

2013 Volcanic Hill

Diamond Creek, California Wine, USA

Product details

Vintage:	2013	Drinking:	Now 2040+
Producer:	Diamond Creek	Alcohol:	
Region:	California Wine	Variety:	
Country:	USA		

Tasting notes

Dark, deep and powerful yet nuanced and layered. This is full of flavour but delivers it weightlessly and with elegance and refinement. Full of energy, vivid and exciting. Magnificent.

About the producer

DIAMOND CREEK WINES

There is a long tradition of pioneering Americans deciding to “Go west, young man”. In the case of Southern Californian entrepreneur Al Brounstein in the 1960s, the adventure was simply adjusted geographically. The successful Los Angeles-based pharmaceutical wholesaler couldn't go any further west, so, when he decided on a change of career, he looked north, to Napa Valley.

There had been winemaking in this region, north of San Francisco, since the mid-19th century, but setbacks in the early 20th century - a phylloxera outbreak, Prohibition, the Great Depression - had kept it from thriving. Then, in the 1960s, Napa saw a red-gold rush as prospectors such as Brounstein sought to extract the precious treasure they believed was there and establish the region as a producer of truly high-quality wines.

Brounstein was more of a speculator than most. The 70 acres of land he bought in 1967 was, in the words of his widow Boots Brounstein, “nothing... but weeds and trees”. As he cleared 22 acres of it, he discovered the land had distinct soil types and microclimates in plots barely 60 feet apart. So he decided that he would plant Cabernet Sauvignon (almost) exclusively and begin bottling these vineyards separately. At the time, he was the first in Napa to concentrate his efforts on Cabernet Sauvignon - although, 20 years later, most producers would come to recognise that this hardy grape variety suits the geography, geology and Mediterranean climate of the area. He was certainly the first to talk seriously of terroir here and many thought his single-vineyard bottlings to be folly. Half a century later, it is the prevailing trend - thankfully Al, who died in 2006, lived to see himself proved right.

Brounstein's stepson, Phil Ross, is at the helm today. Armit Wines has, in recent years, taken over the importing of Diamond Creek Cabernet Sauvignons to the UK.

The Diamond Creek winery is located in the elevated, difficult terrain of the Myacamas Mountains, which produces low yields and smaller grapes with thicker skins which can be harvested later. It tends towards wines which age very well. However, the deliciousness is in the detail.

Of Diamond Creek's the three main vineyards, Volcanic Hills is the largest and northernmost - eight acres of south-facing hillside, warmed by breezes from the valley. The grey, fluffy soil is due to volcanic ash, originally deposited from the



eruption of Mount Konocti, 50 miles to the north, eight million years ago. The resulting, full-bodied wine is appropriately long-lived and does have a distinctly smoky richness, along with intense cassis, violets and firm tannins.

Closest to the Diamond Creek winery, Red Rock Terrace is almost as warm, with seven acres of ferrous rust-coloured soil. This rich, well-balanced Cabernet Sauvignon is the most approachable and early-drinking Diamond Creek produces, with velvety tannins, and cherry, mint and blackcurrant flavors.

The coolest plot of the three, chilled by ocean breezes channelled up from San Pablo Bay, is the five-acre Gravelly Meadow. As one might assume from Al Brounstein's straightforward naming policy, this - the lowest yielding vineyard - is quick-draining, stony ground formed from a prehistoric river bed. Its wine is earthy, and jammy, with hints of cedar and a spicy expansive finish.

The Diamond Creek winery has a fourth, tiny plot of less than an acre, called Lake. In exceptional years (around four times a decade), the Cabernet Sauvignon from this parcel - the coolest of the lot - is bottled separately and much sought after. In other years, it contributes to Gravelly Meadow.

Diamond Creek wine is described as exclusively Cabernet Sauvignon but, in fact, each vineyard is planted with a few vines of Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot (in addition to an extra acre of Petit Verdot in the coolest corner of the estate). So the wines are roughly 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, with 10% of other grape varieties used to adjust the flavour slightly. Other than that, the character of the wines is largely down to very detailed harvest timings - there might be up to 20 separate pickings from a vineyard in one year. The winemaking and oak ageing processes are as non-interventionist as possible. In some ways, nothing has changed since Al Brounstein first snuck first-growth Bordeaux cuttings into California via Mexico. In other ways, everything has changed since then.

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