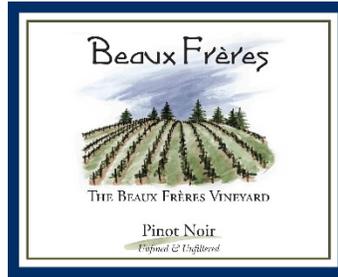


SNOW ON WINE

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Director of Education



LIGHT FROM DARK

One Small Miracle Within Smoke Devastated Vintage 2020
As told by Beaux Freres, a Newberg, Oregon Winery

The story of the 2020 vintage could fill a volume of books, even setting the pandemic aside. First the good news. Budbreak and bloom phases went off like clockwork that spring. In an interesting twist, June rains



affected enough of the primordial clusters that we estimated final crop levels would be among the lowest since 2004, given that early rain washed away some flowers that would have become grapes. A mostly worry-free growing season followed. Despite the lower yields that would follow, we knew we had something special and worthy thanks to this exact scenario: low disease pressure due to loosely spaced clusters, highly pigmented wines and increased concentration (due to lower crop load) and small berries with more surface area of skin, often without seeds. The quality over quantity we always prefer. The summer continued on with breezy warm days and

cool nights through August leading promptly to harvest commencing on September 5th. We pulled the trigger first mostly on Chardonnay in Chehalem Mountain sites and in the Dundee Hills, but also chose to bring in a couple blocks of ripe Pinot Noir from those sites. In addition – a precious and precocious little block called “6 rows” from The Beaux Freres Estate Vineyard was harvested. A fortunate decision later proving to be a small miracle. We were very pleased with the 29 tons of fruit we had processed so far, resulting in 72 barrels (not the usual 400+ from these blocks) but wines of remarkable texture, tone and energy.



Then, on September 13th, a psychedelic wildfire haze began. The sky turned purple high above us, and chatter began among our colleagues about an impending smoke crisis. Then it was “all hands on deck”, as our winery team, including several admin and office types, clamored to pick a couple perfectly ripe blocks of The Beaux Freres Vineyard – resulting in enough to fill two barrels. Fires as far away as Central Valley California propelled by a windstorm that wowed meteorologists around the

country, soon brought air quality worse than anywhere in the world. A good chunk of Ribbon Ridge AVA, including our small winery, lost power in the middle of the chaos. We were off the grid for four long days, but only out of power for 18 hours, thanks to a genius electrician who rigged hundreds of feet of bobogna cord to connect processing equipment to a good old gas-guzzling generator that we rented. And we pressed on.

The second half of September was dramatic and heart-wrenching as a dense smoke settled low in the valley. Once the destiny of the vintage revealed itself as significantly at risk, we leaned into a creative plan developed through consultation with our brightest colleagues worldwide. We intentionally chose the best remaining blocks of our most promising terroirs and harvested at the right temperature; not too cold, not too warm, and pressed the juice off the skins as soon as it hit our crush pad. After a long cool slumber in our finest barrels for more than a year, we're thrilled to uncover a bracingly precise and clean, juicy profile on the apple side of the fruit spectrum.



Not only is the wine unscathed, it is a jubilant, albeit one-hit wonder we named "Light from Dark". This 140 cases of "Light from Dark" shows a fascinating, transparent expression of this cool climate varietal pressed from the skins before color or tannin extraction, and importantly also leaving the smoke taint behind with the skins. It shows promise for collectors to enjoy now through 2025.

We only hope never again to be forced to make White Pinot Noir, but if needed Beaux Freres now has a plan. And the "small miracle" picked just before smoke hit – it became 240 large format (1.5 L) bottles of 2020 Beaux Frères Pinot Noir Light from Dark White Pinot Noir.

Writer's Notes: As my readers know I have written about smoke damage to grapes and resultant "smoke taint" of wine in previous issues of "Snow on Wine". You can find Oct 2020 "A Triple Threat to Harvest 2020" and Sept 2018 "Smoke Taint" in the Spokaneenologicalsociety.wildapricot.org website library of "Snow on Wine". However, I thought the January 2022 newsletter from Beaux Freres would help SES members understand the rapidly emergent, unexpected disaster and the panic and emotion that it thrust on Winemakers. Although knowing that vintage years and harvest seasons always have variables, this was something never experienced by them before which they hope not to repeat.



I am grateful to Christopher Marshall, Marketing Communications Manager for Beaux Freres, who graciously allowed me to quote their material, which I have cut, pasted and lightly edited to create a read that flows smoothly while, I hope, preserving their story. Please credit this entire article to Beaux Freres, their winery team and Michael G. Etzel, Founder, President and Dad, and to Mike D. Etzel, Winemaker, Viticulturist and Son (except the italicized words which I added and bold print of their text).



Many of you know that **Beaux Freres** is French for Brother-in-Law, and was chosen because Michael's wife is the sister of America's well known wine writer, Robert Parker, author of The Wine Advocate.



I am proud to have six bottles of "**Light from Dark**" ageing gracefully in my cellar. In time (2023 – 2026) we will open some with some of you, my readers and dear friends, as we toast the many Vignerons who creatively fought the classic battle of Man vs Nature and the horrid wildfire smoke of 2020.