vineyard, and had been planning to make an amber wine from that, but a late August rainstorm hit the Rocks district of Milton Freewater much harder than usual. The Roussanne I had been following all summer was damaged pretty badly, but we were able to get the contracted tonnage out of the neighboring Marsanne block instead. Knowing that the fruit had been subject to the same conditions that damaged the Roussanne, I opted to pick on the early side. In general the acidity in Rocks District fruit collapses quite early as the grapes ripen, and that's what I saw here as well. Acidity was low enough (and the pH was high enough) that I opted for a small addition of grape-derived tartaric acid as the must began fermentation. This is a somewhat aggressive intervention, but I thought it was necessary to include some sacrificial tartaric acid, knowing that the process of maceration would extract a lot of potassium from the grapes and stems, which binds with tartaric acid. Low natural acidity is the price we pay for the aromatic complexity that comes from fruit grown in the Rocks District.

Marsanne is large-berried and thin skinned, so the clusters broke down quickly and extraction from the skins and stems proceeded rapidly during fermentation. The high juice-to-skin ratio, low number of seeds in Marsanne, and proportionally low stem mass make for an only mildly phenolic/tannic amber wine. I pressed as hard as the equipment would allow to get as much tannin as possible. The wine finished fermentation, went through malolactic conversion, and aged on lees in neutral American oak barrels (ex-chardonnay barrels), where the inherently reductive chemistry of the Rocks fruit amplified the residual flavors of neutral American oak.

This wine is super low in alcohol, at only 9.6% abv, but it drinks much bigger and tastes much fuller on the palate than the alcohol number suggests because of the tannin/phenolic content extracted from the skins and stems. This is still a relatively short-macerated amber wine, which places it stylistically between a more standard crisp white wine and a traditional long-macerated buried Kvevri/amphora wine. There is some pure Marsanne stone fruit flavor and aroma, plus some creamy and toasty flavors from the underlying reductive chemistry of the juice and lees, and interaction with the neutral American oak barrels. This is a great aperitif and works well at a wide temperature range, from very cold up all the way through 55-60 °F, but I like it best around 45 °F. I like the wine with fish, chicken, and lighter pork dishes as well as a wide range of legumes and vegetables.

The 2019 Amber Wine is available in the Marginalia webstore.