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WHAT TO DRINK NEXT

Homestead Wines What it means when the winemaker actually lives among the vines

By Ray Isle

WHAT DOES HOME MEAN? For some winemakers, it means a house surrounded by vines—a place where they raise their family and tend livestock, where growing grapes and making wine isn't just a job but a way of life.

Being present, day and night, amidst your vines means taking some things into account that others might not—as a winemaker in Italy once said to me, “My kids play in my vines; why would I spray them with insecticides?” With this group of vintners, organic farming (or biodynamic, or regenerative—any of the constellation of approaches that run counter to conventional farming) is definitely more prevalent. Scale comes into play, too. Small doesn't always mean better—there are any number of good wines made by large wineries—but when you farm your land yourself, a personal knowledge of each dip and furrow in the ground, of seasonal changes in the weather over the span of years, and of each vine's individual character becomes an inevitability rather than an option.

Whether you pay attention to these wines isn't just about how they taste. Plenty of mass-produced wines are honed to tantalize your senses in just the right way to make you want another sip, just as a fast-food hamburger is. Choosing wine that's the product of a homestead is more about origin and approach. Wine is a product of the earth; knowing the farmer is tied to their land—and so is driven to treat the land with care and conscience—ought to make a difference to anyone about to take that first sip.

2017 RAVENTÓS I BLANC BLANC DE BLANCS (\$22)

Pepe Raventós, who lives just above his oldest vineyards on this historic Spanish estate, can trace his family's farming history back more than 400 years. His sparkling blanc de blancs has a compelling scent of freshly baked bread and layers of lemon and apple flavor.

2018 NAVARRO VINEYARDS GEWÜRZTRAMINER ESTATE BOTTLED (DRY) (\$24)

Ted Bennett and Deborah Cahn bought their land in the Anderson Valley back in 1973 and planted their first Gewürztraminer vines in 1975. Their dry version is full of classic lychee and spice notes.

2012 MURGO ETNA BRUT (\$26)

The Scammacca del Murgò family farms grapes, olives, and fruit for preserves on the slopes of Mount Etna, and they have done so through repeated eruptions from this still-active volcano; fortitude is a given. Their signature sparkling wine is crisp and bright, with orange and floral honey notes.

2017 THE EYRIE VINEYARDS CHARDONNAY (\$27)

The view from Jason Lett's back door tells you everything you need to know: rows of vines, climbing into the Willamette Valley hills. Eyrie is known for Pinots, but the Chardonnay is equally impressive, full of flavor (green apple, lemon balm) and lifted by zesty acidity.

2018 DOMAINE DELAPORTE SANCERRE (\$34)

The Delaporte family has farmed near Chavignol, in the heart of the Sancerre region, since the 17th century. Today, Matthieu Delaporte farms the land organically and makes wines that include this irresistibly juicy bottling, with its red grapefruit flavor and hints of freshly mown grass.