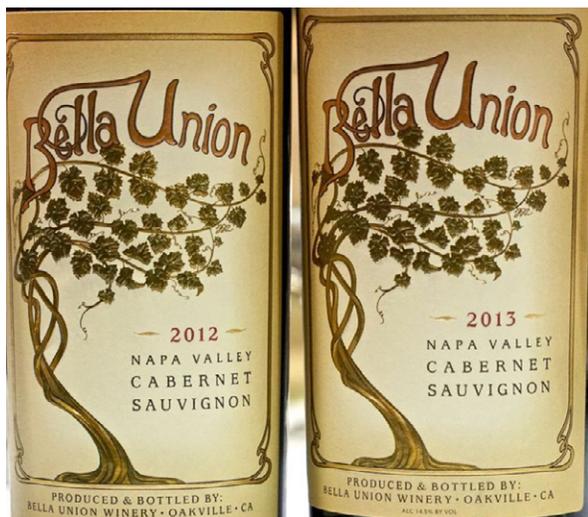


Bella Union—the Super Baby Wine is Born!

August 25, 2015



Remember how they gossiped when Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie got married? Everyone conjectured that their kids would be stunning, runway model gorgeous.

Well that's what we've been expecting in wine country, after two of Napa Valley's super stud wineries, Far Niente and Nickel & Nickel, joined forces to make a new wine; the baby will finally bounce into life next week and will be named Bella Union.

A small group of local wine writers were invited to the winery today to taste the wine and explore the new venture in the heart of Rutherford.

(Rutherford population 480, but with the influx of down-valley writers today, the population soared to 490.)



Larry Maguire, director of Far Niente, Nickel & Nickel and now, Bella Union.

“We started making wine at Far Niente with the 1982 vintage and have only ever produced estate wine,” says Larry Maguire, director of the two parent wineries.

“Then we started Nickel & Nickel, our effort to bring high quality, single-vineyard-only wines to market.”

“What we did not have in our portfolio until now was a blended Cabernet made from different parcels around Napa Valley; Bella Union fills that niche,” Larry finishes explaining.



The core fruit for Bella Union comes from a 25-acre Cabernet vineyard along fabled Bella Oaks Lane, in Rutherford.

Napaman knows the vineyard well; as it is adjacent to his home, the sulfuring tractors, the chattering, early morning grape pickers and seasonal pruners have awakened him enough mornings that Napaman *earned* his invitation to the inaugural launch!



The name Bella Union is a nod to the history of Bella Oaks Lane, first called Bella Union Roadway in the 1880s. At that time, the country lane led into the Mayacamas Mountain range and the Bella Union Mining Company.



Beth Nickel

Speaking of the wine's name, Beth Nickel, who with Larry Maguire hosted the reception and launch event today, commented, "I think with a name like Bella Union—meaning 'Pretty Union'—this wine may become a staple at weddings!" Beth and her late husband Gil Nickel, started Far Niente in 1979.



The Bella Union vineyard is located along the western bench of the Rutherford appellation. Planted in loose, loamy soil, the Cabernet vines here are expected to produce 2 to 3 tons of fruit per acre. In addition to Cabernet Sauvignon, small amounts of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot are planted.

In the initial 2012 release, 60% of the wine comes from the Bella Union vineyard; it has been augmented with Cabernet, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot from elsewhere in the valley. While the label does not make an Organic claim, the Bella Union vineyard is maintained as such.

The winery has only produced 1,250 cases of the 2012 release.

The Wine



Oh boy, this is good stuff!

The inaugural 2012 Bella Union Cabernet Sauvignon is delicious. It exhibits bright fruit on the nose, with hints of cherries and plums on the palate; after three-quarters of an hour, the wine really starts to relax and have a good time in your mouth.

The 2013 vintage, which will not be released until February, has an even deeper, darker composition, hinting at cocoa and chocolate on the finish. I made a note in the margin of my notebook that the 2013 Bella Union was like the 2012 only with a deeper suntan.

The Winemaker



Winemaker Megan Melief

Winemaker Megan Melief, formerly assistant winemaker at Nickel & Nickel, has turned out two dazzling debut wines at Bella Union. I would not be surprised to hear polite applause at the unveiling of the 2012 Cabernet but the 2013 will cause drinkers to jump to their feet loudly clapping and demanding an encore. “Bravo!” they will shout. And if they don’t, they should.

In 2005, Megan graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a degree in Molecular and Cell Biology.

Following this, she earned a Masters of Pharmacology at the University of Washington.

Upon graduating, Megan decided to forego pharmacology as a career and, instead, pursue her growing passion for wine. Her first winery gig found her pulling hoses and working midnight pump overs as a cellar intern at Seattle’s JM Cellars.

Megan was drawn back to her native Northern California and in 2009, she joined Nickel & Nickel as enologist, eventually becoming assistant winemaker.