

Littorai

THE NAME

Littorai (lit'tōr-i) is a plural derivative of the Latin word Litor, which means the coasts.

THE PROPRIETORS

Heidi and Ted Lemon. Ted is a lifelong winemaker who began his career by receiving an Enology degree from the Université de Dijon in 1981. He worked at many prestigious estates in Burgundy: Domaine Georges Roumier, Domaine Bruno Clair, Domaine Parent, Domaine De Villaine, Domaine Delorme and most importantly Domaine Dujac. He was the first American ever selected as winemaker/vineyard manager of a Burgundian estate, Domaine Guy Roulot in Meursault, and remained in Burgundy through 1984. He moved to Napa Valley in 1985 and lived and worked there for 18 years. Ted has been consultant to prominent North Coast wineries: Franciscan Estates, Clos Pegase, Green and Red Vineyard, Reverie, Howell Mountain Vineyards, Archery Summit Winery in Oregon, Burn Cottage Vineyard in New Zealand and many more.

GEOGRAPHY

In 1992, we spent months traveling the vineyards of the west coast from Seattle to Santa Barbara looking for the best growing conditions for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. At that time, the extreme north coast was virtually unknown. We concluded that the area which had the greatest unexplored potential for these two varieties was the true north coast of California. We believe that the finest Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are grown near the littoral zone of the continent, hence this is where we source our grapes. Littorai searches to unearth the finest vineyards at the very boundary of where grapes can be successfully ripened. Our first vintage was 1993.

TERROIR

We use the plural word "coasts" intentionally for we are convinced that the geology, topography and mesoclimates of the extreme western portion of the continent north of San Francisco create a diverse series of unique terroirs, each with its own characteristics. The word Littorai also reminds us that wine, this noblest agricultural product, arises from the interaction of place (vineyard), time (vintage) and man. It is this complex interaction which makes wine so endlessly fascinating.

PHILOSOPHY

Our philosophy toward winegrowing was profoundly influenced by Ted's years in Burgundy, since Ted learned the trade from such prominent winemakers as Jacques Seysses, Aubert De Villaine and Jean Marie Roumier. To them we owe an eternal debt. We have never lost that sense of awe and admiration Ted felt when he first began working in Morey Saint Denis and it is that respect for the mystery of wine which Littorai is all about.

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788 Gold Ridge Rd, Sebastopol, CA 9547 • www.littorai.com Tel 707/823-9586 Fax 707/963-7332



GOALS

Littorai Wines produces approximately 5,000 cases of wine per year. We will not grow beyond our current production level. This allows us to handcraft and manage Littorai as a family estate in the tradition of the great artisanal winegrowing estates of Europe. Every year we strive passionately to produce ever better wines, applying our many years of experience and always seeking to fine tune our vineyard and cellar practices. We concentrate entirely on producing fine Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. If we find vineyards which have unique and exciting potential, we will add them to the family as vineyard designates. By the same token, if we are dissatisfied with the quality of fruit from a given vineyard in any year, we simply will not produce it. This practice is widely accepted and praised in traditional European winemaking. It is called declassification.

This philosophy requires that our clients understand, as we do, that fine wine is not a commodity. We cannot simply invent more of it to satisfy demand. Indeed, that is what distinguishes it from its less expensive brethren.

TECHNIQUE

There are no substitutes for low yields and careful site and vine selection. Winegrowing is a wonderful word, for it implies that the object is not to produce the most beautiful vine or grape cluster but to produce the finest wine. We believe in minimal intervention, long lees contact and gentle handling of the fruit and wine at all times. We do not like pumps or filtration and avoid them as much as possible.

We barrel ferment all our Chardonnays. The Pinot Noir wines are fermented in small, traditional Pinot Noir fermenters. We often retain at least some proportion of whole clusters. We punch down. If nature is willing, all our wines undergo native yeast fermentation and complete, native malolactic fermentation. We do not believe that chemical additives are consistent with terroir inspired winemaking. We strive to avoid all chemical inputs to our wines be they enzymes, nutrients, fining agents, or acids. We strictly limit the use of sulfur dioxide.

We passionately believe that farming using only organic materials is the starting point for producing great terroir wines. As in winemaking, we strive to avoid chemical inputs in our farming as much as humanly possible. In addition to using only organic materials, we avoid all fertilizers. Estate produced compost is our "fertilizer" of choice. We farm all the sites which we own or lease using biodynamic techniques and according to the agricultural philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. For those sites which we do not farm ourselves, we use by-the-acre contracts to insure maximum quality and vineyard control and we strongly encourage all our farmer partners to use only organically certified materials. We do not employ farm certification systems as we believe that the true motivation for engaging in sustainable farming practices should be for the good of the land, for those who work it and for the future generations to whom it truly belongs.

ESTHETICS

We are sensitive to high alcohol levels and overripe flavors in wine. We prefer wines of finesse, balance and length. We find excessive alcohol levels to be a detriment to the marriage with fine food. We don't make wines for competitions, ratings or trends; we make the kinds of wine which we most like to drink at home around the dinner table. We like to use approximately fifteen to twenty five percent new wood for aging our wines as an element of complexity, but never want you to think "oak" when you taste a Littorai wine. All these attributes contribute to creating wines which improve and blossom with cellaring. Littorai produces age worthy wines.

Finally, and most importantly, we believe in that quality lost in so much of modern life and modern winegrowing: patience.