



Ancient White No. 1

We have always been fascinated by the history of agriculture, food and fermented beverages. It's part of what inspired us to get into wine in the first place, and it's what sparked our latest small-lot wine project: Ancient White #1.

We met Dr. Patrick McGovern, the famous archeologist of wine and other fermented beverages, at a conference and asked him if there was an ancient wine he wanted to taste. His response was Retsina. Thus began a collaboration based on recipes dating from 90 AD.

Thousands of years ago, before sulfur dioxide and refrigeration, early winemakers would add a little pine resin to their grapes as a preservative. Specifically, they used Aleppo Pine resin and the resulting wine is known as Retsina. Retsina is still made today, mostly on the Greek Islands, but in a more modern style. We wanted to capture the old historical style: whole-cluster, skin fermentation with just a hint of fresh, piney sap.

We started by choosing the grape. As you probably know, we have something of a passion for obscure, unusual grape varieties here at Matthiasson, including a small patch of Greco di Tufo vines that we grow at the Helen's Gate Vineyards in Rutherford. With its Mediterranean roots, we decided it would be the most fitting choice for this wine.

Next came the pine resin. We tasted many different kinds, but Aleppo Pine resin was the cleanest and brightest. In a happy twist of fate, Steve's mom actually has Aleppo Pines growing in her backyard in Tucson. She harvested the sap and mailed it to us to use in the wine.

We fermented the grapes on the skins, whole-cluster, similar to our method for Ribolla Gialla, and added a small amount of resin during the fermentation and nothing else: no preservatives and no yeast. Once the wine was done fermenting, it was aged in old, neutral oak barrels.

The final wine is a blend of three vintages. The newest wine brings vibrancy and freshness, while the older wines add complexity. Flavor-wise, it resembles an "orange" wine with a subtle, fresh, piney character. It is a "jangly" wine, in other words it has lots of crunchy, exotic fruit flavors like starfruit and golden raspberry. It has similarities to our Ribolla Gialla, but it's brighter with zesty acidity.

It's perfect paired with all kinds of Mediterranean food like wood-grilled fish, feta cheese, oil-cured black olives, calamari, braised greens with pine nuts and raisins, eggplant, and hummus.

The organically farmed Helen's Gate Vineyard is the home of Arthur Berliner and Marian Lever. It sits on an east-facing hill along Whitehall Lane in the Rutherford District of Napa Valley. We planted the vines for them in 2009. The vineyard is organically managed, and all farming done by hand (no tractors). The vines are surrounded by Marian's riotous plantings of flowers and fruit trees.

Alcohol is 12.0%. 95 cases produced.