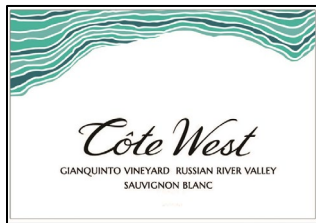


Côte West California (California sales only)



Côte West is an urban winery in Oakland dedicated to new world wines with old world (read Burgundian) restraint, hence the name. It's the brainchild of Bret Hogan, aided and abetted by his wife Kerrie, and they bottle around 1,200 cases of altogether delectable wine each year.

A native of Carmel Valley, Bret studied at Notre Dame with two semesters abroad in Angers, deep in the Loire Valley. Subsequently he did a semester in Paris, had a stint with Google (in its early days!), but home brewing led him astray to Davis, where he got a degree in viticulture and enology.

In the growing season of 2013, he worked at Domaine des Comtes Lafon in Meursault, where for five months he found himself at the right hand of Dominique Lafon and his cellar master, Thierry Jasnots. It was there that his ideas about wine and winemaking solidified.

He returned and started Côte West. In rather short order, he moved into a warehouse space in Oakland that fifteen years earlier had been converted into a proper winery, with real floor drains and a slab completely oriented around them. Everything needed is there to make fine wine.

Except the grapes. Consequently, Bret spends an inordinate amount of time in the field with the growers he works with and amid the vines that carry his name. A key tenet is to pick early to keep the pH low in order to have vibrant and fresh aromatics and to keep SO₂ additions to a minimum.

He's very much on the vanguard of the new wave of California wine. He's also, bless his heart, a pragmatist. Recently, Bret expanded his brand with Coterra, focusing on innovative natural winemaking. (While all of the Côte West wines are made with minimal intervention, the Coterra wines are fully "natural" in the sense of strict native ferments, no fining or filtration, with little to no sulfur added. In addition, the Coterra vineyard sources are either organic or on the path to organic farming.)

In his words, thoughts on yeast:

No hard and fast rules here. It really depends on each specific lot based on various factors. I'm very much a proponent of native yeast fermentations where I think they can be successful, but I have no hard and fast rules. Things I take into account are the assessed strength of native yeast in the vineyard, desired fermentation temperature, and desired style of wine. For example, I let the Grenache go native in open top fermenters because the vineyard owner of that Grenache says he can get his native Grenache ferments completely through at almost up to 16%! Since I'm picking much earlier than he does with a potential alcohol of 13 - 13.5%, I'm not afraid to go native here.

Pinot Noirs get a cold soak and start to take off with native yeasts around day 4 or 5, soon thereafter I add a commercial yeast. I let Chardonnay kick off spontaneously, but then add a commercial yeast originating from Burgundy to ensure varietal correctness. These native starts bring in a certain "je ne sais quoi" from the vineyard, though I don't rely on them entirely in all cases.

I like to ferment Sauvignon Blanc and Rosés at very cold temperatures which would almost certainly inhibit a native yeast, so I use a commercial yeast on these from the get-go.

Orange wine and Pétillant-Naturel are both native ferments to respect the traditional processes for which these wines are so regarded. So I'm all over the spectrum on fermentation approach - really depends on each lot.

Thoughts on SO₂ and additions:

My thoughts on SO₂ are to keep additions to the lowest amounts necessary in order to not suppress the beautiful aromas. This is one of the reasons why I try to pick early to benefit from a low pH so that tiny SO₂ additions are effective. While I respect the concept of 100% natural winemaking using sans soufre, I think the total lack of SO₂ allows the wines to suffer. Water and acid additions I try my very hardest to avoid altogether. This is why I spend A LOT of time in the vineyards leading up to harvest, sampling the fruit at regular intervals and running analyses on the juices. The most important decisions made all year long are when to pick and you can stay truer to your ideal approach if you're on top of your vineyard picks so that you don't have to compensate for things in the cellar.

I don't make additions to cold stabilize the whites and rosés. I put them through a traditional cold stabilization process using jacketed tanks. I struggle with this decision because the energy demand is significant in cold stabilization this way, but I feel better about that than dumping strange gums into the wine which consumers are going to drink.

<https://www.cotewestwine.com/>