

## Snowden Vineyards – St. Helena California

October 26, 2016

*A terroir-focused effort benefits from a “first-class” French connection since the winery shares winemakers with Domaine Dujac*

**The Winery:** Snowden is a vineyard-based wine producer, meaning they don't own their own winery. The property is located on the east slope of the Napa Valley between Rutherford and St. Helena and has produced wine grapes continuously since being homesteaded in 1878. Today, Snowden has a total of 23 acres of planted vines spread across several blocks at elevations ranging from 600 to 900 feet. For many years, they were growers for other producers, including Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and Silver Oak Cellars. In 1993 they began keeping back their favorite blocks to produce their own wines. From producing 383 cases in 1993, today it now produces approximately 3,000 cases per year.

The family has been tending vineyards on their property since Wayne and Virginia Snowden purchased the property in 1955. They had two sons at the time, Randy and Scott Snowden, ages 5 and 8. When Wayne died in 1977, Virginia asked Scott and Randy to take over management of the ranch. Virginia has since died and the ranch, including its vineyards and the resulting wines, are operated by a company owned by Scott and his wife, Joan, and Randy and his wife, Janet. They don't own interests in any other wineries.

The vineyard comprises 160 acres, of which only 23 are planted and there is no interest in removing woods to plant more vineyards. All of their vineyards are in locations where there were vineyards, orchards, or abandoned vineyards or orchards when they acquired the ranch. *Snowden has, however, begun the planning work to construct their own winery on the property.*

While Snowden has always had the goal of producing wines that are expressive of the terroir and not of over engineering their wines, their methods of winemaking have evolved over time. During the initial years Snowden, like many others, utilized measures such as long macerations, acid adjustment, sugar additions, use of digestive enzymes and a higher percentage of new oak. Today their farming is careful and less invasive and well on its way toward adopting organic farming methods throughout the vineyard with no herbicides or pesticides. Some of these new methods include using organic mildew control, wild yeast fermentation and only 50% new oak.

**The Winemaker:** Perhaps the single most important differentiator for Snowden is the winemaker, Diana Snowden Seysses, who is Scott Snowden's oldest daughter. After receiving a BS degree in Viticulture and Enology from the University of California at Davis and working at several wineries in California, she moved to France where she initially worked in Bordeaux and then moved on to Burgundy. Today she's the enologist at Domaine Dujac and also participates in winemaking at Triennes in Provence. Both wineries are owned by her husband's family, Dujac. *While Domaine Dujac had only been in existence for a little over 41 years after Jacques Seysses's father purchased Domaine Marcel Graillet for his son, Dujac is now ranked by many as one of the finest and innovative estates in Burgundy.* Diana now splits her time between Snowden and Dujac. Her French experience is a perfect match for a winery focused on terroir and a more Burgundian-style of wine making. The concept of delivering terroir to glass is, of course, longstanding in France, as are the non-invasive winemaking techniques that have proven to best serve that goal. Diana didn't have to change Snowden's perspective on winegrowing, but has helped add her old-world wine experience to significantly enhance efforts at Snowden.

### Wine Research

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**The Wine:** The winery largely produces Cabernet Sauvignon, with lesser amounts of Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Sauvignon Blanc and Malbec Rose. Starting in 2012, and after having replanted the “Palomino Hill” block, the winery moved away from a Bordeaux-style blend which included Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, to a wine that, at least for the 2013, 2014 and 2015 vintages has been 98% Cabernet Sauvignon and 2% Petit Verdot. With this change Snowden also switched from a “reserve-based” system and more toward a vineyard-based system. For many years, one particular vineyard area on the property produced the highest quality Cabernet Sauvignon and was consistently the heart of Snowden’s reserve wines. This area was called “Palomino Hill” after the grape variety growing on the property when it was first purchased in 1955. Unfortunately, the vines on Palomino Hill were planted on AXR-1 rootstock. They eventually gave way to phylloxera, which began to affect not only vine health, but also the quality of the wine produced. Gradually the quality of wines produced fell from their first wine to the second, then were sold to other producers, and finally the block was replanted in 2011. Snowden produced one barrel from 800 pounds gleaned in the 2012 growing year and soon realized the area was once again producing wines of top quality. They decided to bottle the wine as a vineyard designate, rather than a reserve to honor this particular site; and also because they believe a vineyard designation tells consumers more than a “reserve” designation does.

### Select Snowden Tasting Notes – 2014 Release

#### Brothers Vineyard:

The Cabernet Sauvignon is made from 98% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot. The wine was aged in 18 months in French Oak, 50% new and 50% used oak. Only 696 cases were made.

**The Winery:** One sign of a great wine is its magical tendency to vanish. The cork is pulled, and the next minute the last drops are falling into a glass. My husband and I had this experience while enjoying the Brothers 2014 with buffalo steak. The 2014 Brothers is gloriously drinkable, with aromas of crème de cassis, cured meats, lavender, huckleberry jelly and blueberry – sweet and savory with structured, focused length.

#### The Ranch:

The Cabernet Sauvignon is made from 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot. The wine was aged in 18 months in French Oak, 50% new and 50% used oak. Only 1891 cases were made.

**The Winery:** A bit shyer than years past, the 2014 Ranch has a bouquet of pencil lead and steel, red fruit, marzipan, blackberries and cracked black pepper. Red fruit and anise persist on the palate with vigorous tannins and bright acidity - enjoy immediately and for the next decade.

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