

FORT ROSS

FORT ROSS-SEAVIEW · SONOMA COAST

~ SUSTAINABLE & HOLISTIC FARMING PRACTICES ~

SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES: Fort Ross Vineyard utilizes sustainable farming practices and focuses on preventing problems rather than resolving them. We microscopically inspect the leaves, shoots and growing clusters with a jeweler's magnifying loop to find any hints of a potential future problem. With focused vigilance we can avoid practices that disturb the balance of nature. If mites, leaf hoppers and thrips come a courting in the vineyard, we monitor the concentration of the invasion. Most years we can coexist quite easily with them but if the vines are dramatically affected and the leaves are so damaged that photosynthesis is substantially reduced and the accumulation of sugar in the grapes is inhibited we use the gentlest means to keep the population in check. Fort Ross Vineyard follows holistic practices to maintain plant health. The vineyard crew carefully removes leaves by hand around the clusters, leaving a thin canopy of leaves that lets the dappled sunlight slowly ripen the clusters while sea breezes gently dry vines wet by the coastal fog. To keep the yield low and the flavors intense we monitor the crop load and remove bunches throughout the growing season to maintain a loose canopy of fruit that lets in the sun and wind.

VINEYARD LAYOUT: The main vineyard blocks are planted with the vine rows running north to south, with adjustments to magnetic north, to allow the vines to enjoy the morning sunshine on one side and afternoon sunshine on the other. This planting direction also allows the strong springtime winds to blow through the vine rows and not hammer directly at the vines. However, in some of the steepest blocks, we had to follow the natural terrain and we compensate for any imbalance in sunlight with an adequate shading canopy on the southern exposure and more direct sunlight on the shadier northern side.

TRELLISING: We chose a Vertical Shoot Position Trellis and made some modifications for our own particular needs. Above the heavy fruiting wire, we have installed three rather than the standard two sets of adjustable foliage wires so that the canes are positioned vertically and do not shade the clusters below. Each row is wide enough to prevent any shadowing from row to row.

CANE to CORDON PRUNING: The vineyard was first trained to cane pruning which is more traditional in cool climates. It allows more 'fruiting potential' on the vine during pruning by leaving more buds and canes as an insurance against a small crop. Then block by block we began converting the vineyard to cordon pruning in an effort to elevate the wine quality through better fruit balance and more even ripening even though this meant accepting an even lighter crop.

COVER CROP: Our cover crop of natural grasses keeps the steep hillside blocks stable and allows us early entry into the fields in springtime when the water holding capacity of the soil is 100%. Before winter, to protect against any possible soil erosion on the steep slopes and roads around the vineyard, we use a machine that chops up single bales of straw, adds grass seed and sprays the mulch onto any possible erosion areas before the native grasses are well established.

IRRIGATION & EROSION PREVENTION: The vineyard is located in an area that receives up to 125 inches of rain a year - more than the annual rainfall in the Amazon Jungle. We collect this rainwater water in our reservoir during the winter to use for irrigation during the water scarce, dry summer months. To conserve the limited water available we irrigate the vines with half gallon an hour emitters that were developed for desert farming conditions. To prevent erosion the flow of winter rain is carefully directed through contouring away from the erodible edges. In areas of run-off, the water enters a silt pond to separate the silt from the water to avoid silting up winter streams. In steep areas we spray a mixture of grass seed and mulch to soften the contact of the rain as it falls onto the earth.