



# CHALK HILL ESTATE

*Producing Exceptional Wines*

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

Chalk Hill Estate is one of Sonoma County's hidden gems off the beaten path. The 1,300-acre property, founded in 1972 by Fred Furth, boasts vineyards, a hospitality center, an organic culinary garden, a residence, an equestrian pavilion, and plenty of wilderness areas. The 300 acres of vineyards are beautifully intertwined amongst the native foliage, and over two-thirds of the property remains in its natural undeveloped state.

## THE TERROIR

Chalk Hill's terrain, located at the convergence of several naturally defined winegrowing regions, features several microclimates, soils, and sun exposures, affording numerous opportunities for site-specific crops. Situated between the cool Russian River appellation and the warm Alexander Valley, Chalk Hill is the perfect place to grow top notch red and white varieties. The vineyard blocks at Chalk Hill are delineated and planted based on soil profiles, sun orientation, vertical slope, and climate. In the end, the terroir dictates the plantings.

Sustainable Agriculture is at the heart of farming at Chalk Hill Estate. The land is treated with conservation in mind to meet the needs of the present without creating problems for the future. Each wine is produced with a gentle touch, allowing each bottle to bring forth the essence of the vineyard.

## THE GARDEN

Chalk Hill has a long history of revolutionizing agriculture. For over 100 years, this land has been used to produce gourmet produce, meats, poultry, and wine. Today's culinary program is an extension of that agricultural heritage. The wide-ranging organic gardens provide the Estate Executive Chef with high-quality herbs, fruits, and vegetables to prepare delicious dishes to pair with the wines. The

bounty from the Garden also supplies Chalk Hill Restaurant in Healdsburg and many food programs at local wineries, excluding Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery.

The Chalk Hill Estate Culinary Garden features numerous antique varieties of fruits and vegetables grown using organic farming principles. This organic garden houses hens that produce eggs and help to keep down garden pests. Chalk Hill honey is made in the beehives, and the bees pollinate the flowers.

## THE VISIT

My visit to Chalk Hill included a delicious tasting of several wines and a property tour with Raj. I rode in the back of the vehicle, and we stopped several times along the road, meandering throughout the property.

We stopped at the culinary Garden, and Raj poured me a delicious glass of 2020 Chalk Hill Felta Chardonnay aged in French oak. The wine exhibited an excellent round mouthfeel, had bright acidity and a wonderful creaminess, and ended with a long finish. Raj said, "Chalk Hill is a destination estate winery; everything is processed and bottled onsite. We grow 15 varieties, and everything is aged in French oak." As I walked through the Garden, sipping from the glass in hand, I noticed the different types of tomatoes and squashes, lettuce,



colorful flowers, fragrant herbs, and vertically growing cucumbers. Raj said, “Many of the flowers from the garden are used for plating in the restaurant.” I had the pleasure of meeting one of the farmers working amongst the tomatoes.

My next stop was the renovated equestrian facility now used for parties and meetings. I took in the diversified landscape as we continued through the property. The natural bowl in the hillside inspired the original owner, Fred Furth, to purchase the property. The vineyards were well manicured, the park-like setting at the peak of the property was serene, and

the red-clay-colored mission fit perfectly in this opulent yet natural setting. Raj emphasized that the winery policy is quality over quantity; this may mean fewer bottles but a superior product.

Back at the tasting room, I reveled in a Russian River Valley estate bottled 2021 Pinot Noir. It paired well with the charcuterie plate. A new wine for me was the Sauvignon Gris from 2021. This crisp, juicy wine boasted aromas of mango, passion fruit, and spice while exhibiting flavors of grapefruit and lemon with a well-appointed amount of minerality. This wine was not as citrusy as a typical sauvi-

gnon blanc; it is much more floral on the nose and would be fabulous with spicy food.

### THE UNIQUE LABELS

Chalk Hill produces numerous wines with different labels. The portfolio includes a section of Sonoma wines available at retailers and restaurants and exclusive small block and wine club wines.

Foley Family Wines owns Chalk Hill Estate and other stellar wineries in their portfolio. Most wineries have a wine club. At Chalk Hill Estate, you can opt to be a member that receives exclusively Chalk Hill wines or be a part of the Connoisseur Club, where you can receive wines from the entire Foley Family Wines portfolio.

When visiting Sonoma County, plan an afternoon to savor the wine and stunning natural landscape at Chalk Hill Estate. ❖