



Westwood's Annadel Gap Vineyard is set in the northernmost end of Sonoma Valley, giving the site all the requisite climatic and geological elements necessary in an extraordinary winegrowing site.

THE WESTWOOD GANG

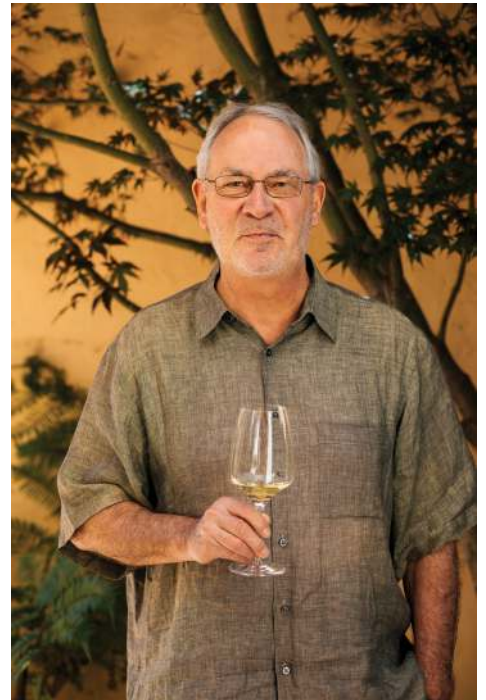
WISE EXPERIENCE,
YOUTHFUL ENERGY,
CONSCIENTIOUS
PROFESSIONALISM
REIGNITE A BRAND

BY DIANE DENHAM / PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RUBIN

WESTWOOD WINES' STORY is a perfect example of why any definition of terroir should encompass more than climate, soil and aspect. The oft quoted "great wines are made in the vineyard" is true, but the vineyard doesn't plant itself or put its fermented fruit in barrels. Westwood's Annadel Gap Vineyard, located at the northernmost tip of Sonoma County, checks all the scientific boxes of a superior viticultural site. Nonetheless, human effort, skill and heart is what elevates a site's innate potential to its highest artistic expression in a finished wine. At Westwood, that's what's happening right now. The team that first came together in 2014 is working to lift the wines from the Annadel Gap Vineyard from good to great. As winemaker Ben Cane puts it, "Everything that we do—or don't do—in the vineyard is toward morphing what is already a good site into something exceptional."

In late 2013, Westwood came to a crossroads. The project—initiated in 1998 when a group of wine-loving businessmen/friends purchased Annadel Gap—had stalled. So Carl Stanton, one of the founding partners, took a more active role as Managing Partner and began assembling an elite gang of wine professionals to help revitalize Westwood.

Enlisting the assistance of legendary winemaker David Ramey was Stanton's first brilliant move. David's winemaking credits include Chalk Hill, Matanzas Creek, Rudd and Dominus Estates, and his own sought-after wines. Additionally, David's many years in the Northern California wine milieu makes him a gold mine for wine business connections. Exhibit A: David Ramey and Westwood Managing Director David Green first worked together 17 years ago at Lancaster Estate and have since collaborated on other projects. Exhibit B: Ben Cane, the hot young winemaker seven years at the helm of Silver Oak's Twomey, was ready for a new challenge when he ran into David Ramey. "David said, 'I may have an interesting new project for you,'" says the Aussie. Exhibit C: Ramey and Cane's connection indirectly led to young Natalie Winkler, now Cane's right-hand gal.



Westwood's consulting winemaker, David Ramey, is a legend in California wine.

Assistant Winemaker Natalie Winkler is shepherding the process for both biodynamic and organic certifications for Annadel Gap Vineyard.





Westwood Managing Director David Green. With Green's arrival in 2016 the potential of the brand was harnessed.



As Managing Partner, co-founder Carl Stanton began assembling an elite gang of wine professionals to help revitalize Westwood

All this connecting was happening just six weeks before the 2014 harvest. "David [Ramey] came to me and said, 'You're gonna miss this harvest,'" Stanton recounts, eyes wide with remembered dismay. "I said, 'It's my first harvest! I can't miss my first harvest!'"

Cane, who worked his first career harvest in 1997, says, "It was the most stressful harvest of my life! We didn't have anything. The winery was a mess, and Natalie couldn't start until two weeks before harvest. Luckily, through my Twomey relationships I found a few good coopers who happened to have some decent barrels in stock." 2014 was a true test of mettle for the nascent cadre. Adding to the pressure, all the Pinot Noir came in at the same time. Yet somehow, with everyone on the team pitching in, Stanton didn't have to miss his first harvest.

As for the raw material the Annadel Gap Vineyard provides, its location at a narrow choke point between Sonoma Mountain and Mount Hood gives the site all the requisite climatic and geological elements necessary in a potentially extraordinary winegrowing site. Climate: cool nights, morning fog, afternoon breezes. Check. Soils: well-draining combination of volcanic, glacial and alluvial. Check. Aspect: gentle, south-facing slope. Check.

Add to these physical advantages the fact that the Annadel Gap Vineyard is being cared for in the most natural way humanly possible. Natalie, the Millennial in the gang, began working on her days off with Philippe Coderey, one of the world's best biodynamic consultants. Stanton exclaims, "It wasn't long before she had us convinced to make the vineyard biodynamic!" She's shepherding the process for both biodynamic and organic certifications.

The vineyard is planted to Rhône varieties and Pinot Noir, including some rarer clones that Westwood happily bottled in single-clone wines. We tasted both the 2015 Estate Pinot Noir (1,125 cases, SRP \$44) and the 2014 Heritage Clones (98 cases, SRP \$56). Heritage Clone's small production means no wholesale, but ripe strawberry and rose petal characteristics make it a nice personal cellar selection. David Ramey believes all the Westwood Pinots should easily age ten years.

After seven years exclusively focused on Pinot at Twomey, Cane embraced the opportunity to work with Rhône varieties. We tasted the delicious, rife with peachy stone fruit, 2016 Rousanne/Viognier. Alas, there isn't much of it. Currently, Annadel only has a total of five rows planted to whites.

In reds, Westwood brings to the table small quantities of single variety bottlings. We tasted the 2015s of Estate Syrah (190 cases, SRP \$56) and Mourvèdre (100 cases, SRP \$48) at Westwood's Sonoma square tasting salon. Later, we enjoyed the 2014 Estate Cunoise over lunch at The Girl & the Fig. The meaty and spicy Cunoise with duck confit is unbeatable.

As its vision coalesces, the company is doing some honing. Two proprietary red blends have been pared to one. Legend isn't strictly Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre, but it's a solid stake in the increasingly popular GSM category. Barely two months in bottle, the 2015 Legend (1,560 cases, SRP \$44) had already melded into a very smooth operator. "With the arrival of David Green in 2016," says Stanton, "the potential of the brand was harnessed and the portfolio trimmed to ignite its next chapter. Legend is the embodi-

ment of these disparate pieces of the puzzle that reflect this amazing site.”

Nearly three years after that first scary 2014 harvest, David Green says Westwood still has the feel of start-up, though it’s not. “It’s been 20 years in the making, but a project can’t come together until you get the right people on board.” Spending the day with them is fun and enlightening. There’s a palpable comradery arising from shoulders pushed to the wheel of a common cause and from loving what they do. The dynamic combination of wise experience, youthful energy and conscientious professionalism will indubitably guarantee Westwood’s success. Stanton, who’s already enjoyed considerable business success, admitted to occasionally feeling out of his comfort zone as they go through the revitalization process: “In my world, I’m more accustomed to consistency and getting better at one thing. That’s just not wine—it’s different every year. So, you have to trust your people. Here, consistency is in making the very best wine you can make every year.”



Winemaker Ben Cane came on board at Westwood for the 2014 harvest.



Legend is a solid stake in the increasingly popular GSM category.



The Westwood Annadel Gap Vineyard Estate Pinot Noir and the small-production Heritage Clones Pinot Noir.



The Westwood Estate Mourvèdre shows Ben Cane’s deft hand with Rhône varietals.

Managing Director David Green, Managing Partner Carl Stanton and Assistant Winemaker Natalie Winkler walk Westwood’s Annadel Gap Vineyard.

