

THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

# THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

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## **TERROIR** *Desires*

**MOLLY HILL'S QUEST  
FOR BALANCE AT  
SEQUOIA GROVE  
WINERY**



At Sequoia Grove Winery in Napa Valley, Winemaker Molly Hill and President and Director of Winemaking Mike Trujillo, with Trujillo's dog Ramone.



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# The Crown Jewels

## CROWN POINT SETS A BENCHMARK FOR THE HAPPY CANYON OF SANTA BARBARA AVA

by Meridith May

**"HAPPY CANYON IS A GEOGRAPHICAL ANOMALY,"** says Adam Henkel, Winemaker for Crown Point, a winery that, in this appellation in the easternmost part of the Santa Ynez Valley, may be an anomaly of its own. The wines, remarkable examples for the region, are comparable to those with world-class status, and I am anointing Crown Point as a star of the AVA.

The 104-acre Crown Point ranch in Happy Canyon—50 acres planted with all five red Bordeaux varieties—is 20 miles from the ocean, protected by the unique east-west Santa Ynez mountain range, which intersects the north-south San Rafael range, keeping it warmer and drier than the nearby Sta. Rita Hills AVA. However, cool winds come in during the evening, lowering nighttime temperatures by as much as fifty degrees.

The mineral-rich soils look like rock piles, loamy and well-drained (evident when it does happen to rain, as it did in winter 2017). I asked Henkel what makes Crown Point unique, and he pointed to the mountains. "We're at the far eastern end of this transverse-running valley," he proudly noted. "There's no other piece of land in this AVA or anywhere that has the diversity of rock composition and soil series that we are blessed with. Plus, there's my quirky winemaking style."

Henkel, a former Napa winemaker working with Harlan Estate, joined the Crown Point team in 2013. He understands Bordeaux varieties, and his signature hands-on, labor-intensive process has as much of an impact on the character of the wines as does the region's almost mystical nature. There's still much to discover about Happy Canyon, and Crown Point is a benchmark for the AVA's quality.

Securing Philippe Melka as a consulting winemaker this past May was gilding the lily: The wines are magnificent now. The Bordeaux native has some wise ideas when it comes to geology and soil studies, and Henkel says he feels honored to have access to Melka's wisdom and experience.

Proprietor Roger Bower bought the property in 2012, converting the winery building from a horse barn and exotic car storage garage to a state-of-the-art facility. Henkel utilizes oak tanks for fermentation, as well as a collection of conical concrete tanks. The numerous tanks are required for Henkel's decision to ferment each block, each variety, separately. They are also barrel-aged for 26 months—separately—and then blended and bottled for a year before release. The first release of Crown Point was the 2013 vintage. ❧



## TASTING NOTES

**Crown Point 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez Valley (SRP \$150)** The opaque black-blue color of this serious wine—14.7% ABV—is a lead-in to the parade of sensual aromas from blackberry and white pepper, blue floral tones, black coffee to dark chocolate. Tannins are round, broad-shouldered darlings that swath the tongue for a melt-in-the-mouth effect. One of the most beautifully textured Cabs I've tasted, with great presence and harnessed energy.

**Crown Point 2014 Estate Blend, Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez Valley (SRP \$150)** Predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon, blended with Malbec and Merlot, this wine will be released later in the fall. It has a delicate "feminine" nose of violets and an openness that invites you in; tannins are a touch more gritty than those in its 2013 predecessor. Espresso and blackberry jam converge, and the memorable finish shows harmony and purity of fruit and floral expression.

*At this time, Crown Point wines are available only through The Estates Group in California.*

*Crown Point is a star of the Happy Canyon AVA.*

