

No Deal with the Devil Required

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The Huneus family was ahead of the game when they staked a Cabernet claim in Coombsville with Faust



Photo by: Courtesy of Faust

Another typical morning in Faust's Coombsville vineyard

Following [my visit with Paul Hobbs](#), a Napa Valley veteran but a relative newcomer to the Coombsville AVA, I stopped in at one of Coombsville's pioneers.

Located adjacent to Hobbs' vineyards, [Faust's](#) 130-acre property was planted by the [Huneus family](#) in 1998, making it one of the earliest vineyard developments in the area, following [Caldwell](#) and Farella. There are 112 acres planted, primarily to Cabernet Sauvignon, with a bit of Merlot, Syrah, Petit Verdot and Sauvignon Blanc. Planted under the guidance of [Valeria Huneus](#), a proponent of biodynamic farming, the site is farmed organically today.

General manager Jennifer

Beloz, 43, has been working with the Huneus family since 2011, and moved to the Faust project in 2015. David Jelinek, 48, handles winemaking. Following stints at [Epoch](#), [Harlan](#) ([read about my visit there in August](#)) and [Groth](#), he joined the Huneus

team in 2010 and Faust in 2015. Viticulturist Garrett Buckland, 38, started at Faust in 2017 after earning his wings working with Steve Matthiasson.

"It's not Highway 29," says Beloz as she describes her affinity for the Coombsville area (and its proximity, or lack thereof, to Napa Valley's main artery, which runs through Yountville, Oakville, Rutherford, St. Helena and Calistoga). "The town of Napa is just 10 minutes away, but people here still have horses and cattle along the road. It's different here."

And it's not just the aesthetic that's different. With the San Pablo Bay exerting its influence, Coombsville is the third-coolest AVA in Napa, behind Carneros and Atlas Peak. With the cooler temps, there are higher disease pressures than up-valley. But that isn't what caught Beloz off guard. "I came in with a redevelopment plan, figuring as the vineyard hit 20 or 25 years of age we'd need to start replanting," she says. "But then I found out we didn't need it."



Courtesy of Faust

Jen Beloz and David Jelinek, hard at work

"Varietal change and virus issues have been the main drivers of that cyclical replanting in Napa," says Buckland. "But Napa is now majority Cabernet, as is this site. And we've been able to manage virus issues here by pulling out a single vine as soon as we see any signs of it, or by using varying pruning methods. Going forward, vineyards like this one should be the 40-, 50-, 60-year-old vineyards of Napa's future."

Initially all the fruit from the Coombsville site went into Faust's Napa blend, which debuted in 2002. The vineyard is more undulating than the neighboring Hobbs vineyard, along with a bit more variability in soil types, resulting in the need for more micro-pickings due to varying ripening times. But as the team at Faust got more

and more familiar with the site, they began to pull a portion of the Coombsville fruit out for a separate wine, starting in the 2007 vintage with The Pact bottling (a reference to the Faustian bargains made famous by Marlowe and Goethe).

"What we've learned is the nooks and crannies, the smaller sub-parcels within the parcels that we pick at different times," says Beloz.

Since separating the fruit, Jelinek has been fashioning a wine that is distinct both from Faust's blend as well as other up-valley Cabernets.

"It's easy to make a dark, dense wine with savory notes from here, but without rustic tannins," he says. "It's a good transition between mountain fruit and valley floor."

The **2016 Faust Cabernet**

Sauvignon Napa Valley blends Coombsville fruit with other sources from Napa, resulting in a fresh and sleek wine rippling with red and black currant fruit, ending with polish on the tobacco-tinged finish. In contrast, the **2016 Faust Cabernet Sauvignon Coombsville The Pact** has more notable sage, menthol and violet notes to go with its fruit, ending with a strong graphite edge on the finish. Both are delicious, fruit-driven wines, with The Pact bottling showing a bit more range with its cooler herb and earth notes. While the Napa blend is of equal quality, The Pact shows the distinct DNA of a specific site.

"And that's exactly what we want to do with the selection from Coombsville," says Beloz.

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