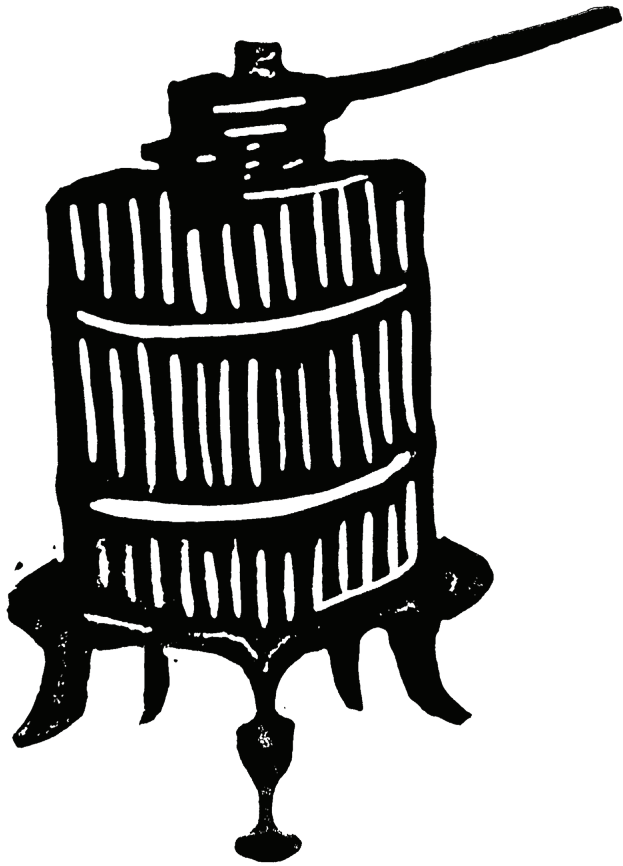


FALL



You can tell that harvest season has begun on ~~SDAY~~ES, North Pender Island, because the ravens have started gathering along the roadsides to crack the first ripe walnuts on the pavement, making you drive slowly and loudly heckling you as you pass by. By the time these bottles reach you, we will have the first few thousand litres of early-season apples from Pender, Saturna, Mayne, and even Salt Spring and Saanich this year, fermenting actively in the ambient fall temperatures.

This has been a more-than-ever anxious summer for many in the farming community, so we are relieved to leave it behind. The pleasure of a busy summer at the tasting room has been clouded by the physically-experienced realities of a changing climate, looming fire risk and water shortages. Many visitors ask if the intense July heat wave affected the apple crops, but it's not the short-term impacts which worry us—perhaps the fruit will be a little smaller in size this year, a little lower in yield—but with big trees, it is the longterm, cumulative effects of stress that are a concern.

After a summer like this, with so much compounding ecological crisis, it's impossible to continue such vulnerable land-based work with the same hope we (naively) had six years ago to effect some larger change. But re-reading the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall-Kimmerer, an indigenous plant scientist researching through a lens of traditional Potawatomi knowledge, has reminded us of the importance of gratitude: practicing gratitude for what the earth provides does not rely on fleeting feelings of hope. Gratitude can be acknowledged in the smallest things (a berry plucked from a vine, a seed that germinates) to the larger things (the fall rains, the inevitable fruit in the trees, even if few). Even our two-year-old can understand this and does not hesitate, when I say thanks to the salal or blackberry vines after picking, to join in with ten-times more enthusiasm: *thank-ooo back-berriees!*, her face smeared purple with juice. Gratitude (as explained much better in *Braiding Sweetgrass*) places us in the cycle of reciprocity—as you receive what the earth provides, how are you caring for it in return? The many-layered and ongoing work of reciprocity with the land around us is how we are continually shifting eco-anxiety into a focused energy to do what we can to improve the communities of plants and people around us, for the long haul.

Batch One

Winter Creek Orchard, 2020 harvest

Store cool, chill upright

What is the future of cider apple growing on the west coast? Many folks may not realize that there are very few commercial apple growers around here. Most of the orchards we harvest—scattered and divided into backyards by property lines—are not remotely like a modern commercial orchard: the old, full-standard trees are too tall for efficient hand harvesting (which is why we shake the apples onto tarps), or for mechanized pruning and spraying. Because of the lack of coastal fungal diseases, large high-density orchards in the Okanagan have become the center of apple growing, both cider and dessert varieties, and that is also where most coastal/island cideries source the bulk of their juice from (though few mention this).

Which is one of the many reasons why this batch is remarkable. It's encouraging to find like-minded apple enthusiasts willing to put in the labour involved in establishing an organically-farmed orchard on the coast. When Julie first called us while planning her orchard and asked if we would purchase cider-specific varieties if she grew them, we said HECK YES. Five years down the road, this is the first single-orchard cider produced from the young trees Julie and her family have put so much work into. The baby trees were first grafted by orchardists Peri and Brian of Salt Spring Apple Company, an organic nursery which has also started an estate cidery called Salt Spring Ciderworks (not to be confused with Salt Spring Wild). Not coincidentally, we called-up Peri and Brian a few times to glean advice from them in our first couple years grafting our cidery orchard. The varieties range from traditional English bittersweets/sharps to mixed-use heirlooms.

As usual, we pressed the apples on our rack-and-cloth press and fermented the juice with a bit of pomace thrown back in to extract more character from the skins and flesh. It has a juicy, pineapple-y profile with weighty mouthfeel and light tannin, though we expect the tannin to develop more in future vintages as the trees mature. The peppery, natural bubbles lend it the celebratory feel it deserves to have as a tribute to Julie and her family, and everyone working to increase local food and fermentation security on the Gulf Islands.

Batch Two

Forage Fine Perry, 2020 harvest

Store cool, chill upright

Perry is not a term we use lightly. Technically you could say perry is simply the fermented juice of pears, just as cider is the fermented juice of apples. But the lack of truly *good* perry (and perry in general) in north america is one reason we take it very seriously, having tasted the fine perry of traditional, tannic, bred-for-perry varieties made by Tom Oliver, a cidemaker in England who is currently on the level of myth in the global cider community.

Even we have a Tom Oliver story, and this is it:

Seven years ago when we flew to England to attend the Big Apple Festival in Putley, Matthew, a freshly-minted cidemaker at the time, packed two bottles of homemade cider in our bags: a dry cider, and a perry made from the tiny, terribly astringent seedling pears we find growing wild around the Gulf Islands (aka the first iteration of Forage Fine Perry). The Putley festival hall was packed with people and long tables lined with countless cider bottles that the judges free-poured from and rated. In fact, there were so many bottles that one of the judges, a village local who quickly befriended us when he learned we were travelers, at some point handed his pencil and notepad to Matthew and begged him to finish tasting and scoring the dry cider category for him.

Matthew had, in fact, submitted his own dry cider to the international section, which didn't win—but unfazed, he spotted a professional cidemaker at one of the vendor tables selling perry, and so, keen for feedback, Matthew opened his bottle of Gulf Islands perry and asked *him* to taste. This maker happened to be Tom Oliver, and he was so impressed by it that he proposed giving us all of his open, partly-poured cider and perry sample bottles in exchange for letting him finish this one small bottle of Gulf Islands perry. It was only years later, when we learned how revered Tom Oliver is in the cidemaking community, that we realized what a compliment that was.

So in short, here you have a 'North American perry' that has been given the O.K.—even drunk with enjoyment—by a master traditional cider and perry maker of England, for whatever that's worth. The cross-sections of tannin, funk, pear-drop residual sweetness and natural bubbles make it a truly unique beast that appears only briefly once a year. Enjoy it.



Batch Three

From, Here Vol. II, 2020 harvest

Store cool, chill upright

This batch began with a shovel, some buckets, the earth, and the inquisitive mind of a maker. Years ago, when we were first planting the cidery orchard and setting up the business with Sandra and Noel, one of the tasks Matthew and I (Katie) undertook was shoveling piles of wet clay out of our tree nursery area which had been left from previous excavator work. It was miserable, back-breaking work, only accomplished by the high energy levels of year-zero-enthusiasm and my dogged insistence on not using fossil fuels whenever possible. At the day's end, inspired by distant memories of high school pottery class, I took home a handful of the wet clay and shaped it into the ugliest candle holder you have ever seen, which still sits in our living room despite occasional exclamations (*What is THAT?*) from guests.

Fast forward a few years, and the clay/pottery/cider pieces clicked together when I watched a documentary on Georgian winemaking, a country where makers continue the ancient tradition of hand-building huge, earthen clay pots called *qvevri* in which they ferment and age wine. After finding more videos of their hand-building methods, I decided to try making my own vessels from the clay sourced near our orchard. It was an amazing moment when my neighbour, a potter named Nancy Walker (Talking Clay Studio on Pender Island), did the first test firing for me and the raw, dug clay successfully transformed—coming out of the kiln a beautiful terracotta colour. I've spent the last year-and-a-half digging and screening clay, building larger pots (up to 120 litres in size), and taking them to be fired in a large kiln at an arts center in Burnaby. As I work toward finding the right shape and size, we've been doing test batches in the vessels...from fermentation only (Vol. I, the pét-nat, which some of you tried), to aging for months in the clay, of which Vol. II is the result.

What I hoped to achieve with clay aging is an oxidative profile, similar to aging in barrels but without any oakiness, instead developing a character that is more enmeshed in the concept of *terroir* here in the Pacific Northwest than barrels can be. This is just the beginning, and this series of cider will evolve as we learn and try new things--different varieties, aging lengths and vessel sizes. We also plan to bury some of the vessels partially underground, as Georgian *qvevri* are buried, to see what effect the clay will have with less oxidation occurring. Cidermaking is a

conversation for Matthew and I, and we are finding the clay vessels add a completely different language and voice to the exchange. It's going to take us a few years to really feel we are communicating its character just right.

These first batches, though, are something to celebrate. There is one cidery in the U.S. fermenting cider in clay qvevri purchased from Georgia, but there is no cider I know of being aged in earthenware native to its growing place, and I am fascinated with all of the layers this entails. Around the globe, clay vessels were what enabled fermentation before the wooden barrels, glass and industrial stainless steel and plastics of cider/winemaking existed. Wooden barrels became widespread in winemaking via the Romans, who adopted them in winemaking not for wood's aging attributes but to solve the problem of transporting wine for armies in their colonial travels, as clay was too fragile. More recently, stainless steel and plastics have been favoured because they leave little impact on the wine's profile, which some would say results in a more "pure" expression of the fruit. That may be, but if you accept that 'the vessel' is key to fermentation (ie, not possible without it), neither plastic nor steel can contribute toward a true expression of the *place and context* of a cider or wine. A hand-built clay vessel contains many layers: the maker's decisions around vessel thickness and size, the exact spot the clay was sourced, the way it was fired, the intertwined beauty and hypocrisy of a settler using the land around them in the way Coast Salish communities have been routinely prevented from doing by settler government and communities. These things that usually hover invisibly around a cider or wine come to the foreground through this hand-building process.

As a still cider with oxidative character, this is not a cider you want to sip on while porch-sitting on a weekend afternoon. Oxidative cider really shines when you find the right kinds of foods to pair it with: the "tang" of acetic acid is mainly what sets this apart from ciders we age in stainless steel. Like a Spanish *sidra*—usually oxidative from aging in wood barrels—fatty, savoury foods are key to creating that ideal eating/drinking exchange: the rich, salty foods coat the tongue and the tangy acid of the cider cuts through it, blazing in with its fragrant rosy, leathery character and setting you up for the next bite. It was pressed from unknown crabapples shaken from a very old tree, mixed-use heirlooms and a wide blend of bittersweets/sharps from the cidery orchard.

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