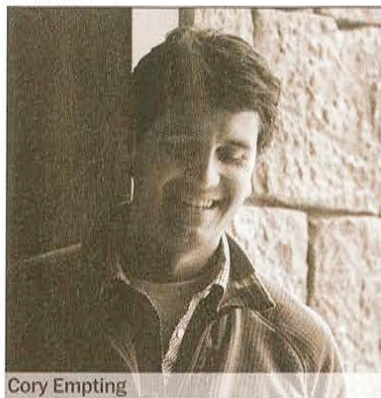


Bond

ESTATE



Cory Empting

Founded: 1996

Winemaker: Cory Empting

Viticulturist: Mary Maher

Acres owned: None

Annual production: 300 cases of the vineyard designates; 1,200 of Matriarch

Owner: William Harlan

Known for: Site-expressive wines in the luxurious Harlan style

Location: Oakville, CA

Website: bondestates.com



Back in the 1980s, Bill Harlan and Don Weaver were making wine from more than 70 vineyards. As Harlan recalls, “There were a few that were head and shoulders above the others. A decade went by and we began to recognize these wines, making them under the same roof with the same winemaking team.” The concept for Bond developed, he says, as they narrowed those 70 vineyards down to five, “a portfolio of geographic diversity to show the differentiation in character from these sites within the Napa Valley.”

A real estate developer by day, Harlan made his money in the boom years of the Napa Valley. In the early '80s, he converted the old Sunny St. Helena Winery into Merryvale, later creating Harlan Estate, a 240-acre parcel rising up off the Oakville Grade. The first releases of Bond, established in 1996, were the 1999s from Melbury and Vecina, followed by St. Eden (2001), Pluribus (2003) and Quella (2006). Each vineyard has a different owner, aspect and soil, and each produces a distinctly different wine—all exceptional in 2006.

Vecina is just south of Harlan's home base in Oakville. Its two blocks were planted in 1990 and '92, 11 acres including steep terraces that rise up out of the valley floor like the overturned prow of a ship. General manager Paul Roberts says the vine roots go down more than 30 feet through devigorating, compressed sandstone. The low-yielding cabernet vines produced a rich 2006, its energy bound up in the middle and extending long into the finish with air.

Pluribus, another site on the west side of the valley, 1,100 feet up Spring Mountain, is more muscular and austere in its tannin, with savory flavors of currants and cassis. Cory Empting, Bond's winemaker, has been fascinated by this site's soil structure—a weathered volcanic core stone, broken up under the humus-rich topsoil. “There's an outcropping of tuff as you drive up Spring Mountain,” he says. “Then you get to soil that you only see on the east side of the valley. David Howell [geologist and co-author of *The Winemak-*

er's Dance] described how an earthquake flipped it over the valley floor and dumped it upside down on the top of Spring Mountain. So you have tuff below and core stone above.” The '06 Pluribus is a wine of penetrating depth, a deep well of flavor that fills out the tannin and lasts with compelling freshness.

Across the valley at Quella, the volcanic tuff is mixed with river rock, giving a more perfumed cabernet with scents of roses and violets. It's among the freshest of Bond's '06s, slowly revealing a sense of restrained ripeness in tart cherry and cranberry notes.

When I recently tasted through half bottles of the '07s with the Bond team, Roberts noted that “the '06s have a clearer definition of the nature of the site. The '07s need to lose a little baby fat to get there.” Their richness makes them more immediately appealing and initially less distinctive—although the distinctions seem a shade more apparent out of half bottles. A major proponent of this smaller format, Roberts has been lobbying Harlan to offer them since he was sommelier at *The French Laundry*. (A third of his list was half bottles, which allowed guests a more diverse selection over the course of a tasting menu.) Now on the inside, he's made it happen: 2007 will be the first Bond vintage available for sale in half bottles. Offered to the subscriber list “en primeur” in February of 2010, the vintage will be available to the trade in May 2011. —Joshua Greene



TOP-SCORING WINES

94 '06 Napa Valley Pluribus \$275 (12/09)

94 '06 Napa Valley Quella \$275 (12/09)

93 '06 Napa Valley Vecina \$275 (12/09)