

EDMUNDS ST. JOHN
BERKELEY

Edmunds St. John



OVERVIEW | In 1987, winemaker François Peyraud from the great Domaine Tempier of Bandol visited Edmunds St. John and tasted their Mourvèdre. When Peyraud placed his nose in the glass, his eyes rolled into the back of his head, he sighed and whispered, “la terre parle.” Steve Edmunds had only been making wine professionally for two years, but this was exactly the validation he needed to know he was on the right path. Rarely will you hear someone state, “the earth speaks,” when tasting American wine, but Edmunds’ wines have proven time and time again that New World wines can indeed showcase the terroir in which the grapes were grown.

Back in the 1970s and early 1980s, Edmunds worked as a wine buyer for various stores around the San Francisco Bay area. A former home-brewer, he wanted to utilize his artistic side and became determined to make wines that wouldn’t get lost in the sea of Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay flooding the market. Instead, he began a ravenous search across the state of California in search of Rhône varieties to produce wines in the style of Southern France. In 1985, Steve, and his wife Cornelia St. John, combined their names and passions by founding Edmunds St. John in a warehouse in Berkeley.

Edmunds doesn’t own a single vineyard. Nor does he need to. Instead, he hand selects vineyards from around California, including sites in Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma, San Luis Obispo and even El Dorado counties, sourcing only from vineyards that are producing grapes appropriate for that location. These grapes are the foundation for his earth-driven wines, of which he produces roughly 4,000 cases per year.

Edmunds makes his presence known in each of the vineyards from which he sources grapes. He consults with vigneron and recommends which grapes to grow according to the vineyard’s climate and subsoil, and gives confidence to farmers who want to convert their orchards to vine. When harvest nears, he’ll travel out to the vineyards and taste the grapes daily until they reach a point when they are vibrant, balanced and focused. In addition, because he produces such small batches of wine that range from 300 to 1,000 cases, Edmunds can maintain the wine’s focus on a specific plot or vineyard. This allows the terroir to remain intact with the wine, rather than becoming lost in a blend coming from many different vineyards. In the cellar, Edmunds uses an open-top fermentation system and racks the wine in used oak barrels.

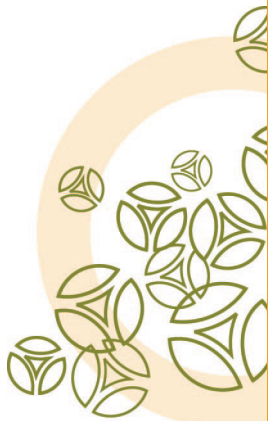
WINES |

Bone-Jolly Gamay Noir, Witters Vineyard - “Witters Vineyard, at 3,400 feet elevation, above Camino, in El Dorado County, planted in 2000, at my instigation, by Ron Mansfield, who also farms Wylie and Fenaughty Vineyards for us. The elevation, the slope to the North, and the volcanic clay-loam soil all work together to produce grapes that will ripen fairly slowly, which is critical for the development of perfume, and finesse.” - Steve Edmunds

Porphyry Gamay Noir - “Barsotti Ranch, just to the North of Camino, at a bit over 3,000 feet elevation. The soils where we planted Gamay at Barsotti are composed, in large part, of decomposed granite, for which Gamay, in France’s Beaujolais region, has a compelling affinity. It seems to work here, too! The fruit we’ve gotten in the first couple of years has been particularly characterful, giving wines that have us excited for the future.” - Steve Edmunds

That Old Black Magic (cofermented syrah and grenache) - “Back in 2006 Edmunds St. John was in a transformational mode; we’d moved our operation, in 2005, and the move wasn’t a happy one (So we moved again; being a rootless wanderer means nothing, if not keeping one’s options open.) and we’d seen our production creep up to a level that felt unsustainable, given the realities of the market. We’d also managed, somehow, in 2005 to make a blended wine, called Rocks and Gravel, that amounted to one of the greatest vinous juggling feats of all time. Putting that wine together had involved combining parts of fourteen different wines from eleven different vineyard sites, encompassing five or six different growing regions in California, into one cohesive, dynamic whole that was greater than the sum of its parts. I felt like I’d written “Sometimes A Great Notion” or “Desolation Row!” My chances of being able to make that happen again were: Slim, and none. And, too, I needed to get more focussed, to make sure I was only working with grapes I could count on; a lot of those grapes that went into the last R&G were not available to me again in 2006.

“Well, I asked myself, what could be more transformational than a little Black Magic? That Old Black Magic, to be precise.” - Steve Edmunds

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