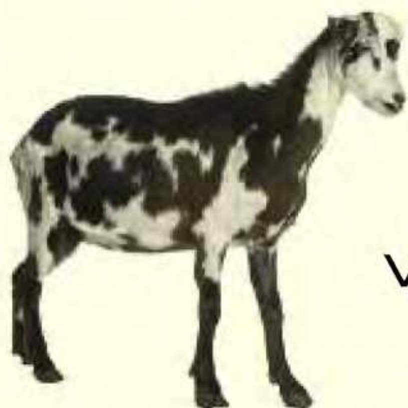
VOODOO



VINTNERS

Oregon's Astonishing Biodynamic Winegrowers

Katherine Cole

Voodoo Vintners

OREGON'S ASTONISHING BIODYNAMIC WINEGROWERS

Katherine Cole

Oregon State University Press • Corvallis

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Preface

Wine writers play two roles: that of the reporter, and that of the critic. We are expected to publish reliable information as well as knowledgeable opinions.

So let me begin by informing you what this book is not: it is not a review of wines or a compendium of useful information, such as you might find in a wine guide. Instead, it is an examination of an inscrutable topic.

I first became aware of biodynamic viticulture sometime around the year 2000, when I moved to Oregon and began tasting local wines. I remember being struck at that time by a pinot gris that was quite unlike its peers: crisp and clean, it reminded me of the pure water you might drink from a mountain spring. I would later discover that it had been made from biodynamic grapes.

A couple of years later, I met the charismatic Jimi Brooks, a figure who appears repeatedly in the following pages, and whose riesling, at that time, had that same mountain-spring purity that I had noticed earlier in the pinot gris.

Brooks was one of those wickedly funny, effortlessly likeable people who could convince just about anyone to try just about anything. As vineyard manager and winemaker for Maysara Winery and Momtazi Vineyard as well as for his own eponymous label, Brooks, he pursued biodynamic viticulture with his typical enthusiasm. Jimi convinced me and many others to take a closer look at this unusual style of agriculture.

Touring Moe Momtazi's property with Brooks, I was struck by the tumbledown appearance of the place. It looked wild and alive—so unlike the neighboring estates, with their neat vine rows of brown-and-green corduroy. As I wrote at the time, "The access road was hemmed in by swampy ditches and weed-laden mounds of percolating manure; farther up the steep, rutted alleys of Maysara's Momtazi Vineyard, sheep, chickens, cows, and horses ambled through untamed fields. Patches of brambles and poison oak harbored coveys of quail. And rambling rows of vines were accented by corridors of crimson clover and purple vetch."

I was shocked to find Brooks carefully tending stands of nettles and horsetail—in my estimation, noxious weeds. I thrilled to see him

stirring these weeds into teas, using a witchy-looking twig broom, with a mischievous grin on his face.

But this was Oregon, where it's typical for a local to complain that she's having a bad day solely due to the position of Saturn in the sky. In the Oregon wine community, Brooks was just one of many off-the-wall characters making wines in an unconventional way.

Then I began reading more about biodynamic viticulture. I learned that some of France's most respected vintners were pursuing the practice, and that the goddess-like Lalou Bize-Leroy, of Domaine Leroy in Burgundy, had spoken on the subject at the International Pinot Noir Celebration in McMinnville, Oregon, in 2001. Could biodynamic viticulture be a serious, worldwide movement?

Burgundy's best vignerons were doing it. So, increasingly, were Oregon's best. I discovered that the headquarters of the American biodynamic movement, Demeter USA and the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, are both based in Oregon.

(An aside here: Demeter USA has trademarked the words "Demeter" and "biodynamic" so that they don't become diluted in the manner of fuzzy terms such as "green" and "natural." These registered certification marks protect consumers, biodynamic producers, and it goes without saying, Demeter USA. If estates without Demeter certification market or label their wines as "bio-dynamic," they risk legal action for trademark infringement. I have attempted to make clear in the following pages which properties are Demeter certified and which are not. However, executive director Jim Fullmer has been kind enough to grant me fair use of the terms "biodynamic" and "biodynamics" to generally describe the farming techniques associated with this practice.)

In the ensuing years, I found myself repeatedly defining and describing biodynamic viticulture for the benefit of fellow wine lovers. Their questions and interest sent me searching for books on the topic. To my dismay, I found very few. There were gardening manuals, a valuable but encyclopedic tome by the British wine writer Monty Waldin, and the original transcripts of Rudolf Steiner's 1924 lectures on the subject. There were, also, ruminations by the quirky Loire Valley vigneron Nicolas Joly, who has been an effective spokesperson for the movement, but whose baroque verbal stylings do not exactly lend themselves to easy comprehension.

Looking over this array of dense texts, I was flummoxed. Why wasn't there a simple, readable, enjoyable book on biodynamic viticulture for the everyday wine lover to flip through and enjoy? And why shouldn't this book focus on the trend from the perspective of Oregon wine country, where the biodynamic practitioners were a colorful bunch with plenty to say? A story was forming in my mind, a story much larger than one that could be crammed into the occasional newspaper column.

It was at this time that I was approached by Mary Braun of Oregon State University Press and invited to submit a book proposal. I sent her an outline of the story of biodynamic wine in Oregon. The Press kindly accepted my proposal, and I set to work.

Over the course of the following year—during which I continued with my regular commitments for *The Oregonian* and *MIX* magazine, as well as my duties as the mother of two small children and the wife of a very busy, if very supportive, husband—I got into the habit of jumping into my car and cruising out to wine country whenever I could find an extra half-day, and ducking into my office to type whenever I could find a spare moment. By the year's end, I had this: a book about biodynamic agriculture as seen through the lens of Oregon viticulture.

Thanks to its cow horns, moon phases, and cachet, biodynamic winegrowing makes for a compelling story. But I hope this book also expresses my admiration of all the Oregonians who toil in the vineyard and tinker in the cellar, no matter what style of winegrowing they are practicing.

This book is about anyone insane enough to be buffeted by the Willamette Valley's famous rains eight months out of every twelve. It is about the organic, the sustainable, and the conventional vignerons. All are foolhardy enough to make pinot noir in Oregon; it is just one small step from this level of risk to that even more foolhardy form of farming, biodynamics.

I have an emotional response to the very best wines. Like the very best books and films, they make me weep. My regular readers know by now what sorts of wines make me cry: They're usually lower in alcohol, higher in acidity, more mineral, less ripe. They're tense and electric. And, of course, they reek of *terroir*.

I don't know if biodynamic agriculture is the key to unlocking *terroir*; I suspect a number of factors count, starting with the suitability of the site. Still, some readers might wonder what I think of biodynamic wines: Do I prefer them or dislike them? Do they make me reach for the Kleenex box? My answer is this: biodynamically farmed grapes make fascinating wines. They also make banal wines. The same is true of conventionally farmed grapes, organically farmed grapes, and everything in between.

The pragmatist in me is suspicious of the biodynamic movement. While many of its farming practices and ecological premises appear sound, they come packaged with a lot of extraneous spiritual baggage that I can't help but view cynically.

However, I must admit: as someone who drives a stick shift when she's not getting around on foot or by bike, I feel camaraderie with anyone who prefers to take the more arduous path to arrive at his or her destination. It may not be the most efficient way to get there, but it is, in my experience, always the most pleasurable.

Introduction

> You do something to me,
> something that simply mystifies me.
> Tell me, why should it be
> you have the pow'r to hypnotize me?
> Let me live 'neath your spell
> Do do that voodoo
> that you do so well.
>
> —Cole Porter, *You Do Something to Me*

They say you can't judge a book by its cover, nor a wine by its label. But I contend that you can tell a great deal about a winegrowing operation simply by sizing up how the winemaker is dressed: he who wears a blazer and button-down to work, for example, is probably engaged in different activities than she who dons a golf shirt and khakis.

The typical Oregon vintner's wardrobe consists of an array of Levi's, plaid flannels, Carhartts, and stained sweatshirts. All of which—although they might leave something sartorial to be desired—bode well for the wine.*

And so if, upon arriving at Brick House Vineyards in Newberg, Oregon, a visitor is greeted by a tall, broad gentleman with a salt-and-pepper beard, dressed in a faded Carhartt T-shirt and worn canvas work pants held up by an old leather belt and a tooled Western buckle, these are good omens. If this gentleman's hair should look wind-blown and wild, if that hair should be flecked with bits of straw, and if a set of neon-orange ear plugs should be dangling, sideways, around the vintner's neck, then these, too, are very good signs.

The Brick House winery is a drafty barn built in 1931, with weathered Tonnellerie Cadus wine barrels stacked against its walls. A makeshift lab (a sink, a few cabinets, rows of test tubes) is in one corner; in another, hanging tapestries conceal a desk and filing

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* One obsessive winemaker of my acquaintance, Jay McDonald, owns seven pairs of Carhartts, in three different waist sizes. The smaller sizes cover summer and fall, when hard work happens in the vineyard and cellar; the largest are for winter and spring, with their endless wine dinners and sales trips.

cabinet. The tasting area is cozy and bunker-like, with low ceilings, an elevated, wide-planked-pine floor, and a long wood table flanked by a green enamel wood stove, antique easy chairs, and a well-worn leather couch cradling an array of snoring canines. It is a bright, sun-soaked day outside, but it is peacefully dark and churchlike inside, where barn swallows sing from the attic rafters to the slow metronome of an orchestra of ticking clocks and a Vivaldi violin concerto drifts in from concealed speakers. At the sliding-glass doors, a fat telescope points toward the moon. In short, this barn isn't merely a winery. It's the man-cave of Doug Tunnell, winegrower and proprietor of Brick House Vineyards. Tall and stalwart, he projects an Adam Bede-like nobility and speaks in a baritone with a cello-like resonance. Born and educated in Oregon, Tunnell worked as a CBS foreign correspondent, mostly based in Beirut, before handing in his press pass and purchasing a forty-acre hillside estate in the Willamette Valley.

Tunnell and his wife, Melissa Mills, live in the eponymous brick house across the drive from the barn, just past a grape arbor and a stand of trees; both structures are built into the hillside and surrounded by vines. Two decades ago, when he purchased the old hazelnut and walnut orchard and converted it to a pinot noir, chardonnay, and gamay noir vineyard, Tunnell realized that he would have to breathe, soak up, and coexist with every substance sprayed on his precious plants. He decided to transition the property to organic agriculture and began to compile a chemical history of the land, interviewing some of the sprayers who had applied pre-emergent herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides such as Paraquat and DDT. "The list of substances read like a chapter out of *Silent Spring*," he recalls.

Because he lives among his vines, Tunnell's relationship with his property is sensual. His daily existence is one of seeing brown canes and trifoil grape leaves, stepping on soft earth, smelling the green vegetation around him, tasting the ripening fruit. Which, he believes, is why he noticed, sometime around the year 2000, something slipping away. "From the day I owned the farm, we used only organic methods of maintenance. But I started to feel like I was losing some of the character of the grapes, especially the chardonnay," he recalls.

His plants seemed to droop a bit. His soil felt brittle as he sifted it through his fingers. “The fact that we are growing on hillsides makes it even more important that we work with the soil,” Tunnell reflects. “It is just so fragile. It dries out so thoroughly. It just needs nourishment. It needs microbial activity. It needs organic matter. We can’t just keep mining fruit out of this place and not putting anything back in. It can’t be a one-way street. Nothing in nature is.”

The path to soil sickness is gradual and subtle in a fertile place like western Oregon. It might begin before a vineyard is ever planted. Earth-moving equipment uproots trees, bushes, and boulders, then turns over the soil to make it smooth. As soon as the vines are planted, weeds start to sprout up and threaten to crowd them out.

The vinetender applies herbicide, but this kills off any benign cover crops that might try to resurrect themselves, thus depleting the soil of nutrient-gathering capabilities, and clearing out the microbe-feeding buffet of decomposing vegetation.

The downed trees and shrubs and lack of a cover crop mean that roosting spots for birds and beneficial insects are gone. The result is a pest problem both large (gophers, which hawks and owls would have hunted) and small (bugs, which smaller birds and larger insects would have gotten). This calls for pesticides. Which curtail the aerating and phosphorus-releasing capabilities of the earthworm. And so pathogenic fungi, which thrive in anaerobic conditions, move in.

The soil grows brittle, then rock-hard and lifeless for lack of air. The farmer tills or discs to soften and aerate the earth, dispersing dust and breaking down whatever organic matter was left. Which leaves the soil bereft of humus, the matter that stores moisture and nutrients.

The grapevines grow droopy and begin to contract diseases and attract pests. So the vinetender applies fertilizer, which is like a steroid shot straight to the vein of the plant, pumping it up for now but setting it up for a future heart attack or stroke.

As an organic farmer, Doug Tunnell’s situation wasn’t as extreme as the admittedly dramatic one outlined above. But he still wasn’t satisfied with the health of his vines or the fertility of his soil. So

in 2000, Tunnell began to study a deeper form of agriculture called biodynamics. This style of cultivation goes beyond the organic imperative of "do no harm"; it aims to actually *improve* farm health. "The organic programs as we followed them placed some emphasis on feeding the soil, but biodynamics makes that job absolutely integral to the methodology and our soils and microbial populations have benefited greatly as a result," says Tunnell.

Tunnell describes biodynamics as "a holistic approach": "If you have healthy soil, you will have healthy plants. And if you have healthy plants, you will have better fruit. And if you have better fruit, you will have better wine. And if you have better wine, you will have better customers and happier people." By 2005, Brick House Vineyards was a Demeter-certified biodynamic property.

What looks different about a biodynamic vineyard? The rows might be a bit wilder, with red clover blossoms peeking up between the vines; or there might be bird boxes mounted above each block. But in Oregon, these are fairly common sights.

Perhaps, then, it's the rambling English garden near the winery at Brick House Vineyards. Look closely between soft pink rose blossoms and you'll see homeopathic curatives, such as bright-white chamomile, yellow and coral clumps of valerian, and gold, white, and paprika yarrow, as well as neat rows of stinging nettle—a surprising sight, since most gardeners consider nettles to be a bothersome nuisance.

Nearby is a brick-lined pit that looks like a shallow well; it will be used to make "cow-pat" or "barrel" compost. And behind the corrugated-aluminum machine shed is a row of massive compost piles. These mounds used to be nothing more than piles of shit (cow dung, actually) mixed with weeds, straw, and grapevine debris. But now, through natural alchemy, they are soft coffee-colored hills of humus, flecked with seeds, hulls, and pebbles, smelling like rich soil. Tunnell plunges both hands in and holds out a fistful of the stuff, pointing out ten red tiny wriggling worms.

Biodynamic practitioners build and nurture compost piles. They grow cover crops to fix nitrogen in the soil. They install birdhouses to attract songbirds, hawks, and owls. They send sheep and chickens down the vine rows to feast on weeds and work the earth. In these ways, they are not too different from proactive organic farmers.

But there are two aspects of biodynamic agriculture that set it apart. Practitioners time their cultivating to the movement of the moon and the stars in the sky. And they make and apply the biodynamic preparations. The preparations, or preps, as they're often called, are like homeopathic treatments for plants. They were first listed by the Austrian scholar Rudolf Steiner in a 1924 series of lectures to farm owners—today collected in a single volume entitled *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture*—that are the basis of biodynamic farming. They also offer a taste of Steiner's New-Agey credo, with their frequent references to cosmic influences and life forces.

Because the preps are what have captured the public's imagination about BD (a commonly used nickname for biodynamic agriculture) and because they are a required part of any certified-biodynamic farming regime, they will be referred to throughout this book. So let's take a moment to familiarize ourselves with them.

Preparation 500* is a cow horn packed with the manure of lactating bovines—no bullshit—and buried two and a half to five feet underground for the winter, "the season when the Earth is most inwardly alive," according to Steiner. It's dug up in the spring, by which point the manure looks like finely pulverized coffee grounds and smells and feels like soft, rich earth. In minute portions, it is added to half a bucket of water at a time. This water is stirred vigorously for an hour, in a ritualistic manner that will be described further in Chapter Three. It's sprayed on the soil in late spring and late autumn to encourage root growth.

To make Preparation 501, the farmer packs a cow horn "with quartz that has been ground to a powder and mixed with water to the consistency of a very thin dough." He buries this for the summer, digs it up in late autumn, and saves it for the following spring, when he stirs a tiny quantity (Steiner is aggravatingly vague here: "you can take a portion the size of a pea, or maybe no bigger than a pinhead")

* According to biodynamic author and expert Monty Waldin, the numerals are no more than product codes; the first 499 numbers were already taken by anthroposophic/homeopathic medicines produced by Weleda, Steiner's pharmaceutical company. However, Waldin points out that they were also useful as a code jargon during the Third Reich, when the practice of biodynamics was banned in Germany.

into a whole bucket of water and sprays it on foliage to promote photosynthesis and ripening.

To prepare 502, the practitioner gathers a bunch of yarrow flowers in the summer, stuffs them into the bladder of a deer, and hangs this up to dry in the sun until the autumn, when she buries the whole thing. She digs it up the next spring, then adds its contents to her compost pile. The resulting compost is supposed to "enliven the soil," encouraging the absorption of nutrients.

Chamomile flowers packed into a cow intestine make Preparation 503 sausages. These are buried for the winter, exhumed in the spring, and added to the compost pile. Chamomile is apparently just as soothing for the soil's digestion of nutrients as it is for ours, stabilizing nitrogen and stimulating plant growth.

Compressed wilted stinging nettles, buried for a whole year, then unearthed and added to the compost pile, produce 504. This should aid in the decomposition process, filtering out the bad stuff and retaining the useful stuff.

Preparation 505 is chopped-up oak bark, packed into the skull of a farm animal, and stashed somewhere very wet, such as under a gutter, under a snowpack, or even in a rain barrel, in late autumn. It is retrieved in the spring, its contents added to the compost pile as a calcium source that will—it is claimed—raise the pH of the soil and prevent or arrest disease.

Wilted dandelion heads stuffed into cow mesenteries (connective stomach tissue) and buried in late autumn make 506. Unearthed in the spring, they're added to the compost pile so as to stimulate the relationship between silica and potassium.

Valerian blossoms gathered during the summer and pressed result in a juice that is diluted and sprayed over the compost pile. This is 507, which is supposed to heat the compost and bring phosphorus to the soil.

A giant cauldron of tea steeped from silica-rich horsetail is 508. This is sprayed—along with Bordeaux mixture (the commonly used fungicide of copper sulfate and hydrated lime) and minute amounts of sulfur—on the soil in the spring to prevent and control fungal disease. Extra-credit points for those who make additional teas out of dried chamomile blossoms to combat heat stress or nettle leaves as an insect repellant.

When discussing biodynamic agriculture, we struggle with a way to describe it in just a few words. It's über-organic. It's witchcraft farming. It's voodoo in the vineyard. It's all of these things, and none of these things.

The wine writer Matt Kramer likens biodynamic to kosher, dubbing Demeter, the biodynamic education and certification organization, the rabbinate that legislates this agricultural orthodoxy. "For this observer, biodynamic processes are a form of discipline, some of which may well actually work, while other practices may be more emotionally and psychologically sustaining to the practitioner than practical to the plant or wine," he writes.

For my part, I like to compare BD to yoga. It's a way to strengthen and fortify the whole body, to ward off illness and to maintain health. It helps us sleep at night and relaxes us during the day. It's also a lifelong pursuit, an endless learning process. Any student, no matter how advanced, will discover something new at each class. We've all admired the bodies of those devout practitioners, with their long, supple, and strong limbs. Their frames are so wiry yet flexible that we wonder why they bother practicing so often. Yet they keep coming back for more.

Yoga is self-contained, holistic. There is no court, no playing field, no ball, no bat. No spectators and no competition. You simply use your own body as a tool to shape and strengthen … your own body. You perform best when you're feeling light and relaxed, so performance-enhancing drugs—even coffee—wouldn't be of any help. Biodynamic farming, too, is (in theory) a closed loop: no inputs from outside the farm should be needed to keep the soil healthy.

There is another, metaphysical, aspect to yoga that isn't much discussed. The same thing goes for biodynamics. It is possible to be a practitioner of yoga without buying into the spiritual side. It is possible to chant *om* purely as a way of exercising the lungs, rather than as a way of achieving that state of mental detachment that allows for meditation. It is possible to be a yogi without being an ascetic or wrapping one's ankles around one's head. And it's possible to perfect each pose while still only getting half-way there, spiritually speaking. Only the yogi knows if she feels a sense of calm and connects with her chakras when she leans into that stretch. Only

she knows if it's not just her body but also her soul that is moved by her practice.

Yoga was once the domain of the long haired, the barefoot, and the broke. Now, this spiritual, holistic, and slimming sport has been wrested from the ascetics and adopted by the stars. Hollywood-based yoga guru Bikram Choudhury is said to own a fleet of forty Rolls Royces and Bentleys. Likewise, some of the best wines in the world come from biodynamic vineyards, and fetch hundreds or even thousands of dollars per bottle.

Biodynamic viticulture in Oregon is similar to yoga at your neighborhood studio. Although it's still a fringe phenomenon, it's becoming increasingly popular and voguish. Many winegrowers are dabbling in it. A small number are devout practitioners.

And, yes, there are the very few who embrace the more esoteric elements of it, who speak of the importance of "intention"—a yoga buzzword, too, which infers that mere thoughts can have tangible outcomes—and who claim to see colorful auras around their plants.

But you won't hear much talk about the spirituality of biodynamics among most practicing vignerons. These farmers are more interested in the discipline, and the positive results this discipline appears to elicit. They understand that, if you stretch every day, your limbs will stay supple into old age.

"We are farmers. We are pragmatic, practical people. We don't take a lot of bullshit. You can't just feed us something; we have to experience it," observes Jim Fullmer, executive director of Demeter USA, the biodynamic certification organization. "The roots of biodynamics come from Goethe. It's really simple: Just shut up and observe nature."

Observing nature means going back to the old ways of doing things. It means turning your back on the past century's rapid advances in agricultural science. It means farming like your great-grandparents did, guided by the moon and the stars and aided by the defenses that nature provides.

There is value to a traditional foundation of knowledge. We want a contemporary artist to have learned her trade sketching realistic nude figures; we like it when our favorite novelists make allusions to the literary canon. It's comforting to know that a physician could deliver a baby or resuscitate someone who had collapsed in the street without access to drugs and modern medical equipment.

But biodynamic farmers don't merely rely on a foundation of traditional knowledge; they swear off most modern advances altogether. Or, as one Oregon winegrower so succinctly put it to me, "You really have to know what you're doing. It's like bringing a knife to a gunfight."

Whatever you think about practitioners of biodynamic agriculture, you've got to admit that they've got guts. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't even show up at a gunfight with a gun. Biodynamic farming is like a health regimen of yoga, herbs, and nutrition. Nothing else. Can you imagine living without access to Ibuprofen?

It may be laudable, but it also may be foolhardy. I'm happy to treat my kids' colds with homeopathic syrup, but I also give them antibiotics when they are gravely ill. If I were a farmer, would I be willing to trust the fate of my crop to herbal remedies alone?

How do biodynamic vinegrowers stay safe? They stay on high alert. "What matters is that biodynamic cultivation signals a willingness to pay extreme attention to vines and wines," the wine writer Matt Kramer observes in his recent book, *Matt Kramer on Wine*. "Like driving a race car, if you take your eyes off the road—or in this case, a highly vulnerable vineyard—an irremediable disaster can result. Ask any farmer: attentiveness is always a good thing."

Burgundy's premier domaines farm this way. And in Oregon's Willamette Valley, where the pinot noir grape is everything, all eyes are on Burgundy. Doug Tunnell is considered—by American observers, at least—to be a vigneron in the Burgundian tradition, because his wines are understated and subtle and reek of *terroir*. And because he practices biodynamic agriculture.

If your target demographic is the serious wine geek, there is a marketing advantage to biodynamic certification. Brick House Vineyards is one of only two Oregon wineries belonging to the natural-wine trade group, Return to Terroir, based in France. For lovers of natural wine, for whom "handcrafted," "artisanal," and "authentic" are buzzwords, Doug Tunnell, with his old barn, his biodynamic viticulture, and with straw in his hair, is a cult star.

"Cult" being the operative word: as I was researching this book in 2010, only sixty-eight vineyard properties in the United States could claim to be Demeter Certified Biodynamic®. In Oregon, only sixteen vineyards were certified. This may be a rapidly growing movement, but at the moment, it's still the fringe of the fringe. That

said, Demeter's winegrowing membership list had grown nearly fourteen-fold over the previous four years. Every sommelier and wine merchant in the United States was talking about BD, and every serious wine drinker was wondering about it.

And in Oregon, even if they weren't seeking certification, many more vinetenders were dabbling in BD practices. Despite a recession that was debilitating the industry, Oregon winegrowers were relentlessly pursuing quality, an environmentally sustainable form of farming, and a lifestyle that might turn back the clock in the face of the sometimes-terrifying onslaught of technology. They were seeking ways to differentiate themselves and to help each other. And, above all, they were on a quest for that holy grail, *terroir*.

Every toddler mimics the calls of farm animals before learning to speak. Every child grows up familiar with those Platonic images of the big red barn, the white picket fence. Children's books depict a farmer who husbands by hand a wide variety of crops and livestock. Through a child's eyes, the farm is seen as a fertile self-contained ecosystem.

In most of the United States, and, increasingly, the world, that image no longer squares with reality. But biodynamic winegrowers are resisting this contemporary irony. They believe it's time to get back to basics, to the kind of farming we learned about in preschool.

A is for animals, which are an essential part of any working farm. Bovine manure, deer bladders, weed-eating sheep, and gopher-killing kestrels are all part of a successful biodynamic ecosystem.

B is for Burgundy, and for biodynamic. In Oregon, the biodynamic Bs include three of the most revered producers in the state: Bergström, Beaux Frères, and Brick House, where Doug Tunnell labors, with straw in his hair, and worms in his hands, and almost—almost—Burgundian wines in his barrels.

C is for the cosmos and for cow horns, those otherworldly aspects of biodynamics that fascinate some observers and repel others. It's also for centuries and centuries of farming this way, and for the past century, when we forgot how it was done.

Could cow horns, vortexes, and the words of a prophet named Rudolf Steiner hold the key to producing the most alluring wines in the world—and to saving the planet?

In *Voodoo Vintners,* wine writer Katherine Cole reveals the mysteries of biodynamic winegrowing, tracing its practice from Paleolithic times to the finest *domaines* in Burgundy today. At the epicenter of the American biodynamic revolution are the Oregon winemakers who believe that this spiritual style of farming results in the truest translations of *terroir* and the purest pinot noirs possible.

Cole introduces these "voodoo vintners," examining their motivations and rationalizations and explaining why the need to farm biodynamically courses through their blood. Her engaging narrative answers the call of oenophiles everywhere for more information about this "beyond organic" style of winemaking.

"An engrossing, entertainingly written, at times wryly funny book on a subject that too little has been written about."
REX PICKETT, author of *Sideways* and *Vertical*

"Katherine Cole is a splendid writer, with an appeal that's like Tracy Kidder—the intriguing ins and outs of any subject, and very entertaining."
ALAN FURST, author of *Spies of the Balkans*

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