

Stirring The Lees With James Molesworth



Photo by: David Yellen

James Molesworth

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Well North in the Finger Lakes

At Boundary Breaks, Bruce Murray has a rapidly growing operation

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"We're a little off the beaten track. But someone has to push the frontier," says Bruce Murray, owner of [Boundary Breaks](#), as he comes out to greet me. His winery and vineyard is located pretty far on the northeastern corner of Seneca Lake, right on the Lodi-Ovid line.

Murray, formerly in publishing and then the tech business, cashed out and bought a 120-acre former farm in 2008. Today he has 18 acres planted to vines and plans to go to 50. The majority is Riesling, with small bits of Gewürztraminer, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

"I always thought I'd eventually hang it up and change to doing something where I didn't have to answer to everyone else. I was a wine lover and I'm a hard-working guy," Murray says. "So getting into this business seemed like a good fit, but I'll admit, I didn't know anything about winemaking when I started."

Boundary Breaks is still a work in progress: The tasting room just opened in June. "Doing tastings in the kitchen of my house down there was getting to be a bit too much," jokes Murray. "But seriously, the plan has been to grow steadily, slowly. And the vineyard comes first."

The 2011 vintage was the first commercial release, and it and the ensuing ones have been made at three different facilities: [Red Newt](#), [Fox Run](#) and [Sheldrake Point](#), with the in-house winemakers there, Kelby Russell, Peter Bell and Dave Breeden, respectively, handling the winemaking. It seems an odd approach at first, but Murray puts a different spin on it: "Yes, it's a little tough keeping tabs on everything. But the benefit is we have three very good winemakers, some who are risk-averse and some who are risk-takers, so there's an accelerated learning curve for us. Over the past five vintages, our thought process has evolved as we've learned where we want to go."

Production currently stands at 5,000 cases, and Murray plans to go to 25,000 cases, keeping to 90 percent Riesling along the way. He also makes no bones about what he's targeting in the marketplace, invoking [Chateau Ste. Michelle's](#) large, value-priced Riesling production in Washington.

"We think we can make a really fine wine at the price point we need to be at to get in the market place," says Murray, noting that around \$15 is where Finger Lakes wines need to appear on retail shelves to get buyer interest. "But to do something really fine at that price point, you do need to mechanize in the vineyard and maximize yield and ripeness."

To that end, Murray and his vineyard manager, Kaes Staple, are using a trellis system with two fruiting canes to each vine, double both the fruit and canopy. For a look at how the system works, and the different approaches to canopy management on the morning- and afternoon-sun sides of the vine rows, watch the accompanying video.

The wines have improved quickly in their first few vintages. The Dry No. 239 is the entry-level bottling, named for the particular clone of Riesling. The Ovid Line North bottling is a medium-dry offering, with a bit more depth and range. The top bottling is the Reserve No. 198, what Murray calls a "spätlese-level" bottling; it ripples nicely with wet slate, Key lime and pippin apple notes. All overdeliver for their respective price points (\$20 for the first two, \$30 for the reserve).

"We understand that maximizing yield and getting ripeness requires a delicate balance," says Murray. "And so far we're seeing [Brix](#) readings of 23, picking good fruit into October, and still just bringing in around 3.5 tons an acre. We know the Finger Lakes can grow good fruit. The idea is getting it to the next level."

You can follow James Molesworth on Twitter, at twitter.com/jmolesworth1, and Instagram, at instagram.com/jmolesworth1.