



Sustainable Winemaking at Littorai

We are committed to winemaking with as little intervention as possible, but we do not use the word “never” at Littorai. We gave up almost all use of yeast nutrients, enzymes or other fermentation aids many years ago. Virtually all our primary and malolactic fermentations are spontaneous, native fermentations. We rarely acidify any wines, preferring to pick the wines at a brix level which allows for the natural acidity to be sufficient. As a young man, I did not believe that there is a noticeable difference between natural and added acid in wine. After many years of careful tasting, I find that I can often detect this difference. I am also struck by how natural acidity seems to hold wines in balance even when the acidity is “low” according to enology school standards. We avoid the use of micro-oxygenation, reverse osmosis and other high-tech winemaking tools. Whenever possible we rack wines on the waning moon cycle as we find that the lees are more compact during this time and that the wines are more brilliantly clear. We like to bottle on the waning moon also, as we believe that wines are less subject to oxidation during that time. Fining wines with any substance has become a rare event at Littorai. Other than wines which do not undergo malolactic fermentation (Chenin Blanc or Vin Gris of Pinot Noir) we have filtered less than a handful of wines in 24 years and over 200 different bottlings.

Regenerative Farming at Littorai

Charles Heintz, Cerise and Hirsch all agreed to convert the Littorai blocks to farming using only organically certified materials beginning in 2008, thus ensuring that the vast majority of our sources are farmed using only organically certified materials. In each case, the Littorai blocks were the first on the properties to be converted to organic farming. In 2011 Cerise and Hirsch began the conversion to biodynamic farming for the Littorai blocks. We hold a long-term lease on Roman Vineyard. It has been farmed using only organically certified materials since inception and was converted to biodynamic techniques in 2008.

Expressed in acreage terms, beginning in 2017:

- 100% of Littorai’s vineyard sources is farmed using only organically certified materials
- 85% is farmed using biodynamic methods (all sites we own or lease and most others)
- 49% is estate production

Why we do not use certification systems

Some portion of organically certified food is produced on factory-style farms which have merely substituted organically certified products for synthetic ones and made few changes otherwise. To us, this is not “organic”; it is a substitution game. We call this “organic substitution” farming. “Organic” to us means the limitation or better yet, elimination, of all fertilizers, including organic ones, and the elimination, of all insecticides, including organic ones. It means increasing the soil health through the careful and strategic use of cover crops and diversified farming techniques. It means farming with the wild: practicing agro-ecological farming.

There is a world of difference between a Littorai-style vineyard farmed using only organically certified materials and a chemically farmed or organic substitution vineyard. Littorai style organic vineyards live in the year of their production. In other words, if conditions are difficult in the spring, the vines truly live that experience. At times, they are not pretty. Their leaves almost never get that deep, vibrant green color of a chemically farmed or organic substitution vineyard. They struggle. During the first years of transition from chemical farming, vines often have a rough time, rather like children changing schools. After a few years, they settle in and are more resilient and self-sufficient than chemically farmed vineyards. Always, through growth rate and leaf shape and color, you see them living the season rather than living in a chemically induced bubble. As farmers, we don’t need to taste the difference in the wines to be convinced. We know that over the long term (and everything in wine is truly about the long term) that difference will reveal itself in better wine quality and greater terroir expression.

Rudolf Steiner’s approach to farming, often called biodynamic farming, (BD) takes using only organic materials as a starting point and adds many more dimensions. In a BD vineyard, the goal is not only to use only organically certified materials, and as few as possible, but to generate as many of the farm’s needs as possible *on site*. If *on site* isn’t possible then as nearby as possible. The farm is a self-contained organism which seeks to achieve a natural stasis with its environment. This balance will minimize, but not eliminate pests and diseases. They will be reduced to a level with which both plant and farmer can live. The farmer works with celestial rhythms to further harmonize the farm with its environment.

It is our experience that with rigorous winemaking, wine from a well-managed biodynamic vineyard expresses terroir like no other. Through biodynamic practices, many of the yearly, weather-related difficulties experienced in the organic paradigm are overcome. In other words, we can produce vines which express the year and yet overcome its greatest challenges, all in a self sustained, self contained model. While we understand the arguments for certification systems and we believe that they are entirely appropriate in some situations, we also believe that the truest motivation for engaging in sustainable farming practices should not be for marketing purposes but should be for the good of the land, for the good of those who work it and for the future generations to whom it truly belongs. For this reason, we do not employ any certification systems.