

Ep 85: Biodynamics, Napa droughts, and the differences of Sauvignon Blanc between California and New Zealand with Quintessa winemaker Rebekah Wineburg



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just can not get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, to all the thirsty people in this world. Welcome back to another episode. And today is a goody. I'm talking with the winemaker from Quintessa, which produces some of the most desirable wines coming out of Napa Valley. I'm tasting their Sauvignon Blanc blend today. Question, have you ever heard of Sauvignon Musque? Well, I hadn't until speaking with Rebekah. So if you haven't, stay tuned, you soon sure will. So alongside talking about the grape varieties, we'll be comparing Sauvignon Blanc from Napa Valley to New Zealand. So you can really understand the differences and nuances between the two. We'll be looking at different fermentation vessels, what they all do and how that actually affects the flavors of the wines. Now, Quintessa is a biodynamic winery. And so we'll talk about some of those biodynamic preparations and what it's like to farm holistically. And Rebekah will talk about the droughts that California has been suffering, and actually why it's so important to manage the rain and how that affects the vines. So there's loads in this episode, I'm not gonna do any more talking. I am gonna go over to that chat now.

Janina Doyle 00:01:58 Hello. And how are you doing Rebekah?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:02:01 Oh, I'm doing wonderful. It's wonderful to be here with you.

Janina Doyle 00:02:04 Now. I think I really want to touch on something very important right now. And this is your last name, Wineburg, Rebekah Wineburg. Do you feel, do you feel like this had anything to do with becoming a winemaker or is this just a very happy coincidence?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:02:20 It's a happy coincidence and I'm ashamed to admit that it didn't occur to me until somebody else pointed it out.

Janina Doyle 00:02:27 Are you being serious?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:02:28 Yeah, I mean, I didn't, I, I got the idea of being a winemaker. Um, so I don't come from California. I don't come from a wine region or a wine family. I got the idea of being a winemaker quite young at 16 years old. And at that point it didn't occur to me really that it was my last

name. It didn't occur to me until I was applying for my first winery job, my first harvest job. And I had no experience. And the person who called me back and hired me, told me that it was my name that made her look at my resume twice and call me,.

Janina Doyle 00:03:01 There you go. That is fate. That is so funny. I actually think you may well have one of the best names in the wine industry, but we'll have to see, we'll have to...

Rebekah Wineburg 00:03:10 We'll have to see. There's Emily Wines. She's an MS.

Janina Doyle 00:03:13 But is that her last name?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:03:15 Wines is her last name. That one's pretty good.

Janina Doyle 00:03:19 Ah actually, that one's good as well. Well, okay. I put this out to everyone listening. Please get back to us. Do you know of anybody else in the wine industry with a destined name? Let us know. That's so funny. So you said that at 16, you, right, that's it, I'm gonna be a winemaker?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:03:34 Well, the idea came to me. So yeah, I grew up on the, um, east coast of the United States in Washington DC. And so, you know, no farming, no vineyards near there, or, you know, there are some near there, but there weren't any in DC of course. And it was on a family vacation to California that included a day trip up to Napa valley that I got the idea of being a winemaker.

Janina Doyle 00:03:59 Well, thank God for that one trip. Right?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:04:01 Right. What would I have done?

Janina Doyle 00:04:03 I mean, Napa. Is, was it the beauty? What was it when you came to Napa?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:04:07 It was the beauty. It was you're, you see this? And if, if you've ever, if you've never been here, I'll paint the picture. So Napa valley is a valley. Okay. So, we're in a valley on the south end, we're at the San Pablo Bay. We're about an hour away from San Francisco. And as you drive up Napa valley, it's pretty small. It's only 30 miles north to south and the valley floor five miles across at its widest point. So you're driving up this absolutely beautiful valley. You see the Mayacamas mountain on your west side, the Vaca mountain range on your east side. And then there's just this expanse of vineyards and beautiful trees and wineries and hot air balloons in the sky. And it just, I mean, yeah, it's, it's really, I think one of the most beautiful places, um, in the world

Janina Doyle 00:05:04 And you have been to quite a few, haven't you, so where has your, wine making journey taken you then?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:05:10 So I have had the opportunity, um, to work in, uh, Italy, in Bolgheri, which is incredible.

Janina Doyle 00:05:19 I've been there. Tick. Okay.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:05:20 Yes, I mean that, that something, um, that's up there in top 10 and in New Zealand, um, which is, you know, I think actually the most beautiful country in the world.

Janina Doyle 00:05:32 You're like, no, still Napa Napa wins, but it's so green.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:05:36 New Zealand is small. So it's got all this beauty in a very tight little package. California's big.

Janina Doyle 00:05:43 No, I like it. So what makes New Zealand special in terms of the vines and the vineyards that you went to visit?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:05:50 So I think what makes New Zealand special is, and, and these are the things in, in my mind that make every region or any great estate special is a combination of geology and climate and then culture. So in New Zealand you have the volcanics, young volcanics. You have a cooler climate and wet. So that's affected how those volcanics have broken down into their soils, which affects the, um, taste of their wine. And then you have a culture that like kind of Kiwi can do culture that doesn't have any pretension and has this, you know, they're isolated, they've had to do for themselves. Um, and they just have a really great feeling about them. So...

Janina Doyle 00:06:35 I love that. And you've also been to Oregon haven't you, winemaking as well?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:06:38 Yes, winemaking in Oregon as well. I've used winemaking as a way to finance my travels when I was younger.

Janina Doyle 00:06:46 I've used wine as a way to find, just in general, any excuse, wine is the reason. So how does Oregon being further north? I, I mean, obviously slightly cooler, hence why, you know, it's known for its Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, et cetera, but how, how does that compare then to Napa?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:07:02 So it is, you know, significantly cooler. Napa is, um, it's a, we're inland. So in California, every mountain range that you come in from the coast gets warmer. Um, and so Napa is a few mountain ranges in, so it's warmer, but we have the cooling effect of the San Pablo bay. So kinda a wind tunnel that comes up, um, from the Pacific. Oregon is cooler, different soils and quite wet. So,

Janina Doyle 00:07:29 Okay. So yeah so a good comparison with New Zealand.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:07:32 Yeah, so I, yeah. I went up there. It was wet. It felt wetter than New Zealand, to be honest, I went up there and it was when I was younger, and I was like, you know, maybe I could move up here and live up here. And I was like, then I was like, oh yeah, it rains a lot.

Janina Doyle 00:07:47 Yeah. So in that case, I wouldn't spend that much time here in the UK.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:07:51 I have been to the UK.

Janina Doyle 00:07:53 Yes. But you didn't stay did you? I mean, it's lovely for a trip. But maybe not so much full-time. No but anyway, we Brits, we like to just moan about the weather. That's just us. That is literally the number one subject. The first thing that anybody says, whenever you meet anyone, how's the weather? Oh the weather's rubbish, oh right, you know, it it's, um, you know, we, we're not very creative.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:08:13 Yeah here we talk about rain. It's like, how's the weather. Well, it hasn't rained, you know, it's beautiful right now.

Janina Doyle 00:08:19 Don't brag.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:08:20 Well, no...

Janina Doyle 00:08:20 Stop showing off

Rebekah Wineburg 00:08:21 We're we're in a drought. So it's like, you have this, it's February right now when we're talking. Um, and it is blue skies, not a cloud in the sky and it is, you know, high of 70 degrees.

Janina Doyle 00:08:36 Oh, what is that in, do you know Celsius?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:08:40 Oh my gosh. I only know a couple things in Celsius. So...

Janina Doyle 00:08:42 Wait 70, 70, 70 F to C this is, I'm always doing this on podcasts. 21

Rebekah Wineburg 00:08:49 21 In February.

Janina Doyle 00:08:50 That's actually gorgeous.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:08:51 Yes. Except we're supposed to have rain.

Janina Doyle 00:08:53 But you wanna have rain now surely then if you've been in a drought. So actually for people listening, at what point is it gonna start being a problem?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:09:01 You know, I, uh, it's like 20 years ago. We're in a significant... Um. No, so we, we have a Mediterranean climate here, so we get rain in the winter and all of our rain in the wintertime. And then we're completely dry during the growing season, which is why here in the north coast, in California, the, um, norm is to irrigate, but because of the, the system of our rainfall. And I know that a lot of people don't, you know, can be purist about dry farming, but you frankly, you don't get any rain in the growing season. And I will argue that being able to irrigate actually can allow you to train your vines for drought and to be more judicious in your water use. Um, but if we don't get that rain and snowfall in the winter, we're in trouble. So, but it's, you know, this is, this is the reality, and this is something this I think is our, our number one priority as a, as an industry. I think it's our number one priority here at Quintessa and in how we're thinking about our farming and our future is how to understand this changing climate and to be able to allow the vines to adapt and adapt ourselves to these conditions.

Janina Doyle 00:10:19 But have you found, with the fact that you've been struggling with a drought for such a long time, but by being judicious with your use of, um, how we water, is that sending the roots much further down, meaning actually they can tolerate the lack of rain so much more? Are they becoming, year on year? Are they getting better?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:10:39 They're getting better. And at, um, at being able to manage the conditions. So if you, if you don't control your irrigation or, you know, I'd say like sometimes if, if there's rain or if you're just relying on rainfall, um, and it's not consistent. You might not, you might have water stress during times that you don't want water stress. So say during bloom. You can't like control that, or you might have too much, um, if you are irrigating just crazy, like, oh, let's just irrigate, irrigate, irrigate, you're teaching the vines to be, to have, you know, more shallow roots to be weaker and to expect to not conserve themselves. So it's like here, we want to, our, our style or our philosophy of, of wine growing is to inform the vines. That's our job, we're stewards of the vines. So we wanna teach them to be able to manage the conditions to, they're they're running a marathon, not a sprint every season. So you wanna pace them, help them pace themselves.

Janina Doyle 00:11:43 I love that. Well, I think that segues us into Quintessa as a beautiful winery that you are. Like, I already know the answer, but can you tell everyone why you're so unique and special and beautiful and gorgeous? Can you tell us?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:11:56 I think this is one of the most beautiful estates, um, I've ever seen and certainly in Napa valley. So Quintessa is a estate in Rutherford. Rutherford is the heart of Napa valley. So right in the center of the valley. We are nestled along the Vaca mountain. So we're on the Eastern side and Quintessa is unique for a number of reasons, but, but the main one geologically is that we are on the valley floor because we are, um, technically on the valley floor. We are west of the Silverado trail, but we have a series of hillsides on the property. And those hillside are the artifact of some crazy geologic activity that happened like 5 million years ago where the Vaca mountain range was raising up quite fast and it reached a height and a weight that it couldn't manage. And there was this massive landslide. So as the landslide came off of the Vaca mountain range, that forms our farthest east, um, hillside. So we that's our Eastern Hills. And then that landslide was so powerful that it ripples up the earth. Like the earth will act like water at that moment and ripple up. Locally we call those things toe hills. They're there's the Toe Hills of Quintessa. So here in Ruthford, there's another kind Toe Hill. So that's like, imagine, so I'll paint the picture. Like people, we were in Napa valley, you're on the valley floor. It's fairly flat. There's a Napa river runs through the middle. And then you see these like knoles coming up. So sort of like these Hills in the middle of the, the valley, and it doesn't make any sense why they're there. So it turns out that's why they're there. And locally they're kinda like toe slopes, kinda pushed back up. Um, and we have a series of two of them at Quintessa, and then we run all the way to the Napa river. And as you follow that east to west, um, Quintessa, those hillsides, the three ridges and then down to the Napa river, you get quite a change in geology and soil types. So we have a very diverse terroir here. And I think that's the unique character of Quintessa is the diversity, it's a single estate. So the Quintessa red wine just comes from the, it's an estate wine of vineyard, but that vineyard has a lot of diversity within it. So it creates a, a very complex and layered wine,.

Janina Doyle 00:14:23 But I've looked at pictures and there's a beautiful pond or lake as well. Is it right in the middle?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:14:28 There is a 20 acre lake in the middle.

Janina Doyle 00:14:31 Oh, that's okay. When I say so when I say little, I mean, not so little.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:14:36 Yeah. The property itself is 280 acres. There are, um, when we're fully planting, our vineyards are 160 acres. There's this 20 acre lake in the middle, which is it existed before Quintessa. It's actually a, a damned lake and it's utilized as our reservoir. So it's at the center of the property surrounded by two of the hillsides. And as we have the winter rainfalls, it naturally collects the winter rain. Um, and then of course, we'll, we have some wells, we pump into the lake, um, in the winter and then utilize that for irrigation throughout the season.

Janina Doyle 00:15:13 There we go. Beautiful. Nature provides doesn't it? And I was, I was just saying on the label of your estate red, uh, the wine is the actual, the part of the lake. And then, and one of the Toe Hills or actually kind of two. It's, it's there on the picture of, uh, of the wine. It's beautiful, beautiful, beautiful painting. We talk about the beauty of the property, but also you are very respectful. Aren't you in Quintessa about how you farm. Everything is biodynamic. This is a very holistic approach. This is very important to you guys. Isn't it?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:15:49 It's very important. When, so the, um, our founders, Agustin and Valeria Huneus, um, when they found Quintessa in the late 1980s, it was a Virgin piece of land. It had never been farmed before.

Janina Doyle 00:16:03 Which is unusual, right? In Napa valley, nearly everything is...

Rebekah Wineburg 00:16:07 By that point. Yeah. That was very unusual. Um, pre 1980s and certainly pre 1960s, um, Napa valley was more ranching than vineyards. Um, you know, I know your listeners are, are mostly not American, but we had some, a very funny thing called prohibition. Um...

Janina Doyle 00:16:26 Oh no, no, no. I think we all, I wouldn't quite call it funny to be honest. Well maybe it's funny now?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:16:32 How did it happened? It's so, to me it's so crazy, to have made a law like that.

Janina Doyle 00:16:35 We, we wouldn't, we would not have happened. We would've been right there with our signs: Wine is life. Yeah, anyway.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:16:46 So the, the wine industry here didn't, um, really come back to life to the 1980s. But by that point, certainly valley floor would've been planted out. Um, this had been a vacation, um, home, a party place for a successful restaurateur from San Francisco in the fifties and sixties, and then his children inherited and could never quite agree on what to do with it. So it just kind of hung out and, I'm, it's so incredible. And Valeria Huneus found it, it was just it's rolling hillside. There were like five cows on the property having a good time. I think she said there was a donkey, there was a ranch house.

Janina Doyle 00:17:28 And they were like, guys, come on in. We don't mind. Respect us. We'll respect you. All is gonna go well.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:17:35 Exactly. And she just, she, she said she, she had been looking for a property that they could have as their family estate. So Agustin and Valeria had have worked in the wine industry since the 1960s. This has been their life's work. And at that point they wanted to find a property that they could work on together as a family. Valeria is a viticulturalist. So she studied, um, grape growing and Agustin is, and has run a series of incredibly successful wine brands starting with Concha y Toro in the 1960s.

Janina Doyle 00:18:05 Okay. Yep.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:18:06 Um, yeah, that little place. So they, they know wine, but they wanted a project that they could work on together and utilize everything that they had learned. And Valeria had been looking at places all up and down California, and she walked onto this property, which wasn't actually even actively for sale. And she said, she just felt, she felt something. She felt that this place had a soul and had something to say and has the potential to be a great wine estate of the world.

Janina Doyle 00:18:35 I really love that. The kinda, the connection.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:18:38 Oh, I mean, when you come out here, I mean, some of the pictures can, can show it a little bit, but when you walk out here, you feel it, there is a feeling here, there is a spirit of Quintessa, and she convinced them that she'd be a good steward of the land. And so Agustin and Valeria

purchased the property in 1989 and began developing the vineyard. And Valeria directed that, she designed, uh, the vineyard blocks. There's 26 blocks on the property that follow the contour of the lands. And she felt very deeply that she wanted to be a good steward of the land. So she, from the very beginning, insisted that no synthetic chemicals be used on this property. So Quintessa has been organically farmed since it's founding. And no trees were cut down. So, like I said, we're a 280 acre estate with 160 acre vineyard. There's the lake. And then the rest of that is native Oak Woodlands. So she maintained the native surroundings of Quintessa, which are incredibly important. And then in 1996, she got introduced to biodynamic, um, philosophy as well, and started introducing that to Quintessa. And now we are fully a biodynamic farm.

Janina Doyle 00:19:52 What does biodynamics mean to you? Or in fact for people, maybe I've touched on it several times in my podcast, but we can never hear it enough. And I love the holistic story. So what does it mean to you? What is it?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:20:03 So it is, it's sometimes very complicated to explain because it can be very esoteric and that is, and I think that is confusing, but also very powerful. Biodynamics is a philosophy, a philosophy that guides how you, the farmer interact with the property and that you think of the farm, or, you know, you treat the farm, it is an organism that is a whole, and that has its own interactions with the minerals underneath, with the cosmos, with the plants on the property, the animals that live on the property, that all of these are important and that you, the farmer, this, this philosophy kind of guides how you interact with that. Um, the central tenant is trying to close the circle. So that has a lot to do, um, that that really translates into thinking about fertility. So that inherently farming is extractive. Like every time every harvest comes around and I pull those grapes, I am extracting energy, minerals, nutrients from Quintessa. I'm taking those grapes. So how do I put that same fertility back in and as much as possible have it be from the estate? So we create our own compost. We, uh, most of the, the practices have to do actually with the compost pile and with the soil. So the kind of directives and some people think, you know, biodynamics can be, can seem a little woo, woo. But it's, it's all about soil health.

Janina Doyle 00:21:37 No, of course, because you want to get those microorganisms. Is that what it is? You know, in the soil, to start work, and doing their thing, they produce nutrients, they give minerals and that's all gonna go back into the grapes that we get to drink, right. That science.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:21:54 And now it's science. So it's so incredible to think that this philosophy and biodynamics, and, and when you read about it, this was the 1920s. So it was a, you know, reaction to some of the, the post, uh, world war, chemical farming. And they didn't, it's, it's only now and continuing that the science, like the tradition, like the science science that I studied in school is catching up to what these traditional practices, this traditional holistic farming practices, that your soil microbiome is what's most important.

Janina Doyle 00:22:27 It's like a human isn't it, it's our gut, our microbiome. We function better when we sort that out. So again, it's the guts of vine growing is the soil. Absolutely.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:22:39 Yeah. Exactly. And if you create a healthy vine or you allow conditions for the vine to be healthy, then they're gonna be resilient. They're going to be resisting pests and diseases. So it's a not about control. And I think that's where the philosophy comes in. It's as much as possible to try and take your ego out of it. That that's not easy to do.

Janina Doyle 00:23:01 Don't worry. I fully agree. I've a fabulous ego. No, get it.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:23:07 It's hard. OK, I have to observe, I have to listen instead of just putting my ego into this, and I think that makes better wine.

Janina Doyle 00:23:18 For sure. And I think at least people are starting to understand, like you mentioned to, to some, people think it's woo, woo. Of course, because you can't prove every single thing that you are doing, you have to feel it more. But I, I think for me, just like I try and take care of my health and think about what's going inside my body. Organic farming is of course much better than conventional farming, if possible, because you're not using any chemicals, but you are still applying something to the problem effectively, rather than actually saying...

Rebekah Wineburg 00:23:48 Right. You're you're treating the symptom, not the cause. So it's organic farming is like chemical farming without using synthetic chemicals.

Janina Doyle 00:23:57 Good. I'm glad we both agree.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:24:00 And it's great. I mean, we are organic, we're certified organic and they're not at odds with each other, but there isn't that greater thought process, I think, or, or asking you to change your relationship to the farm.

Janina Doyle 00:24:13 It's the organics on spiritual steroids. That's what it is. That's what it is. With a long, with a very long term plan. That's what it is. Uh, can you tell me a few of your perhaps preparations or I I've mentioned again, of course, the cow horn burring in Autumn. I'm assuming you, you do that?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:24:39 Yeah. So there's the, um, the biodynamic, the 500 and the 501 prep are the cow horn preps. One of them is cow manure. One of them is, um, silica. So that's the one that people are like, you carry manure in a cow horn underground? So here, think of it this way. So this is, we have cows on the property, so these are happy, happy cows that have, you know, a very good diet. Um, they have the best life, they that's, their job is to make manure. Um, Cows have a pretty incredible, oh, we go back to this like, like gut health. Cows have a pretty incredible digestive system with their four stomachs. They're able to turn cellulose into energy. Something that we can't do. So it makes sense that their manure is going to have a very interesting, very powerful, um, microbes in it. And you take that fresh manure. You bury it in a cow horn. Now there are spiritual and cosmic reasons for the cow horn and for burying it at a certain time. But if we, but you can also explain it that the cow horn is a porous vessel that allows the water to exchange through. So you pack fresh manure in the cow horn, you bury it underground at the, uh, fall Equinox and it stays at a steady temperature, steady humidity, and it transforms it, it goes through a fermentation process. It transforms. So when we pack it in, it's cow poo, smells like cow poo when you, when you unbury it, about six months later at the spring Equinox, it is completely transformed. So it smells like...

Janina Doyle 00:26:24 And it smells lovely. Yes. Everyone says it's beautiful.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:26:27 It smells lovely, like the best freshest earth. And then you mix that with water. Um, and you dynamize it. So you're adding some oxygen, you're activating it. And you spray that on the soil. It's like taking that, um, you know, gut health pill, basically like we are spraying and, uh,

seeding a, um, diverse and powerful colony of microbes into the soil that are gonna help transform those minerals into availability for the vines.

Janina Doyle 00:26:57 And I think it makes sense because again, from what I've heard is when everything is dying, and finishing for the end of, of season, you put it down and then when everything's popping back up in springtime, you bring it back up again. It's like when the energy is coming back out again, it, it feels like that completely makes sense.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:27:18 Right. Yeah. There's I mean, the, the earth is going, these are the Cardinal days and, and the earth has its own cycle. It, it does, especially when you, I think this is something that I think a lot, cause I didn't grow. I grew up in a city. I didn't grow up really in, with the connection to the seasons and being out here, you're very connected to the seasons. You feel it. And you can feel that the earth is, is slumbering is taking that breath in and then the summer solstice changes. So like it, it all starts to expand back out again and you can see that in the vines, even there just starting to expand back out. So it's, it's, you know, it's beautiful way to, it is to add ritual and, and, and I think a little bit more power in the, in the farming. And I think it, you can taste it in the wine.

Janina Doyle 00:28:08 Okay. You know what, fine. You've convinced me. OK. I have wine. I have wine. I can't wait any longer.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:28:15 So you the illumination, right?

Janina Doyle 00:28:17 I have the illumination, absolutely 2018. Now, for anyone who I get very excited about this, you can get in the UK at £37.50 from Ally wines, but I'll put all the prices in the show notes, but okay. I'm very excited about this, cause this is not just a Sauvignon Blanc. This is quite special.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:28:38 Yes. So this is the white wine of Quintessa. It's called Illumination. And it is a Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Musque, Semillon blend.

Janina Doyle 00:28:48 I'm glad you said Musque, cause I was like, how do you even pronounce it? This is spelled M U S Q U E. Sauvignon Musque. I've never heard of this grape variety.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:29:00 So we actually used to, we used to think it was a grape variety and then DNA, there was an argument here whether or not Sauvignon Musque is Sauvignon Blanc or not. Um, with DNA technology, we like studying the genome. It is actually Sauvignon Blanc. So it's a variation Of Sauvignon Blanc that has more, um, of a, Musque means perfumed. So more of a terpene character in the skins, so...

Janina Doyle 00:29:27 It's, if I'm gonna, yes. You know, you said like a terpene character, first of all, it's very aromatic on the nose and it's almost not muscat. It doesn't go anywhere near as far as that, but the kind of floral notes or slight spice you might get with something like muscat or something like a gewurtztraminer or something that's there. There's that real beautiful blossom aromatics in there. It's gorgeous. So that's interesting. Okay. Everybody Sauvignon Musque.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:29:56 Sauvignon Musque. So the blend is about 85% Sauvignon Blanc and half of that is Sauvignon Blanc. So you get the bright acidity, the pink grapefruit, the pithiness, all those citrus characters. Then the other half is Sauvignon Blanc Musque and here we get more of the, so white peach, honeysuckle, even a little bit of guava. So you get slightly tropical, but still very bright.

Janina Doyle 00:30:23 Lots of nectarine for me, it's that kinda...

Rebekah Wineburg 00:30:26 Yeah. Minerality

Janina Doyle 00:30:28 It's tense at the same time. It's textural. But the apart from the acidity is super high, but it really, for me, it's, it's really interesting. Part of it's like, midpalate it's rounded and then it finishes really direct.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:30:43 Yeah. It's like creamy without being creamy. Um, yes.

Janina Doyle 00:30:46 Yes. Well, I've cheated. Cause I've looked at the actual wine making specs to know that, what also probably makes it special is how you choose aging vessels. Right? So I think this is really interesting.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:31:00 Yes the fermentation vessels. So there's the blend and then, I utilize five different fermentation vessels. It's all barrel fermented but there's five different, you know, barrels that we're using. There are, there's a little bit of new French Oak barrel that gives you some spice character and a little bit of tannins, about 4%. I use a little bit of French Acacia wood. So it's a barrel. Um, it's a very tight grain, slow growing tree that doesn't have tannin like Oak, but it does have a flavor component. So this is like a dried floral or balsa wood, you know, if you ever did like modeling as a kid?

Janina Doyle 00:31:39 No. Okay.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:31:41 Um, it's a it's beautiful and it, it accentuates the, the edginess. I think Sauvignon Blanc has sharp elbows and it should. So this, you know, Acacia again about like 4%, these are just for spice notes. Very, very subtle. Um, I utilize about 20% concrete eggs. So these are like, this is like the cool, it's like Humpty Dumpty right?

Janina Doyle 00:32:04 I love what they do to wine now. So it actually creates movement. Doesn't it? So I don't understand the science behind it, but they just move the wine around.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:32:13 I'm not sure I understand the science behind it too, but...

Janina Doyle 00:32:16 It works though.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:32:17 It works and it's true. So they, it's online concrete. So there's some breathability, but there is no real flavor component. It seems to highlight and accentuate the minerality in the grape. So I choose the mineral components to go more into the concrete eggs. It has a very steady temperature as well in fermentation. As the fermentation's occurring, you have all these little CO2 bubbles and the shape of the egg makes these bubbles vortex. So you get this natural stirring. So you have that lees contact that creates the body. And then I utilize about 60% of the majority is neutral Oak barrels. So here we're just getting the breathability. So they, they get some oxygen through the barrel, but they don't have a flavor component. And then a little bit like 15% stainless steel barrels for that linear acidity. Like I still want it to drive all the way through your mouth. And it doesn't go through any Malolactic fermentation. So you have this feeling of roundness. Yeah, you have this compelling texture, but you have this mouthwatering acidity, I think it's one of the best, uh, wines to pair with food. It's very flexible because it has enough body to put in place of Chardonnay. Like you can put it in on roast chicken, you can put it in a bigger meal, but it has so much acidity it makes you wanna take another bite.

It feels bright. Classic pairings or some, you know, scallops, um, fish of course, oysters, oysters work really well.

Janina Doyle 00:33:48 Well. I think scallops would, for me, of all of them scallops really works because scallops has the texture, but at the same time, it's still, it's light it doesn't it's, scallops isn't actually rich. It's more about the texture, but it's weightier than flakey fish, you know? So that actually, and the fact that you could put it with like a yuzu sauce, because I get with this wine, you've mentioned the word bright, it's incredibly bright fruit and certainly for me, it doesn't go over to the herbaceous side of Sauvignon Blanc. It stays much more of the citrus to tropical aromatics. Hence why I'm saying a Yuzu sauce with, uh, with scallops would be really, really nice. But it is it's so mouthwatering, so vibrant. So as you said, I feel like more like kind of stoney on the nose with this kind of real pithiness and then it's just literally a rocket ship zooming out my mouth with this steely, uh, acidity. It's really special. This is so beautiful. And as I said to you, I used to sell this wine going back to Beast, everyone. Dunno if it's still there? Probably not, because we would only ever be able to get like three bottles at a time here and there, you, you know.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:35:02 It is not a large production. Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:35:04 We didn't buy it in cases. We would just find it on fine wine lists that were sourced, you know, so I'd get it every once in a while. It was always just really fun. Cool, cool label as well. What's the label design? Like it's a lady...

Rebekah Wineburg 00:35:17 So it's a small detail from one of the Folio pages of the book of Kells.

Janina Doyle 00:35:23 Okay. I'm gonna pretend I know what that is.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:35:25 So the book of Kells is an illuminated manuscript, an illuminated Bible, and it's on display in Dublin. Think it's the most famous medieval illuminated Bible. And this is a tiny detail from the, um, row page, like the, one of the Folio pages, Chi Rho, so Christ. And it's when you look at the whole page, it's one letter row, this is the tiniest little detail on the top of it. It had to have been painted with a single haired brush, that kind attention to detail. And there's, um, you know, there's a lot of symbolic imagery in it. If you look at it, there's the Chrome.

Janina Doyle 00:36:06 A lot of detail

Rebekah Wineburg 00:36:07 Made in the, um, it's, it's, it's actually one of my favorite labels.

Janina Doyle 00:36:12 Well, I love the fact that there's a woman on it because that allows me to mention that it's, you know, woman history month right? And of course I am chatting with fabulous, fantastic women this month. So you I'm so pleased to have you here. So just as a touch on, uh, the women's month, has there been any inspirations for you in the wine industry? Because we know this is a very male dominated industry, and we're, we're showing them how it's done. It's fabulous. More or of us are coming on board, but any, any inspirations for you?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:36:43 Oh certainly. Um, you know, we're when I was in school. So I went to UC Davis, which is the, the wine school out here. Um, women were graduating about 50%.

Janina Doyle 00:36:56 Okay, great. That's... oh.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:36:58 Yet still, we're in California. We're at 10% of winemakers are women.

Janina Doyle 00:37:02 That's not good.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:37:03 It's not good. We're getting better. We're getting better. I think Napa we're about 15%. Um, and so there have been, you know, I, I am colleagues with and friends with, um, these pioneering women, the first women winemakers out here. And I, I, I mean I'll have to shout them out. They're, they're so amazing. Um, we're really all coming together, um, and bringing each other up. So I have been lucky enough to, um, have Celia Welch as my mentor, um, and you know, Celia is a incredible winemaker, um, and an incredible person and you know, it's, I'm very lucky to have that. We have a very tight group out here and we're seeing more and more women, um, we're, we're getting there.

Janina Doyle 00:37:47 Okay. Right. So let's talk next year and let's hope we can get it to 20% female winemakers. As long as it keeps on going up. That's the, that's the main thing, isn't it?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:37:56 Well, the more there are of us, um, the more there will be. I really believe it's if you can't see it, you can't be it and I'm, I'm sort of second generation women winemakers in Napa, maybe two and a half. Um, and the people that came before me really helped me and I'm helping the people after me because they had to fight just to even be considered like that it's even possible, that they're physically capable of being a winemaker. I've had to fight to people to just even, I, I, I'm still not what people envision a winemaker looks like. But the more women winemakers there are the, the broader that vision is. And so the next generation and the generation below that won't have to spend their energy on that fight. Um, they will just have to do the others.

Janina Doyle 00:38:42 No, I agree. Exactly. We keep on fighting. I've been very lucky. I haven't had, um, I actually haven't come across where I felt that this, my sex has affected my job opportunities, but I will always remember as a sommelier, one time somebody asked for the, the somm. I went over, hi guys, how can I help you with the wine list? And they went, oh, we asked for the sommelier. And I said, I am the sommelier. And they said, but you're a girl. But to be fair in their defense, not that I should be defending them, if it was wasn't like they were being rude. It was just that their expectation. It was almost like, oh, I can't, my brain was expecting a man. And so of course I was incredibly rude, told them how it was. And then they ordered wine from me and enjoyed the wine and we moved on. But you know, it, it was like right. Gentleman learning curve for you.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:39:33 Yeah. And I think that's a lot, it's not. Um, and I think mentorship has a lot to do with this. There's, we have a couple of, yeah. I mentioned Celia was, has been my mentor. Yes. Um, and I have been part of a, a group called the Bâtonnage Forum, which is for women in wine and we have a mentorship group. And I was a mentor to, or am a mentor to other women. Um, I, I think that, that, yeah, kind of having that conversation about what's possible or you know, who, who can be a Sommelier, what does they look like? Cause people aren't, I don't think people are consciously or, or meanly, um, excluding you, they just don't realize it. They are not considering it. So we have a, a bunch of organizations here that are, are working towards, um, increasing the, the diversity and representation in wine, um, in all aspects, not just in production or, or, you know, winemaking or vineyards, but in mark, in, in every aspect.

Janina Doyle 00:40:34 Fab. Now I want to finish off just quickly on the Sauvignon Blanc for people. Everyone is very familiar with Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, very pungent, generally, very aromatic.

How would you jus, having been there, and of course, tasted loads of Sauvignon Blanc, how would you compare Sauvignon Blanc from Napa valley, California in general to New Zealand, Sauvignon Blanc?

Rebekah Wineburg 00:40:58 So they're quite different. I think Sauvignon Blanc is one of the great varieties of the world because it is able to make great wines in many different places and it is transparent to terroir. So it shows where it's from, or it can show where it's from. So that, you know, super grassy, very, very, um, aromatic New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is one style, um, the white Bordeaux or the Sancerre, so the Loire Sauvignon Blanc's another style. The illumination, so typical Napa valley Sauvignon Blanc, and I wouldn't put illumination as a typical, um, Sauvignon Blanc because it's a, um, it's something made with, I think, a little bit more intention and focus than unfortunately traditionally... Like Sauvignon Blanc suffers from being easy to grow, um, and easy to make. And so a lot of Sauvignon Blanc can kind of be made as an afterthought. In Napa, as I mentioned, we have a warmer climate. So what we are doing with Illumination is we are capturing the California sunshine, those ripe fruit flavors that you talked about. But we're also working with vineyards that are in the cooler, more foggy areas. So hillsides that are well drained that have the fog. So they maintain that acidity. So you have that special balance between, um, you know, not grassy, not, not gooseberry kind of character, but, but citrus and, um, stone fruit, but maintaining that kind of acidity and having a reasonable alcohol. So it's not hot. Um...

Janina Doyle 00:42:33 What's our out alcohol here? Not that I care, but some people will ask. 14. So yes, at, for a Sauvignon Blanc that is high, but doesn't feel it.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:42:40 For my region. That is not that high.

Janina Doyle 00:42:43 So generally that's a, I think that's probably a summary then isn't it. More riper, fruit, more, more of the kind of citrus to tropical notes, less grassy, but still beautiful acidity, tend to be higher alcohol. So probably weightier as well.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:42:57 Weightier and more mineral character. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:42:59 We love it. If, if more of Napa valley Sauvignon Blancs could be like yours, I would be literally a convert. Totally. And just be going straight to Napa. So I'm, I'm in for a treat later, cause I've still got the whole bottle to go. So yum, thank you. Thank you so much for making the Illumination.

Rebekah Wineburg 00:43:16 My pleasure.

Janina Doyle 00:43:20 Now, as you know, during these episodes of March, I want there to be a little bit of a nod to the wonderful women in the wine world. And so I just wanna quickly touch on Celia Welch, who Rebekah mentioned was her mentor, one of her inspirations. If you don't know who Celia Welch is, you definitely should. She makes the wines at Scarecrow. The Scarecrow Cabernet Sauvignon is a cult wine and is incredibly hard to get your hands on. It is made in the Rutherford region of Napa valley. And so are the Bordeaux blend wines made by Rebekah at Quintessa. So next week when you tune in, we'll be opening up two different vintages of the Quintessa Bordeaux blend. We will look at the different grape varieties and what they add to the mix. Looking at mapping of the vineyard, so you can understand the different soil types and the complexities and differences even within one area of Napa valley. And to hear the perspective of a winemaker with the highs and lows of fantastic vintages and not so great vintages. Now I'm sure Celia Welch would also have a lot to say about that having been in the

wine industry for well, over 30 years, she earned herself rising star award from the Southern California chapter of women for wine sense. And in fact was inducted to the Winemakers Hall of Fame by the national chapter of that same organization. She's been honored as winemaker of the year in 2008, by Food and Wine magazine. And as one of Forbes.com's top 10 taste makers of 2006. Now, as always, I shall leave you with a wine quote and I wanted to pick an impactful woman. So I've chosen best selling an award-winning writer and author Jodi Picoult. She's also a member of the Vida. Women in literary arts advisory board. So it's a nonprofit that addresses gender parity in the literary world and aims to amplify marginalized voices. And she has said:

“The wine, it made her limbs loose and the liquid made her feel that a hummingbird had taken the place of her heart.”

It's not really a wine quote is it, that's wine poetry. Right that is it. Thank you as always, if you are new to this podcast, do make sure you have subscribed. Like the podcast, share it with your wine loving friends. And if you can leave a comment, please do, as it makes the podcast more discoverable. You already know exactly what's coming next week. So I'll see you again and until then, cheers to you.