

FATGOLDZINE

FALL 2020 HARVEST / ISSUE 1

Welcome to the first issue of Fat Gold's fourth year, made from picual and arbequina olives harvested in October 2020!

THE BASICS

Here's how to open your tin: pull the white cap up by its "ears," extending the translucent pouring spout below. Don't be afraid to apply steady pressure until the spout pops out. This can be puzzling, so we've posted a demonstration at fat.gold/open-sesame.

Italian producers call the year's first offering *olio nuovo*, new oil, a term now often used by producers in California, too. Here at Fat Gold, we tend not to imitate the Old World traditions... but we still like the idea of a special name for the very freshest oil of the season, so we call our December shipment: Nova.

(Note that Italian *olio nuovo* is traditionally hazy with sediment. We filter our Nova, because we think filtered oil tastes better.)

BATCH BY BATCH

Fat Gold is a small-batch olive oil producer. What does that mean in practice?

A batch begins when, at some point over the course of the year, Kathryn gets a line on some interesting olives. Sometimes, we can arrange to buy them months ahead; other times, it's a matter of a grower telling us, "We'll have to wait and see what I have."

Then, as the harvest approaches, we sketch out an itinerary. This year, we started down south, in Bakersfield, where the olives ripen earlier. From there, we hopscotched north: Fresno, Vernalis, Capay Valley.

On a harvest day, we show up, ready to collect our interesting olives. This year, our batches ranged in size from 1½ tons to six tons—which, just for scale, completely fills the back of a 26-foot refrigerated box truck.

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HOW TO TASTE OLIVE OIL

Grab a spoon or a tiny cup and pour out a little bit.

Smell it! Olive oil has tons of aroma.

Take a sip. Slurp in a bit of air at the same time.

Now: swallow it. There are three things you're looking for in extra virgin olive oil, all in balance:

- **Fruitiness.** Think of words like this: grassy, tomato-y, herbaceous. You might taste green banana, artichoke, or something almost flowery.
- **Bitterness.** If you ever eat an olive straight off the tree, you will discover that they are very, very bitter. Some of that bitterness makes it way, pleasantly, into the oil.
- **Pungency.** This is the technical term for the spicy sensation that you might feel at the back of your throat. It's not spicy like a chile pepper; more like ginger or radish. If you've never encountered it in olive oil, it can be a bit alarming! What you're feeling is caused by antioxidants that are abundant in fresh olive oil. (Some people even describe olive oil in terms of one, two, or three coughs.)

Is six tons a lot? Depends who you ask. Four years ago, six tons was our entire harvest, our total production—and yes, it seemed like a lot! But of course, many producers in California mill that many olives not in a day, but in an hour. The fact that six tons fills up a truck makes it feel like a natural limit for one of our batches. Unless we start driving a little fleet...

Here's the important thing: *we make these batches specifically for you.* As we followed our itinerary across California, we were constantly in conversation: "Do you think this batch is going to be a subscription shipment? Which one? March? June?"

In French winemaking, there's a term for a kind of producer who buys grapes from many different growers, then uses them to make wine offered under their own label: the *négociant*. The *négociant* might not own vines, but they know what kind of grapes they love, and, in a sense, their lack of vines liberates them, permits them to survey the whole field, coaxing new combinations into existence.

Which is exactly what we did with this shipment.

This first release of fresh 2020 oil is our first-ever blend, 50-50 picual and arbequina. The picual olives came from hot Bakersfield, and they were milled with Gregg Bone on a hilltop in Paso Robles. The arbequina olives came from Fresno, and they were milled with Jeff Martin along the train tracks near Gilroy.

Olive oil makers will tell you that they often blend to compensate for lackluster oils. Or, sometimes an oil is actually too robust, so you want to tone it down with a milder oil. But that's not the case with this blend. Both of these oils were great on their own... and the blend is better than the sum of its parts. Read on.

KATHRYN'S TASTING NOTES

The picual alone had one note, bold and clear: fresh, ripe tomato. The arbequina alone was softer, more delicate, and it had layers: nuttiness, ripe apple. Both of them were perfectly good; we've previously sent you oils similar to each. But, combine them, and it makes something much more complex and interesting.

When we did our first test blend of these oils, Kathryn's face lit up. Of course, she had hoped and believed the combination would be good... but you never know for sure until you taste.

HOW TO USE YOUR FAT GOLD

On the day we finished bottling this shipment, we stopped for a snack on the airy patio of a little wine bar. Kathryn ordered a glass of prosecco; Robin had a California pinot noir. We also ordered one of the bar's appetizers, an offering of prosciutto, parmesan, dried fruit, and dry bread. VERY dry bread. Kathryn dashed back to the car to retrieve a dented tin of the picual-arbequina blend; we doused the entire plate in it. And—this might sound schmaltzy, but it's true—we realized, in that moment, that we'd been so busy making our small batches we hadn't really stopped to enjoy them.

The oil went particularly well with the fruit: dried apples, apricots, prunes. So, if you want the full Fat Gold experience, assemble a plate just like this—your bread doesn't have to be QUITE so dry—and pour your Nova freely.

THE SWITCHING YARD

As always, the label is a magnet for you to keep and save, if you wish! This shipment's magnet uses the painting *Engine House and Bunkers* by Austin Mecklem, painted in 1934, funded by the New Deal's Public Works of Art Project during the Great Depression.

Fat Gold subscribers know we like to emphasize the industrial and mechanical parts of olive oil production: a counterbalance to the omnipresent pastoral scenes. The switching yard in Mecklem's painting evokes, for us, the logistics of this year's harvest—and the fun of hauling heavy things from one place to another.

But, of course, it's also just a beautiful image. You can find a high-resolution version, along with a link to learn more at the Smithsonian's website, at fat.gold/art.

That's it for this issue! **If there are any problems whatsoever with your shipment, let us know.** Just email robin@fat.gold and we'll get things fixed.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Fat Gold. Remember: use it up!

—Kathryn and Robin

P.S. You can browse back issues of the Fat Gold Zine at our website. There's a lot of good olive oil info lurking here: fat.gold/zine