



Technical data cards help us distinguish the differences between cool, warm and hot vintages in the Umpqua Valley.

# Domestic Grüner is Gaining Ground in Oregon's Umpqua Valley



A rare opportunity to taste all eleven vintages of Reustle-Prayer Rock Vineyards Grüner Veltliner brings together esteemed professionals from throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

THE SOMM JOURNAL TASTES THROUGH TEN REMARKABLE VINTAGES WITH THE CATEGORY LEADER, **REUSTLE-PRAYER ROCK VINEYARDS**

by Allyson Gorsuch / photos by John Curley



## IN THE U.S., GRÜNER VELTLINER

plantings are growing but still hold a minimal percentage as far as overall acreage. But it was Reustle—Prayer Rock Vineyards who paved the path in the Umpqua Valley, Oregon, by planting the native Austrian grape in 2003, with its domestic debut vintage in 2005. In celebration of ten years of Grüner Veltliner production, Stephen Reustle and his team led an unprecedented vertical tasting of all ten vintages for an inquisitive group of sommeliers, chefs and wine buyers at the Fountaingrove Inn in Sonoma County in August.

Reustle's 2015 Grüner Veltliner was his first to be produced utilizing concrete eggs. The beautiful weight from the constant circulation of the lees accompanies ripe pear, peach pit, oyster shells, orchard blossoms and celery salt—an interesting wine to say the least, not to mention delicious and thought-provoking. We taste the 2005–2014, exploring cool, warm and hot vintages side by side. Evenly split, the cool vintages of 2005, 2007, 2010 and 2011 show more savory characteristics, with a leaner mouthfeel; the warmer vintages of 2006, 2008 and 2012 display just ripe fruit with more body; the hot years of 2009, 2013 and 2014 exhibit riper fruit, but careful picking decisions keep the acidity and alcohol levels in balance. "We're really making solar collectors," smiles Reustle when asked about the remarkable similarity of the wines given vintage variation.

The 2008, a warm year, "is exploding with lush guava and mango, exotic jasmine and bergamot. The palate is soft yet rich—creamy custard and passionfruit, star anise and macadamia nut; a lovely backbone of acidity and freshness with a complex pal-

ate," describes Alexis Iaconis, Senior Estate Manager at Copain Wines and Sommelier Consultant for Barn Diva in Healdsburg. With silt and loam soils, Reustle relies on different rootstocks for consistency in the vineyards. "The most important thing is that they're well-drained," explains Reustle.

Matt Dulle, Sommelier at Single Thread Farms in Healdsburg, shares, "Reustle's Grüners align themselves more closely with the classic Kamptal style than to that of either Federspiel or Smaragd from the Wachau in that they are slightly elevated in alcohol and deliberately exclude botrytis-affected fruit," a fortunate observation as Reustle intentionally avoids *Botrytis cinerea*.

"When you let the sugar creep up and maintain acidity in the process, you get a richness in the mid-palate that I like so much; it makes the wines so food-friendly," remarks Reustle. We enjoy Brie with roasted peaches and a smoked scallop and mushroom mousse with our ten Grüner Veltliners—the rich and lean and the sweet and savory bites mimic the wines themselves.



**Assistant Winemaker Wade Smith, Smith's wife Denise, Sales and Marketing Director Gloria Reustle and Winemaker Stephen Reustle.**

We transition into Syrah for our next vertical tasting of ten vintages, again exploring the differences between cool, warm and hot vintages (although hot in Umpqua Valley is relative). Syrah shows the vintage variation more than Grüner Veltliner, interesting as the technical data remains consistent throughout the years. As expected, the cooler vintages exhibit more savory and smoked meat characteristics while the hot

vintages showcase more luscious fruit.

Reustle employs a blend of 50 percent French and 50 percent American oak for his Syrah expression. "I just like the combination," he laughs. Typically, the wine spends one year in either French or American oak and one year in bottle prior to release. The three best American oak barrels are isolated to produce Gloria's Syrah, named for Reustle's wife, who handles sales and marketing for the small winery.

Reustle beams as he introduces the 2012 Syrah. "2012 was the perfect winemaker's year in Umpqua." As a result, the wine was selected to compete in the 6 Nations Wine Challenge, pitting Syrahs from Australia, the United States, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and South Africa against each other for the best of the best.

Accompanying our vertical, duck rillettes with a cherry gastrique as well as bresaola, Manchego and tapenade flirt with the Syrah flavors, the duck just beautiful with the warmer vintages and the bresaola melding with the cooler vintage wines.

While the focus of the day embraced Grüner Veltliner and Syrah, Reustle—Prayer Rock Vineyards also produces Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Pinot Noir, Grenache, Malbec, Merlot and Tempranillo. On the 200-acre property, 40 acres of hillside vineyards, Reustle—Prayer Rock Vineyards is producing interesting wines and is helping catapult the Umpqua Valley into international awareness. SJ