



Joe Czerwinski, March 2018

I almost feel like Felton Road should need no introduction by now. If two decades of excellence isn't enough to convince you to try these wines, what more can I say? Long time winemaker Blair Walter and I tasted through some barrel samples of the 2017 Pinot Noirs and then sat down to go through the current releases. Along the way, he offered some comments on the various trends he's seen over the years. On whole cluster in Pinot Noir: "We use 20-30%. It hasn't changed in 20 years. I don't like it when it clouds expression of site." On the effects of vine age: "The wines are less heavily fruited, show more nuance, greater fruit-tannin expression." The white wines are often overlooked here, but the Chardonnays and Rieslings are outstanding. Oak-averse consumers should note that the Block 2 and Block 6 Chardonnays use no new wood, as Walter feels "the mineralogy we have is quickly masked by the flint of oak."

#### **Block 6 Chardonnay 2016 94 Points**

From a north-facing slope, the 2016 Block 6 Chardonnay delivers classic Chardonnay aromas of white peaches and gently toasted hazelnuts. It's medium-bodied, with a plump, succulent mouthfeel and a crisp backbone of citrusy acids. Complex shades of baking spices accent the nearly endless lemony finish. A modern-day classic.

#### **Block 2 Chardonnay 2016 93 Points**

After 17 months in previously used oak, the 2016 Block 2 Chardonnay is remarkably pure and fresh. Delicate notes of crushed stone, citrus blossom and bergamot push forward, borne on a texture of the finest silk or culinary sauce. The result is almost savory despite a preponderance of fruit, with a briny edge to the lengthy finish.

#### **Bannockburn Chardonnay 2016 92 Points**

Delicate notes of pencil shavings and lemon curd mark the nose of the 2016 Chardonnay. It's a plump, medium-bodied wine with flavors that incorporate hints of stone fruit but ultimately lean toward the grapefruit and lemon side of things without being sharp. Those citrus notes are cushioned by tea-like complexity of mouthfeel, extending through the silky finish.

#### **Block 1 Riesling 2017 94 Points**

The 2017 Block 1 Riesling weighs in at the same exact level of residual sugar (63 grams per litre) as the regular bottling, but at an extra half-degree of alcohol, it comes across as slightly sweeter. Ripe nectarine and candied pineapple are joined by hints of bergamot and lime zest. This is dense, with an almost creamy texture to it that flows seamlessly across the palate. These 2017s are some of the most exciting New World Rieslings I've ever tried.

### **Dry Riesling 2017 92 Points**

Lime zest accents peach sorbet on the nose of the 2017 Dry Riesling. This medium-bodied wine is so vibrant, fresh and invigorating, it's a bit anomalous to be tasting it on one of the coldest days of the year here in New York. It's more of a summer wine, brisk, refreshing and crisp without being hard or angular, those edges rounded off by lees contact, then polished on the long, pristine finish.

### **Bannockburn Riesling 2017 93 Points**

Floral and peachy, the ripe, succulent 2017 Riesling mimics the proportions of a German spätlese at 8.5% alcohol and 63 grams per liter residual sugar. Few places in the world can balance sugar, alcohol and acid this successfully. And that acid gives this wine great focus and drive, a fulcrum against which to balance the sweetness (or is it the other way around?). The ripe peachy notes add lime zest on the finish, which goes on and on.

### **Block 3 Pinot Noir 2016 94 Points**

Deeper, denser and meatier than the other 2016s, the 2016 Block 3 Pinot Noir underwent similar élevage of 13 months in 35% new French oak. Plum, cola and earthy notes come across as slightly chunkier and more angular than the other wines, but the higher tannin levels should also support longer aging. This medium to full-bodied Pinot Noir is delicious now, but it should be even better in another 5 years' time.

### **Block 5 Pinot Noir 2016 93 Points**

Earthy and floral, the 2016 Block 5 Pinot Noir smells like dusty rose petals sprinkled over a bed of plummy fruit. Cola notes add a savory character on the palate, which is medium to full-bodied but supple and elegant. The finish firms up a bit, so try to keep your hands off it for the next couple of years and then drink it over the next decade.

### **Calvert Pinot Noir 2016 91 Points**

Made with 25% whole clusters, the 2016 Calvert Pinot Noir is floral and herbal up front, with distinct rose petal and thyme aromas. Red berries take charge on the palate, although there's a resinous herbal note from start to finish. This medium-bodied wine is supple enough to be approachable now, but it has the concentration to age through 2025.

### **Cornish Point Pinot Noir 2016 92 Points**

Cornish Point was planted in 2000, so these vines are just entering their prime years. The 2016 Cornish Point Pinot Noir features dark berry notes and hints of thyme, coupled with ample weight on the palate and a soft dusting of tannins on the finish. It's approachable now, but it should age gracefully through 2025.

### **Bannockburn Pinot Noir 2016 92 Points**

Unusually delicate red fruit notes mark the nose of the 2016 Pinot Noir. It's a mélange of strawberry, raspberry and cherry, with some herbal notes, cola and spice blended in. In the mouth, the wine is medium-bodied and supple, with a long, silky finish.



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