



Shinn Estate Vineyards

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A Self Guided Vineyard
Vineyard Walk



As you find your way to the markers in the vineyard you are welcome to explore further by walking into the rows of vines. We just ask that you do not pick the leaves or the fruit. If you see some of our vineyard crew working on the vines please allow them to continue working uninterrupted, we are happy to answer any of your questions when you return to the tasting room. Enjoy your time in the vineyard!

Marker #1 Organic and Biodynamic Vegetable Garden

This is our communal kitchen garden. Our garden is cared for by Barbara Shinn and our vineyard staff although everyone at Shinn Estate Vineyard partakes of the bounty. Every year we improve the general layout to add to its beauty and efficiency.

You may notice some clover and chamomile growing among the vegetables along with lavender, calendula, cat mint, borage and nasturtiums. These flowers attract both our honeybees and the wild pollinators who's foraging we rely on for the pollination of the vegetable flowers. Besides this benefit we provide habitat for our honeybees and wild pollinators because they are in dire need of our kindness. Insecticides and industrial beekeeping have taken their toll on a worldwide scale. That is why we have intentionally made our garden, our tasting room flower garden and our entire 20 acre vineyard a pollinator's paradise. We have planted bee friendly flowering plants who's pollen and nectar is not only abundant but is also some of the most nutritious to bees.

We farm our vegetables organically and Biodynamically feeding the soil with seaweed, fish and special composts. We plant our vegetable seeds according to the lunar calendar. Biodynamic farming is a method of farming organically while tuning your farm in to the subtle unseen workings of nature. As you stroll the vineyard you will learn more about this approach to farming.

As you continue walking up the tractor path you will see our blackberry and raspberry bushes and to your right will be our block of Cabernet Franc vines. Look for station #2 to your right about midway up this row of vines.

Marker #2 Turning Sunlight into Wine

Take a moment to look at how the vine grows. The thick trunk rises from the soil and extends out left and right into a T shape. The canes then reach skyward like teeth in a hair comb. In the early spring the canes are only 1-10 inches tall but in the summer notice how the canes are sandwiched between catch wires that hold them upright. This vertical shoot positioning allows the leaves to capture sunlight efficiently and turn sunlight into wine, otherwise known as photosynthesis.

Photosynthesis is an amazing process where sunlight falls on a leaf and is captured as pure energy. At the same time the leaves are taking in carbon dioxide and the roots are drinking in water and sending it up to the leaves. As the sunlight, carbon dioxide and water converge an amazing transformation of elements takes place. In a split second the elements are converted into food for the vine. Except for a byproduct...one molecule of oxygen which is not needed and which the plant exhales. So take a moment and breathe in some delicious oxygen straight from our vines.

As you continue walking up the tractor path you will see many blackberry bushes to your left. We love the abundance of summer blackberries but in fact these bushes were planted to help with insect control. The blackberry bushes harbor beneficial insects that launch into the vineyard and help control the leafhopper population. Leafhoppers are insects that damage grapevine leaves. Look ahead and you will see the next stop on your vineyard tour, the coop which houses our Japanese Bantam chickens.

Marker #3 Japanese Bantam Chickens

This is the home of our flock of Japanese Bantam chickens. They really love their bedtime hideaways made from our used wine barrels.

Keeping livestock amongst the vines is a practice of Biodynamic farming. The integration of animals and plants creates a complex farm ecosystem comingling animal and plant instinct and intelligence. Complexity amongst the vines gives us complexity in the wine.

Envision our roosters crowing at dawn while at the same moment the vines open their tiny vents on the underside of their leaves to begin breathing for the day. The roosters sing while the vineyard takes its first morning breath, a subtle magic moment that happens every single morning.

What to do with the chicken bedding? Compost. The cycling and recycling of nutrients makes our wine the ultimate beneficiary. You will read more about this when you learn about our organic soil management at marker #5.

Now as you turn around and look to the west you can see the break in the vineyard separating the north (to your right) and south (to your left) blocks. Begin walking west and you will notice the posts at the end of the rows are numbered. This numbering system is our roadmap to the vineyard charting the different grape varieties we grow. As you progress towards row 54 on your right (station #4) you pass through the Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Petit Verdot all of which are red wine grapes. On your left you will pass through our Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon, our white wine grapes. Once the vine flowers and sets its fruit in June the grapes are all green until September when the grapes turn either red or golden yellow. This time of color change is known as "veraison"

Marker #4 Our Vineyard Floor, a Blooming Meadow

row 54 on your right. Welcome to this section of our vineyard where we grow our merlot. The vines to the north (rows 1 through 56) and south (rows 1 through 31) constitute 10 acres of this grape variety.

As you have enjoyed your stroll through the vineyard you may have noticed the lush green growth under the vines and around their trunks. The beauty of this meadow reflects our organic weed and insect control.

When we allow the meadow to grow, bloom and go to seed, the natural cycle of growth and reseeding has taken place maintaining the vigor of the meadow. As we mow the rows and under the vines a thick layer of green manure is laid down which decays and is turned into plant available nutrients.

Our practice of returning our vineyard floor to an ever evolving meadow ecosystem is a method of Biodynamic farming. By allowing the farm acreage to pass through natural seeding cycles with native plant species a 20 acre biological set-aside is created. As the years go by the ecosystem gains in complexity and new plants appear making the vineyard their home. Here is where Mother Nature can perform her regenerative work on our soils, plants and wildlife habitat.

This continual cover of grasses and broadleaf plants also furnishes food and shelter for our beneficial insects which are an important part of our farm ecosystem. Providing us with natural insect control, beneficial insects prey on the unwelcome pests that eat our vine leaves and grapes. We have over 45 species of grasses and blooming broadleaf species of plants in the vineyard.

Here is a good example of how the natural meadow works for us:

Many years ago we noticed we were beginning to have a troublesome population of mites dining on our vine leaves. This was just previous to converting our vineyard floor to a meadow. As the meadow evolved over the next few years we noticed our troublesome mites were no longer with us, they had disappeared. Upon further study we learned that the “good mite” population (the mites that were eating our “bad mites”) was using the pollen from the meadow flowers to feed their young. They laid their eggs on the pollen granules. Apparently a baby “good mite” eats pollen first and then becomes voracious for “bad mites” later on. We no longer see troublesome mites in the vineyard and are happy to provide as much pollen as our good mites may need for their nursery.

In addition, our 20 acre vineyard is a pollinator’s paradise, welcoming both our honeybees and the 700 wild pollinator species of the Northeast. Our vineyard is a peaceful safe haven for these wonderful creatures.

You can now turn around to the south and find the next marker #5, at row 54 directly behind you. This is the section of the vineyard where we grow our Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Pinot Blanc. The row you are looking at right now is in our Sauvignon Blanc block. The cool growing climate on the East End allows our Sauvignon Blanc to retain crisp acidity when it is fully ripe resulting in a white wine that has a perfect balance of lush fruit and refreshing brightness.

Marker #5: Organic Soil Nutrition

row 54 south block

One of the wines we produce is a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. We have named this wine Haven which is also the name that has been given to our soils on the U.S. Geological Survey. These soils are a gravelly loam which is well drained and perfect for growing wine.

At Shinn Estate Vineyards we feed our soils with organic matter for many reasons, the most important being the health of our living soil. Although we may think of soil as simply a combination of clay, rock, silt and sand the real essence of soil is everything that lives in it. In fact it is the worms, insects and microbes that are responsible for feeding our vines. The natural cycle of soil life is called the Soil Food Web, an intricate relationship between the living soil and plants. When we feed the soil fish, seaweed, whey, compost, compost tea, sea minerals and peanut meal the microbes and insects eat this and then release minerals into the soil. The plants then take up the minerals through their roots. When we manage our soils organically, it is a two step process: we are selecting nutrients for the microbes and insects to eat who in turn feed our vines.

When artificial fertilizers are used this important microbial step is overlooked and the chain of natural events in the soil is broken. In fact, artificial fertilizers are so salty they kill much of the life in the soil. In addition, chemical fertilizers become soluble in the soil water so when the plant is thirsty it involuntarily takes up the chemical fertilizers with the soil water. You may ask “why eat when I am only looking for a drink of water?” That question is the foundation of the movement away from manipulative farming. Instead, let’s allow the vines to eat only when they decide they are hungry and to seek out organically naturally produced food.

Another reason we foster our soil microbes is related to how we ferment our wines. We do not use laboratory yeasts in our fermentations. Instead, we allow the natural vineyard yeast to perform the fermentations in the winery. The vineyard yeasts originate in the soil and then migrate to the skins of the grapes as the grapes mature. On the day of harvest the grapes are brought into the winery ready to be fermented naturally since they have been allowed to populate the wild yeast culture during ripening.

You can now continue to walk west towards row 43 where you will find marker #6 to your right. You are at the highest point of the vineyard and if you look around, you can see the land slopes away from you in every direction. Although it is a gentle slope, it provides us with good water and air drainage keeping us free of standing water and diminishing the threat of frost in the spring and fall. As you look to the north you will see a line of trees on the horizon almost a mile away which is the shore of the Long Island Sound. Behind you to the south the Peconic Bay is just 2 miles away. Our close proximity to the water makes our sustainable farming methods immeasurably important ensuring the cleanliness and viability of our water supply in this fragile ecosystem on the North Fork.

Marker # 6 Wind and Solar Energy

row 43 north block

As you look to the north you can get a good view of our wind turbine and the solar panels on the roof of the barrel cellar directly behind the turbine. We produce 100% of the electricity we use here at Shinn Estate Vineyards. The turbine and solar array power the winery, barrel cellar, outer buildings, Farmhouse Inn and irrigation pump.

Both systems perform quite efficiently. Because the North Fork is situated on a narrow piece of land jutting out into ocean, we have more “sun-days” than any other region on the Northeast coast allowing our solar array to capture sun most days of the year. Meanwhile our turbine is spinning almost constantly producing 80% more energy than was originally predicted from the system. The energy is fed back into the energy grid meanwhile turning our electric meters backward. Producing energy with the wind and sun is another piece in the puzzle of sustainable living.

Continue walking to your left (west) until you come to marker #7 at row 27 on your right.

Marker #7 Creating Natural Wildlife Habitat

row 27 north block

Agriculture is a noble use of open space but we must remember that as humans any alteration we make to a natural ecosystem changes that land forever. Restorative farming is a method of farming meant to bring the land back to a more natural state. As restorative farmers we allow our farm to evolve with the seasons by integrating native plant species with our crops and as you look out over our vineyard meadow you can see the beauty of the vines cohabitating with this wild pasture. But much more is happening than just a symbiosis between plant species. This lush growth also provides food and habitat for small wild creatures such as rabbits, field mice and groundhogs.

Depending on the time of year you are visiting us, you will notice bird netting either rolled down around the base of the trunks or unfurled and covering the fruit. Starlings, a species of blackbirds, are the main reason we use this netting. We love the Starlings during July and August when they dine on the Japanese Beetles who eat our grape leaves, but during ripening season the Starlings eat our fruit. The nets come in very handy during September and October.

We welcome wildlife amongst our vines and have learned over the years that plant and animal diversity connects our vineyard to natural cycles we may not immediately notice or understand. This humble approach to farming is a Biodynamic way of addressing the intelligence of Mother Nature and a way of acknowledging unseen connections between wild and domesticated species. As our vineyard ecosystem evolves and becomes more complex, nature’s wisdom directs many decisions we make while growing our wine.

Continue walking to your left (west) until you come to marker #8 at row 6 on the south side behind you.

Marker #8 Irrigation, Rain and our Water Table

row 6 south block

You may have noticed the black plastic tube running under the vines which is an irrigation conduit with water emitters every 40 inches. In drought years we need to irrigate but in most years the irrigation system is never turned on. Grapevines do not need very much water and prefer a hot dry summer. Even though we get rain during our growing season our light soils drain quickly allowing the ground to dry. Occasionally the drip irrigation is used to add liquid nutrients directly under the vine such as the fish, seaweed and compost tea mentioned earlier.

Our concern for our water supply is yet another reason we manage our soil organically. The North Fork is part of an important watershed and artificial fertilizers easily leach into our water table causing contamination. Recognizing the link between what we feed our soil and the water we drink is a primary concern of a sustainable farmer.

Your walk in the vineyard is now complete and you can retrace your steps back to the winery.

