

Convert to
Pinotholicism

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinotaficionados

Volume 5, Issue 46

August 14, 2006

Inside this issue:

Privé Vineyard	4
White Rose Vineyard	6
Belle Vallé	9
Van Duzer	13
Oregon Wine Websites	19
Willamette Valley Appellations	19

Oregon: Pinot Noir Is Here to Stay

There has been an impression that Oregon is rife with hippies making wine out of garages in their backyards. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Sure, the winemakers here often sport beards and there is a prevailing laid back attitude which places more emphasis on quality of life than material possessions. But by any measuring stick you choose, Oregon Pinot Noir is world-class. It is remarkable to think, that Oregon's Pinot Noir Era began only about forty years ago.

According to the Oregon Wine Board, in 2005 there were 303 wineries in Oregon, 384 Oregon wine brands, and 734 vinifera vineyards (14,100 acres). Other sources have put the current number of wineries between 320 and 350. Oregon claims to be second in the United States behind California in the number of wineries (a claim that is disputed by neighboring Washington which has close to the same number). New vineyards seem to sprout up like weeds. Oregon has placed its stake with Pinot Noir - 7,974 acres planted. In 2005, 12,086 tons of Pinot Noir were harvested (contrast this with 1986 when less than 30 tons of all varietals were picked). Oregon now ranks fourth in the United States in production output. In 2005, sales were 1,591,300 cases (up 24% from 2004) with a retail value of \$184.7 million. Nearly half of Oregon's total case sales are Pinot Noir.

Vinifera grapes were planted in Oregon as far back as 1825 (about the time they were also introduced to California). The wine industry's modern era was ushered in by pioneer winegrower Richard Sommer of Hillcrest Vineyard in Roseburg in the Umpqua Valley. He was the first to make commercial-quality Oregon wine. The Umpqua Valley is actually a series of valleys south of Eugene. It is warmer and drier than the Willamette Valley to the north and produces primarily warm-suited varietals like Cabernet, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chardonnay.

The modern Pinot Noir Era in Oregon began in 1965 with the arrival of Charles and Shirley Coury who purchased an abandoned 45-acre vineyard near Forest Grove. Coury's name has been somewhat lost in the history of Pinot Noir in Oregon, often eclipsed by David Lett, who arrived in Oregon about the same time and carries the moniker, "Papa Pinot." While attending UC Davis, Coury wrote a master thesis titled, "Cold Climate Amelioration Hypothesis," in which he hypothesized that vinifera varietals produce their best quality wines when ripened just at the limit of their growing season. He chose Oregon as the best place to prove his hypothesis and in 1965 planted Pinot Noir in his vineyard. He became the second winemaker

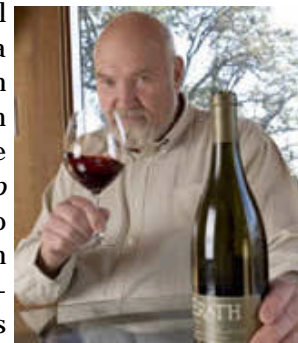
David Lett's biggest professional challenge: "To convince wine lovers that Pinot Noir is the most seductive, beautiful, enjoyable, fascinating wine in the world...when it's grown in the right place."

Wine Business Monthly, December, 2005

in post-Prohibition Oregon to produce a decent wine. He operated the Coury Winery, Vineyards and Nursery until 1978. Coury was one of the first winegrowers in this country to take an interest in Pinot Noir clones. According to *North American Pinot Noir*, he is reputed to have brought "suitcase clones" to Oregon from Burgundy in the 1960s. The historic property is now the David Hill Winery.

David Lett was also a student at UC Davis at the same time as Coury. Utah-born, Lett had a BA in Philosophy before entering UC Davis. His professor, Harold Berg, had told him that there were very few climates in the United States cool enough for Pinot Noir. Lett was committed to planting Pinot Noir and considered New Zealand and even Portugal. He kept coming back to Oregon, thinking it was the closest climate to Burgundy (Oregon and Burgundy share the same 45 degree northern latitude) Finally, at age 25, he moved to Oregon's Dundee Hills. In 1965 he planted Pinot Noir and related varieties, despite the echoes of colleagues who told him the grapes would never ripen in such a cold climate. Whether Coury or Lett planted the first Pinot Noir in Oregon is up for dispute and it little matters as they both made significant contributions to the fledgling Oregon wine industry. Lett's first harvest was in 1970, a year after Woodstock, and he sold a few hundred cases of "Oregon Spring Wine" for \$2.65 a bottle. Supposedly he sent out four hundred invitations to a release party and received but one response. This was an inauspicious start, but the quality of his wines improved with each vintage. In 1979, Robert Drouhin set up a blind tasting of French Burgundies versus American Pinot Noir. At the Gault-Mileu tasting held in Paris, a 1959 Domaine Drouhin Chambolle-Musigny came in first, but David Lett's 1975 Eyrie Vineyards Pinot Noir took second. Lett's Eyrie Pinot Noirs have since become well-known for their quality and ageability. Today, he has 50 acres of organically farmed, own-rooted, non-irrigated vines producing 8,000 to 10,000 cases annually. He has been making a "single vineyard" Pinot Noir longer than any other winemaker in the United States. In addition, he was the first to produce a New World Pinot Gris in 1970.

About the time that Lett's Pinot Noir shocked the international wine scene, there were 34 bonded Oregon wineries farming 1,100 acres of vineyards. The history of many of these wine pioneers that followed Coury and Lett to Yamhill County are told in the excellent book written by Kerry McDaniel Boenisch titled, *Vineyard Memoirs: Oregon Wine Pioneer Recollections of Living, Grape-Growing and Winemaking in the 1970's* (2004, CKMB, PO Box 512, Dundee Oregon, 97115). The Sokol Blossers, with no agricultural background or training, purchased an abandoned prune orchard in 1970 and planted vines two years later (their story is chronicled in the book, *At Home in the Vineyard: Cultivating a Winery, an Industry, and a Life*, written by Susan Sokol Blosser). Dick (right) and Kina Erath came to Oregon in 1968. He purchased a 49 acre site in the Chehalem Mountains above Newberg. Subsequently, in 1975, he formed a partnership with C. Calvert Knudsen (Knudsen-Erath Winery) which lasted until the 1980's. Knudsen went on to form an Argyle Winery partnership in 1985. Dick Erath's story is told in the book, *Boys Up North*, written by Paul Pintarich. There were many others of importance who felt anything was possible if you set your mind to it: David Adelsheim (Adelsheim Vineyard), Dick Ponzi (Ponzi Winery & Vineyards), Fred Arterberry (Arterberry Winery, now Duck Pond), Jim and Loie Maresh (Dick Erath's first grower, today still own Maresh Red Barn B&B and Maresh Vineyard), Jim and Donna Jean McDaniel (now Torii Mor Winery), Bill and Bessie Archibald (vineyard now owned by Archery Summit), Dr. John and Sally Bavers, Gary and Sandra Fuqua, Tom and Sharon Saucy, and Dan and Christine Jepson.



The 1980s in Oregon ushered in the era of European and international winemakers and investors. 1983 and 1985 were very successful vintages in Oregon, and comparisons were being made between Oregon and Burgundy. Robert Drouhin (pictured with daughter and winemaker Veronique Drouhin on the next page) of Domaine Drouhin in Beaune, Burgundy, had visited Oregon in the 1970s and in 1987, he purchased 180 acres in the Dundee Hills. Named Domaine Drouhin Oregon (DDO), this really brought vindication and notoriety to the Oregon wine industry. And, although DDO remains the only

Burgundy house with ownership in the Willamette Valley, many French winemakers travel to Oregon yearly to train and learn in the vineyards there. In 1980, the annual Steamboat Conference was initiated to bring together winemakers to discuss and critique their Pinot Noir wines. It is held annually at a hostelry devoted to fly fishing called the Steamboat Inn on the Umpqua River in southern Oregon. Initially, only Oregon winemakers attended, but soon the event became international in scope. No public or press are allowed so the event has not been publicized. Nevertheless, it has played a key role in the renaissance of Pinot Noir in this country.



In the 1980s, a number of California investors were attracted to Oregon's rural farm country. Napa's Gary Andrus established Archery Summit, Napa's Carl Doumani and Steve Girard started Benton Lane, and Napa's William Hill opened Van Duzer. And although Robert Parker denounced the 1986 and 1987 vintages in Oregon, he thought enough of the potential here to invest with his brother-in-law, Mike Etzel, and start Beaux Freres. Dick Shea, an Easterner, was searching to escape city-life in the early 1980s. While on a trip to Washington, he became entranced by Oregon Pinot Noirs he tasted. He purchased land in the Yamhill-Carlton district and planted Pinot Noir in 1989. This land featured Willakenzie soils, which at the time were thought to be inferior for grape growing to the Jory soils found in the Red Hills of Dundee. Today, the Shea Vineyard (left) has



135 acres planted to Pinot Noir, and is one of the most sought-after sources for Pinot grapes in Oregon.

The 1992 and 1994 vintages were stellar in Oregon and its reputation became well-established. Oregon has considerable vintage variability as in Burgundy. 1994 was followed by three poor vintages, 1995-1997. However, the advances in viticulture and winemaking have recently made Oregon Pinot Noir less at the mercy of the vagaries of climate. From 1998 to the present, there have been a continuous string of successful vintages. Yields have varied, and style has reflected the year's growing conditions, but the quality has remained high. Today, many Oregon wineries are small and require expeditions along gravel roads to reach them. Most are family-owned and make less than 5,000 cases a year. Tasting rooms are for the most part unpretentious. But make no mistake, these Woodstock refugees know how to make great Pinot and newcomers are flocking in. Travel through the Willamette Valley and you will see extensive new plantings (vineyard acreage is increasing 10% per year).



Oregon can be commended for advancing the cause of Pinot Noir. The winemakers here were among the first to embrace exclusive use of French oak barrels, new and old.

Strict labeling laws in the state require any wine labeled Pinot Noir to be 100% Pinot Noir (unlike California where up to 25% of the grapes may be another varietal). If a specific vineyard appears on the label, 95% of the fruit must have been grown there. The LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology Program) certification program begun in 1997 by Ted Casteel of Bethel Heights, requires designated wineries to use minimal chemical additives, no off-farm chemicals and fertilizers, and strive for maximal biodiversity. The Oregon Wine Board started OVID (Oregon Vineyard Database) in 2003 to allow grape growers and winemakers to share information online. The International Pinot Noir Celebration, now in its twentieth year, celebrates all that Oregon has accomplished with Pinot Noir and the state's sustainable food movement (see Issue 45).

Recently I attended the International Pinot Noir Celebration in McMinnville, Oregon. In conjunction with this event, I visited four wineries which I would like to profile in this issue. They are representative of wineries in Oregon, from tiny boutique (Privé), to moderately large (Van Duzer). Each one is quite different, but all are passionate about Pinot Noir. All of them are open by appointment. Their Pinot Noirs have charisma and are to die for.

Privé Vineyard



I was driving through the hills of Newberg with visions of Pinot Noir dancing through my head. Finally I arrived at a little slice of paradise called "Rue de Privé. Straddled behind a gate and between two well-groomed one-acre vineyards, sits the residence of Mark and Tina Hammond. A sportcourt and a boules (bocce) court surrounded by lavender indicate some fun is to be had here. Heading up the driveway, I am taken by the cutest little French winery you ever laid eyes on. (see below). The Hammonds are American, but their Privé Vineyard estate is every bit French in name and character. The outstanding Pinot Noir made here also reflects a French pedigree.

Privé ('private') Vineyard is probably Oregon's smallest winery at 250 cases. Certainly it is among the most exclusive. The Pinot Noirs made here are highly sought after, but with such a small production, all of the wine is currently allocated to a full mailing list (you can ask to be placed on a waiting list, but as nice as the Hammonds are, begging will not work). Remarkably, the first vintage (2001) sold out in six months, the second in two weeks. Now everything is sold on futures. At the Northwest Wine Summit, the largest judging of Northwest wines, the Privé 2001 Le Nord Pinot Noir earned "Best Oregon Wine." The Hammonds have managed to keep prices relatively stable despite the demand for their wines, balancing business decisions with the friendships they have established with faithful customers. I owe my soul to Hector Bocanegro, a *PinotFile* reader and Pinot lover from Puerto Rico of all places, for cluing me in to Privé a couple of years ago.



This estate vineyard was first planted in 1980. When the Hammonds purchased the property on Chehalem Mountain, the house was run-down and the vineyard neglected. In 1995, they took cuttings from Patricia Green at Autumn Wind and grafted the vines over to Pinot Noir (100% Pommard) from Müller-Thurgau, a cross variety of either Riesling and Sylvaner or two strains of Riesling. 95% of the grafts took, and last year vines were re-grafted that did not take initially. Mark is the vineyard steward here and as we walked the vineyard he explained his program. Precision viticulture is possible here due to the small size of the vineyard. He pulls off secondary clusters which pull energy from the vine, so that there is one cluster per shoot. Usually he leaves the lower cluster unless the top is healthier. Yields are 1 1/2 to 2 tons per acre. He utilizes organic sulfur aggressively every week starting in the Spring to ward off mildew. Gradually, he tapers to every three weeks, and stops spraying on August 1. The vineyard is LIVE certified but not organic as they utilize Roundup to control weeds (the only inorganic chemical used). The upper vineyard (pictured above behind the winery) is called le nord

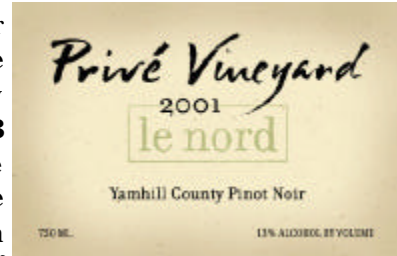
('north'), and the lower block in front of the house, le sud ('south'). Privé is a two person operation with Mark managing the vineyard and Tina making the wine. This division of labor is convenient for Mark can blame Tina and visa-versa if there is a problem with the outcome of the finished wine. Mark's 12 year-old son does contribute some vineyard labor. Experienced pickers are hired at harvest, but otherwise this is truly a family-run estate.



Tina is a talented self-taught winemaker who has a knack for making Pinot Noir with heavenly balance. Women winemakers may have a special talent for this. David Westrey, of Westrey Wines in McMinnville says, "Women show a sense of balance in

winemaking that you don't see with men." The grapes are 100% destemmed. No crush is employed as there is an attempt for as many whole berries as possible. The grapes are meticulously sorted, placed in 1 1/4 ton plastic fermentation bins, and allowed to cold soak for an average of 4-5 days. Le nord sees 15% new oak and 1,2, and 3 year-old barrels. Le sud, from the lower block is aged in 100% new French oak. It is a more cellar-worthy wine. A reserve, labeled Joie de Vivre ('joy of life') is made in limited amounts. Nord or Sud, this is your answer to an elusive kind of romance.

As we chatted in the winery, I could feel the passion this couple has for Pinot Noir and it is clearly evident that they loved doing this. We sipped the **2004 Privé le nord** (enticing aromatics with Bing cherry and spice flavors on an elegant platform with lively acidity) and **2003 Privé le sud** (again, aromatics that make you want to stick your nose into the wine; a little richer and riper flavored Pinot reflecting the warmer vintage). I reviewed the **2003 Privé le nord Pinot Noir** in a previous issue of the *PinotFile*. My comments: “A gorgeous nose of spicy cherry jam on buttered toast. The Pinot fruits are flirty and well-rounded. The finish is so outrageous that it sends your sense swirling. A complete Pinot Noir. If this wine were a lover instead of a wine, it’s one that would make you abandon your family, leave your job, and forfeit your hard-won position in the community for but one more fling. You have been forewarned.”



There is a lot to be said about both the art and science of winemaking. The Hammonds obviously studied their trade in depth through travels to Burgundy and basic wine science courses taught in nearby Salem. However, there is the work of artists evident here that shows through in the charm of these Pinot Noirs. The Hammonds are quite humble about their success to date. Their business model is such that a really bad vintage could severely hamper their dreams. Tina likes to joke that “Mark will have to get a real job.” They kid each other about what each one would do. Mark thinks he might pump gas because he has also dreamed of this outdoor job. Now that is real humility.

The website is www.privevineyard.com. The phone is 503-554-0464. The Pinot Noirs are priced in the \$42-\$85 range. Please do not contact Privé with unrealistic expectations - there is just not any wine available. If the opportunity arises, the Hammonds plan to add to their vineyard holdings and production would increase modestly at that time.

White Rose Vineyard

Greg Saunders has some prime real estate in the Red Hills of Dundee. To the north of his vineyard is Domaine Serene, to the east is Domaine Drouhin and Eyrie Vineyard and close by are Winter’s Hill and Nysa Vineyards. The proposed new high brow resort and spa (a first for the Willamette Valley) is scheduled to be built close by (see the blank field above Domaine Drouhin’s vineyards in the photo below, White Rose Vineyard is in the foreground).



In 2000, Greg purchased the White Rose Vineyard, first planted on its own roots to Pommard and Wädenswil clones in 1980. Past vintages saw some magnificent Pinot Noirs produced from this vineyard by Tori Mor, St. Innocent and Panther Creek. This is Greg's first venture into the wine business, and I must say he has succeeded admirably. He is a bright, largely self-taught winemaker who comes from a business background. He has a passion to excel with Pinot Noir, using Grand Cru Burgundies as the benchmark against which he compares his style of wine. He divides his time between Southern California and his estate in the Willamette Valley and believe me, this is not easy with four kids (including a newborn) in tow. The 240 degree view from the terrace of the newly constructed winery is breathtaking (below, vineyard in foreground, facing east toward the Willamette Valley and Mt Hood which is faintly seen in the center in the far distance).



Greg has built a nice modern two room winery into the hillside (below, right). He was just putting the finishing touches on it when I visited along with a family of sparrows who have nested in a cranny above the winery door. Directly on top of the winery is a unique tasting room constructed of large timbers salvaged from a fire (below, left). Inside is some comfortable furniture for lounging, a pot-belly stove, and old winemaking equipment. The ambience is truly Oregonian. I think even Greg might have been a hippie at one time.



Greg produces about 1,000 case of Pinot Noir. He sources grapes from three other local vineyards for his value-play Nokaia Pinot Noir (\$18). His Quiotee's Lair Pinot Noir also contains some blended grapes in conjunction with estate grapes (\$35). The top bottling contains the best White Rose fruit along with some grapes from Meredith Mitchell Vineyard. It is variously titled depending on the vintage - the 2003 is labeled Michelle after his wife (\$60, appropriately the most expensive). Now Greg is quite a character and you can go to his website to see where he gets his inspiration for the names of his wines and the dragon on the label. I happen to like his labels, but at least one local retailer refused to carry his wines because they disliked the stark black and white labels. Greg is a master of the put-on so if you taste with him, watch your guard. He rags on me mercifully, claiming I am a lover of "those rosy, ballsy California Pinots." If I didn't like his wines, I probably would steer clear to protect my sanity.



The 2003 Pinot Noirs were previously reviewed in the *PinotFile* (Vol 5, Issue 26). The Quiotee's Lair is a soft and elegantly-styled Pinot, while the Michelle has more structure and requires contemplation. The 2004 vintage is currently in bottle and I did not taste them. In 2005, yields were low as was the case generally in Oregon. The winery barrel room (below) shows the entire 2005 harvest.



I tasted through single-vineyard barrels and the estate barrel from the 2005 vintage. The hallmark of Greg's wines is balance. He keeps the tannins low with a lively acid backbone. The goal is wine that is drinkable on release, but wine that has aging potential as well. The estate wine was a wow wine which exploded on the palate. As Greg gets more and more familiar with his own vineyard and adjacent vineyards from which he sources grapes, he will be spoken about in the same breath as neighboring Domaines, Serene and Drouhin.

The wines may be purchased directly or in retail stores primarily in California. The website is www.whiterosewine.com. The phone is 949-275-8021 (yes, Greg actually answers the winery phone and you can chat with him about his wines. I must emphasize, however, that Greg will pull your leg if you let him). You have done the major winery tour thing, so follow Greg's signs to his unpretentious winery and taste some Pinot that only passion can create.

Belle Vallée Cellars

Winemaker Joe Wright grew up in Southern California, but his love for the outdoors led him to Oregon in the early 1990s. His winemaking career blossomed at Willamette Valley Vineyards where he was tutored by Joe Dobbles. Wright took to winemaking with a passion and impressed Dobbles. In a recent article on Belle Vallée in the Avalon Wine newsletter (avalonwine.com), Dobbles talked about Wright: “He’s got an incredible work ethic. He’s very steady at what he does. He has an innate talent for wine-making - as well as beer making. He’s very focused - always eager to learn more and improve what he’s doing.” During his six years at the 100,000 case-per-year Willamette Valley Vineyards, Wright learned to make many types and styles of wine from single vineyard Pinot Noirs to Rhone and Bordeaux varietals.

In February of 2002, as fortune would have it, Wright met Mike Magee and Steve Allen at a wine event and they immediately struck up a friendship and partnership. They were all passionate about Pinot Noir and wanted to start a winery. Belle Vallée (Beautiful Valley) was born. Within three months, Wright had left Willamette Valley Vineyards, and the trio had purchased a 22,000 ft former tire warehouse in an industrial park in downtown Corvallis. Within five months, Wright had converted the warehouse into a winery of his design. From the outside, one would never suspect this nondescript warehouse contained a beautiful winery. The barrel aging room is the centerpiece (Joe, ‘no ordinary’ in the room, below).



Adjacent to the barrel aging room is a large fermentation room (photo next page). Wright designed the facility originally for 8,000 cases. This was fine initially as the 2002 and 2003 vintages produced 5,500 cases. Now, however, construction has begun to expand the facility to include more storage, a bottling room, a banquet room and a tasting room. Production is expected to reach 18,000 cases in 2006. Belle Vallée has been warmly embraced by the citizens of Corvallis as “their” town winery. The wines have been stellar and Belle Vallée was chosen to pour their Pinot Noirs at this year’s International Pinot Noir Celebration in McMinnville.

Belle Vallée Cellars has multi-year contracts with thirteen high quality vineyards in the Willamette Valley. Wright is familiar with many of the vineyard managers and their fruit and works closely with them. This is critical for him because he believes in blending grapes from several vineyards to craft his Pinot Noirs. Many Oregon winemakers have staked their reputation on vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs (think Ken Wright - no relation, Patricia Green, St Innocent). The advantage of blending is that the winemaker is not at the mercy of the vagaries of vintages since his grapes come from several sources in different areas of the Valley. In addition, each vineyard can offer different flavor profiles to the final blend adding to the complexity, depth and character of the finished wine. To make all of this work, the winemaker must be a master at the art of blending - spending hours hunched over beakers of wine in the lab concocting the final result. When I visited Belle Vallé, Wright led me through a tasting of individual barrels of 2005 Pinot Noir and then we sampled the proposed final blends. It was clearly evident that blending created a better wine. Every block from each vineyard is kept separate during the winemaking process. In 2005, there were 42 separate fermentations in 5 different cooperages. After the wines have gone through secondary fermentation in the barrel, Wright picks out the most “magical” barrels to become the Grand Cuvée Pinot Noir. The next level of quality is the Reserve blend and the remaining barrels are classed for the Willamette Valley Vintage blend. The Whole Cluster Pinot Noir program is an entirely different process and is explained later. There is also a Pinot Noir Port that Wright is quite proud of. This wine is fortified with Pinot Noir brandy that has been barrel-aged for three years.

Lately, Wright has been experimenting with large barrel or puncheon fermentation. There is a trend both in this country and abroad to ferment in larger oak uprights. One advantage of this process is that because of the volume-to-size ratio, less oak contact occurs and the resultant wine is not over-oaked. Also, oak fermentation creates more robustness, concentration and color which compliments the purity of fruit that results from fermentation in stainless steel. After the wine has finished oak fermentation, the skins are taken out, and the wine is returned to the barrel for aging. It is a lot more trouble and if you look closely at the label on Wright’s two puncheons, it says “PITA 1” and “PITA 2” (‘Pain in the Ass’).



Some of the vineyards used in the Pinot Noirs here include Winter’s Hill Vineyard (planted 1990 in Dundee Hills), Temperance Hill Vineyard (100 acres, organic, established in 1981, Eola Hills), Cherry Hill Vineyard (planted in 1999 in southwestern Eola Hills), Freedom Hill Vineyard (planted in 1980, located in the foothills of Dallas), Vitae Springs Vineyard (planted in 1986, West Salem Hills), Lemelson Stermer Vineyard (planted in 1997, Yamhill County near the town of Carlton), Rainbows End Vineyard (planted in 1993, near Monroe), Alpine Vineyard (established in 1976, some of the oldest and best reputed Pinot Noir in area, south Benton County, still unphylloxerated, owners Dan and Christine Jepsen were pioneers in the early Oregon winemaking industry), Elton Vineyard (planted in 1983 in Eola Hills), Hyland Vineyard (one of Oregon’s oldest vineyards, 33 years old, high up in the McMinnville foothills), and Momtazi Vineyard (190 acres, planted in 1998 in the foothills west of McMinnville). Belle Vallée also produces Merlot, Cabernet and Syrah from vineyard sources in the warmer Rogue Valley located in southern Oregon.

A distinctive feature of the Belle Vallé wines are the beautiful labels. Each label is designed by co-owner Mike McGee’s wife, Claire, whose artistic flair is reflected in the attractive patterns created to reflect the wine within (see next page). In addition, a limited number of large format bottles are

produced with a custom fused glass label and gift boxed in a custom made wooden crate with the Belle Vallée Cellars logo branded on two sides. Glass fusing is a process in which two or more pieces of colored glass are placed together in a kiln and heated until they melt or “fuse” together. Each label is individually hand made over the course of several days using numerous pieces and requires two or more firings to complete. Due to the nature of the kiln working process and the fact that the glass used is entirely hand crafted, no two labels are ever identical. Each label is signed, dated and numbered. A magnum is only labeled after it is ordered. These special magnums range in price from \$130 (Vintage Pinot Noir) to \$150 (Reserve Pinot Noir) to \$190 (Grand Cuvée Pinot Noir and Pinot Noir Port).



The 2005 blends were tasted in Wright’s lab out of beaker. According to Joe, he was simply a steward for this vintage as the wines pretty much made themselves. The Vintage Pinot Noir had an expressive nose with enticing flavors of red fruits and spice. The mouth feel was soft. Very approachable now. The Reserve Pinot Noir was darker, richer and more complex with some toast added to the nose. The Grand Cuvée was a serious wine, even more structured and complex, with terrific aromatics of cooked cherries, fine tannins on the palate, and a lingering finish tinged with oak.

I tasted through the lineup of 2004 Pinot Noirs (and the 2005 Whole Cluster Pinot Noir) at home in my usual fashion. Except for the Whole Cluster wine, vinification is similar for all three blends. The grapes are destemmed and not crushed allowing some whole berries to fall through into the fermentation vat. The fruit is then gravity fed into 6.5 ton open top stainless steel tanks and cold soaked at a constant temperature of 40F for 2-10 days. Temperatures are then raised and a proprietary yeast added. The must is gently punched down one to five times a day using a pneumatic punch down device that Joe designed and had custom made. After primary fermentation, which lasts six to 10 days, all free run is drained out and the remaining skins are lightly pressed off and kept separate. The wine is racked off of its gross lees after settling into barrels. The wines are laid to rest for about 11 months in 45% (Vintage), 55% (Reserve) and 75% (Grand Cuvée) new French oak. They are blended to tank and bottled in the winery unfiltered and unfined.

2005 Belle Vallée Whole Cluster Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 12.5% alc., .3950 cases, \$14, screwcap. This is a unique wine made in a Beaujolais style. Wright learned the process from a winemaker visiting Oregon from Beaujolais. The grapes are put into closed top stainless steel fermenters and left alone to allow carbonic maceration to proceed. The juice that forms at the bottom is drained off periodically. There is no punch down. Fermentation proceeds rapidly but it is not allowed to go too long to avoid too much extraction from the stems. The wine is pressed to a tank, bottled and released two months after harvest. The idea is to taste the grapes as they come from the vineyard. It is meant to be a fruity wine to drink young, although Joe says after three or four years, the wine becomes similar to a young Burgundy. The wine smells just like must during fermentation. The flavors are fresh and spicy and pure Pinot. It is simple and alluring. Not a wine to ponder but a low-alcohol treat to drink and enjoy. It would be fantastic with a coq au vin because of its fruitiness.

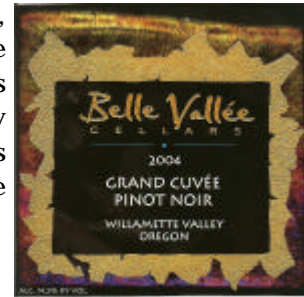


2004 Belle Vallée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 2923 cases, \$20. This is a complex blend of six vineyards situated throughout the Willamette Valley. Clones are Pommard, Coury, 115 and 777 as well as some field blend. A medium-bodied Pinot with plenty of dark violet color. It opens up with some air to reveal charming aromas of Bing cherries, sandalwood and roses. The black cherry flavors are set off by mocha and toasty oak. The finish has pert acidity and is a touch dry. Nicely balanced and ready to go now. This wine grew in the glass over time taking on more character and structure. All of Joe's Pinots show this feature and it is typical of a well crafted wine.

2004 Belle Vallée Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 887 cases. \$30. The wine is a blend of four prized vineyards and two clones (62% Pommard, 38% 115). This Pinot needs about 45 minutes to undress and reveal its charms. The aromatics are similar to the Vintage Pinot Noir above, but with a little more intensity. There is more body and structure here too. The mouth feel is fuller, the fruit more lush, and the finish is smoother and lingers on and on. My notes say, "Right on, Baby."



2004 Belle Vallée Grand Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 310 cases, \$48, wax capsule. From the best vineyards and best barrels in the cellar, this cuvée has 62% 115 and 38% Pommard clones. It is a voluptuous Pinot with copious amounts of fruit and oak. It is fat on the palate but has plenty of acidity to keep it in balance. It is still very tight and needs some serious cellar time to come together and strut its stuff. This wine is for lovers of the Caliesque style of Pinot Noir.



2003 Belle Vallée Pinot Noir Port 18% alc., 330 cases, \$38. The making of this wine begins in the vineyard where Joe removes tertiary flower buds from the vines before they fully fruit. This tricks the plant into making what little fruit remains a little faster and higher in sugar content. The fruit is left to hang if there is no disease pressure and the weather is permissive. Dehydration will lead to even more sweetness. Halfway through fermentation in the winery, he fortifies the Pinot Noir with spirits (Willamette Valley Pinot Noir brandy that has been barrel-aged for three years). He allows it to cold soak after cooling the wine, then adds yeast, ice and alcohol to prolong the fermentation. Finally, more spirits and ice are added to extract as much flavor as possible. Obviously, this is a very labor-intensive process requiring a lot of skill. There is a lot of love and sweat in every bottle. In making port, the winemaker may often press off the juice and fortify it separately. In contrast, Joe fortifies everything together. Pinot Noir port has become more popular since the Pinot Noir grape shows well in this style of wine, its fruity character complementing the brandy. This of course is a sipping wine to ponder. It is a bit nutty, with some caramel, nutmeg, raisin, and chocolate-covered cherry flavors. Just terrific and very distinctive.



Belle Vallée Cellars is located at 804 NW Buchanan Ave in Corvallis. The winery is open by appointment. A tasting room will open in the near future. The website is www.bellevallée.com. The phone is 541-757-9463. The wines can be ordered directly from the winery. I think the prices are right on for the quality offered here. The winery has a Wine Club coordinated by Claire Magee which offers 20-30% discounts on purchases. The wines also enjoy good retail distribution in Oregon. The way cool Limited Edition Glass Label Series in magnum must be ordered in advance.

Van Duzer Vineyards

In 1998, Van Duzer Vineyards was suffering financially and the vineyards were not receiving the care and attention that they needed. Winemaker Jim Kakacek had tasted several vintages from the owners and he knew there was considerable potential in the fruit expression. Venture capitalist Carl Thoma and his wife Marilyn were wine enthusiasts from Illinois who had partnered with Parducci Wine Estates and had developed several vineyards in California. Kakacek approached Thoma who purchased the property in 1998 with the intent of focusing on revitalizing the Van Duzer Pinot Noir program. The Thomases proved to be extremely supportive and Kakacek has taken the vineyards here to new heights. New plantings of Pinot Noir were complemented by field grafting of Dijon clones to 15-year-old established Pinot Noir vines and grafting over of Chardonnay vines. By 2001, 38 acres had been replanted or grafted, the efforts began to show in the wines, and today the winery is firmly in Oregon's top echelon.



Jim Kakacek never intended to be a winemaker. He entered the University of California at Davis pre-med program as a teenager hoping to become a surgeon. He quickly discovered that this was not a fit for him and he was attracted to the newly established fermentation science program. This intrigued him because it did present some of the challenges of medicine utilizing a combination of art and science. After graduating, he did his internship at Monticello Cellars in Napa and later began several winemaking consulting positions. After developing the Big Horn Ranch wine label with William Hill, he teamed with Carl Thoma in 1998 to manage and rehabilitate Van Duzer Vineyards.

The property is located 60 miles south of Portland, just south of Amity and west of Salem in the small community of Dallas. The Van Duzer Corridor is to the west and provides a cooling effect for all of the southern part of Yamhill County, allowing maritime air to enter the Valley directly without traveling over the Coastal Range of mountains. The property consists of 140 acres, 75 of which are planted almost entirely to Pinot Noir. Small new plantings of Pinot Noir are planned for next year below the new winery. There are about 8 acres of Pinot Gris. The vineyards begin in the flatland of the valley surrounded by fields of grain and climb up a gently hillside to the top of the estate where views are magnificent. Here an oak savannah provides a buffer zone for the surrounding vineyards. Water is sourced from rain and springs. The vineyard has both 12 ft and close density vine spacing for diversity. Currently, farming is sustainable and close to organic with the estate being LIVE certified.

The photos below show this magnificent property from different viewpoints. Clockwise from top left; approaching the estate with the oak savannah and vineyards visible; vineyard with old traditional wide spacing facing north; view from savannah to the west toward the Van Duzer Corridor; view to the southeast from the top of the estate.



Pinot Noir grapes in the Van Duzer vineyard on July 26 (left) and some Pinot Noir grapes burned by the scorching sun during the July heat wave that swept through the Willamette Valley (right).



During my visit to Van Duzer I spent some quality time with Jim walking the vineyards and tasting Pinot Noir and he spoke about the vineyards and the new winery. This site is quite unique in that maritime breezes from the Pacific Ocean travel through the Van Duzer corridor and cool the vineyards on hot afternoons. Temperatures drop noticeably and earlier than in the northern Willamette Valley. This leads to extended hang time after veraison. Cool evenings stop the acid to sugar conversion, allowing the grapes to reach phenolic maturity without excessive sugars. Jim works closely with the vineyard manager, Norbert Fiebig, a German-trained viticulturalist, who has worked on the property for 23 years. Fiebig has been responsible for two recent equipment acquisitions which have contributed to the renaissance of the estate vineyards. He brought in a sprayer that uses 80% less quantity for the same coverage, decreasing the amount of chemicals used and saving enough money to allow purchase of a second sprayer. Second, he acquired an Italian-made spader that digs and fractures the soil down to six feet. This has led to a change in the soil type of the vineyards. In the upper levels, the soil, which was once clay and sedimentary, has become loam in type. This in turn produced a healthier, more nutritious soil, and noticeable improvement in the balance of the vines. The vineyard layout is featured on page 18.



The construction of the new winery on the property has taken a considerable amount of Jim's time but in the long run he knows it will save him considerable time. Jim has been working out of an old shed-like structure very common in Oregon with no temperature controls and nagging sanitation issues. It is to his credit that he has been able to craft such impressive wines in this cramped and inefficient arrangement. The new winery will allow him to control his environment and his work will probably be cut by a third. Currently in the last phases of fabrication, the new winery is simple, but multifunctional in style. It is designed to utilize little energy with heavily insulated, thick concrete walls. Unlike many recently constructed wineries in Oregon, the owners opted not to build a gravity flow facility. Their research indicated that current pump technology is more gentle to wine than dropping fruit or wine a distance of 10-20 ft by gravity. A single level winery design was therefore chosen, with the option to use gravity flow in certain situations with the use of a forklift to lift the wine above the filling machine during bottling. The new winery also contains business offices, banquet facilities, and a tasting room that will provide spectacular views of the surrounding valley. The new winery will be ready for the 2006 harvest and will increase capacity to at least 22,000 cases of which 18,000 cases will be Pinot Noir (2005 production was 14,000 cases, 12,000 cases of Pinot Noir).



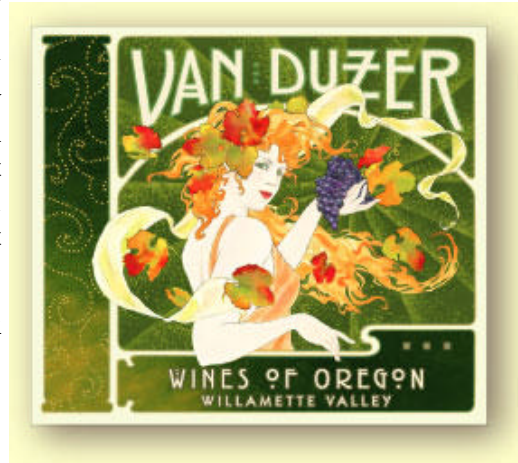
I asked Jim about his winemaking regimen and style. He described it in one term: simple. Sure, just anyone can do it, right Jim? Not so I am convinced. Jim's work begins in the vineyard, keeping the vines in balance and insuring that they are fully mature when picked. When Jim says the word, 150 harvesters show up and pick. In the early hours of the morning, there is but 30 minutes between the time the grapes are picked and are crushed. Carefully sorted, the grapes undergo an inadvertent cold soak (they are very cold when picked). Fermentation proceeds with a proprietary yeast blend. The yeast blend is varied among different barrels adding to the complexity of the finished wine. Fermentation is carried out in closed top tanks with gentle pump over using dairy pumps with wide hoses. Jim believes this causes less phenolic extraction than manual punch down and volatile esters are trapped leading to enhanced floral aromatics in the Pinot Noir. Fermentation is complete in 10-12 days. The Estate Pinot Noir sees about 33% new French oak and spends 10 months in barrel. The block-designate Pinot Noirs are aged in 45% new oak. During aging, they are racked to a tank for blending and then re-barreled for 5 months. One thing Jim has done which is somewhat unique for Oregon, is addition of secondary yeast nutrients along with oxygen. Air is actually pumped into the tank. He feels this reduces off odors in the finished wine.



Making the wine is the easy part. Because this is a relatively small operation, although large by Oregon standards, there are only three full-time employees: Jim, vineyard manager Norbert Fiebig, and who Kathy Fiebig who manages the tasting room and does the accounting. The national sales manager is Tanna Massur Kutz. As such, Jim makes business decisions, directs construction projects, does plenty of paperwork, pours at the tasting bar when needed, repair lights, washes floors and more. He calls himself a "jack-of-all-trades." The truth is, though, Jim actually likes multi-tasking and relishes the opportunity to do a lot of different things. Jim also is the consulting winemaker for Cardwell Hill Cellars in Philomath, Oregon. As you can tell by his smile in the photo above, Jim is one heckuva nice guy, and I highly recommend you take the time to visit and meet him the next time you are in Oregon. He will be smiling even more when he gets into that new winery.

The 2003 Van Duzer Pinot Noirs (practically sold out) were reviewed previously in the *PinotFile* (Volume 5, Issue 7). The Pinot Noir program starts with an Estate bottling which is a blend from multiple blocks and clones on the property and consistently represents the Van Duzer style. Block Designate Pinot Noirs were introduced with the 2003 vintage. These three distinct Pinot Noirs are produced in limited quantities from selected blocks on the estate that have shown consistently unique flavor profiles. In 2005, there was also a Pinot Noir Rosé (strawberry sweetness without the sugar) and a Vintner's Cuvée Pinot Noir (A light style using no oak. A soft and easy sipping wine with a lovely floral nose, 1000 cases, \$19). My tasting notes follow. As you can tell by my comments, Jim has the ship moving in the right direction. These are Pinot Noirs that have pinoaficionados swooning over Oregon. Van Duzer was one of 70 wineries chosen to pour at the recent International Pinot Noir Celebration in McMinnville, Oregon.

The Van Duzer label is inspired by Zephyra, the Greek goddess of the gentle West Wind who blows Pacific breezes over the estate's hillside vineyards.



2004 Van Duzer Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 7,000 cases, \$29. A luscious and hearty Pinot Noir that has a very long finish. Rich, round, mature, sweet fruit that is creamy and demure.

2005 Van Duzer Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (from tank). Quite a mouthful. A little less tannin than the 2004 offering of this wine. 60 barrel samples were sampled to formulate the final blend.

2004 Van Duzer Homestead Block Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc.. The vineyard designate Pinot Noirs were aged 20 months, bottled in March, 2006, and will be released in the Fall. Price will be around \$40. This wine is 100% Pommard clone planted in 1982. The vines grow on the gentle slope that was the site of the original homestead for the Van Duzer property. A toasty cherry nose leads to red (Jolly Roger red cherry) and black (plum) fruit flavors. A fat wine enhanced with deft wood and brown spice.

2004 Van Duzer Dijon Block Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc.. This wine comes from vines originally planted to Chardonnay in 1982 and grafted over to Dijon clones 113, 115, and 777 in 1998. Perfumed with floral and cherry notes, this wine draws you in from the start. A bit lighter on its feet than the other wines of the trio. An elegant Pinot lover's Pinot.

2004 Van Duzer Flagpole Block Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc.. Actually this block was identified as distinctive as far back as 1999. This block is one-third of an acre of old Wädenswil clone vines, planted in 1982, and located near the entrance to the property. This steep vineyard takes its name from the flagpole located at the top of the slope. The enticing aromas feature spice, raisin and licorice. There is some prominent cranberry notes on the palate. Finely-tuned and well balanced, the wine is still a bit closed at this early stage.

Van Duzer Pinot Noirs are available directly from the winery: www.vanduzer.com. 800-884.1927. The address is 11975 Smithfield Road, Dallas, Oregon 97338. Case discounts are available. Van Duzer has decent country-wide distribution, although none into California at present. Avalon Wine in Corvallis (www.avalonwine.com) is an Oregon source. Sign up for the excellent newsletter. A fine art poster of the Van Duzer Zephyra can be ordered online or by calling the tasting room.



PrinceofPinot.com

“Pinot Noir is here to stay, it
will never die”

**Convert to
Pinotholicism**

© 2006
PinotFile is a Registered
Trademark

Oregon Wine Websites

Oregon Wine Advisory Board: oregonwine.org

Oregon Winegrower’s Assoc: oregonwinegrowers.org

LIVE (Low Input Viticulture & Enology): liveinc.org

OVID (Oregon Vineyard Database): ovd.us

Willamette Valley Wineries Assoc: willamettewines.com

**Travel Oregon: oregonwine.org
oregonwinecountry.org**

Oregon Wineries: oregonwines.org; winesoforegon.com

Oregon Wine Press: oregonwinepress.com

Oregon Wine Report: oregonwinereport.com

International Pinot Noir Celebration: ipnc.org

Salud!: saludauction.org

Willamette Valley Appellations

The Willamette Valley is a fertile agricultural land. About 70% of Oregon’s wines are produced here. When you tour this region you quickly realize the populace suffers from a singular obsessive disorder: Pinot fixation. All anyone talks about, thinks about, dreams about, and prays for is Pinot Noir. I can dig that.

The Willamette Valley AVA is quite large, consisting of 3,438,000 acres extending from Portland in the north to Eugene in the south. The alluvial soils on the valley floor are not conducive to grape growing, but the rolling hillsides, with their volcanic and sedimentary soils, are just right. Within this large AVA, there are six smaller AVAs in the northern valley which have distinctive mesoclimates, geography, and soils. The following data is from the Willamette Valley Winemaker’s Association. For a map of the appellations, consult avalonwine.com.

Chehalem Mountains (petition pending): 70,000 acres, 1600 acres of grapes, over 100 vineyards and 31 wineries. Includes Ribbon Ridge. All three soil types are present including basaltic, sedimentary and loess.

Dundee Hills (2005): This was the first place Pinot Noir was planted in the valley and it is the most densely-planted AVA. 12,500 acres, 1700 acres of grapes, 50 vineyards. This AVA is a balsamic landmass that is protected from the Pacific Ocean by the Coastal Range of mountains.

Eola-Amity Hills (petition pending): 40,000 acres, 1300 acres of grapes, The soils are shallow and primarily volcanic basalt from lava flows combined with marine sedimentary deposits. The Van Duzer corridor allows cool ocean breezes to lower temperatures, especially during late summer afternoons.

McMinnville (2005): 40,500 acres, 600 acres of grapes. The sedimentary loam and basalt soils are uniquely shallow for winegrowing.

Ribbon Ridge (2005): At the northwest end of the Chehalem Mountains, containing 3350 acres with 500 acres planted to grapes within 20 vineyards. Ocean sedimentary soils protected by surrounding landmasses.

Yamhill-Carlton District (2005): North of McMinnville, 60,000 acres, 1200 acres planted to grapes. It is protected climatically by the surrounding Coast Range, Chehalem Mountains, and Dundee Hills. The quick draining marine sedimentary soils are extremely old.