

2008

Grenache Blanc Botrytis

Thompson Vineyard

Santa Barbara County

Notes:

We only produce a dessert wine every few years, and in very limited quantities. In 2008 we made a single barrel of this dessert wine and it's pretty special stuff.

Botrytis, or 'noble rot' as it's referred to in France, is a naturally occurring mold that can infect grapes while they are still on the vine. The botrytis removes the water from inside the grape, resulting in higher concentration of sugars, acids, and other grape compounds. These highly concentrated and extra-sweet grapes are used to make the finest dessert wines in the world, most notably in France's Sauternes region. Botrytised wines have incredible richness and complexity. Simply put: it's nectar in a bottle.



In 2008 we estimated that the Grenache Blanc block at Thompson Vineyard had about 3% botrytis. Not all clusters were impacted, but some clusters had small "bunches" of berries affected by the noble rot. We picked 3 tons off of our 1 acre block and each cluster had to be hand sorted in order to snip out the botrytised berries and set them to the side. There was so little botrytis fruit that we couldn't use our big Europress to press it as there wasn't enough volume to fill the press. We borrowed a small basket press from a home-winemaker friend and pressed off the dessert wine the old-fashioned way.

There was barely enough juice to fill up a single barrel, and the wine sat undisturbed for 18 months. We bottled 42 cases of half bottles (375ml) in May of 2010. The wine tastes great; it's sometimes hard to imagine that "moldy" grapes can produce such profound flavors.

Food Pairing Recommendations:

This wine is not overly sweet and has great acidity. We recommend pairing the wine with some sort of fruit dessert that is not overly sweet. Something like a pear or stone-fruit tart with custard or crème fraiche is fantastic. Toasted nuts added on top are fantastic. Extremely sweet desserts will make the wine taste sour. Chocolate may or may not work. A very dark chocolate is fine but the fruit based dessert is a much better option.