



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir

## Evesham Wood Winery: The Way Oregon Pinot Noir Was Meant To Be

I can't think of another Willamette Valley producer of Pinot Noir with a long record that is so under-appreciated yet out-performs a majority of other comparable wineries. I looked at many of the main stream wine books published over the past years and I could not even find mention of Evesham Wood in *Oregon Wine A Deep-Rooted History* (2019), *The Wines and Wineries of Oregon's Willamette Valley* (2017), *Wine Pioneers* (2015), *Winemakers of the Willamette Valley* (2013), and *Essential Wines and Wineries of the Pacific Northwest* (2010).

One of the first books published on Oregon Pinot Noir, Lis Shara Hall's *Wines of the Pacific Northwest* (2001), has only a brief mention of Evesham Wood in the section of the book on the Eola-Amity Hills, calling the Pinot Noir wines "seductive." In Benjamin Lewin's book, *In Search of Pinot Noir* (2011), Evesham Wood does receive a brief mention, calling the winery, "One of Oregon's old line vineyards," but stops short of any superlatives. John Winthrop Haeger, writing in *Pacific Pinot Noir* (2008) provides the most extensive coverage of the winery, characterizing the wines as, "Relatively early-picked, elegantly built, with fine, sometimes gossamer structures and aromatic complexity." I have a word for this - "pinotosity." Evesham Wood Pinot Noir is never a fruit bomb, even in warm vintages. These are truly wines for those who consider themselves connoisseurs of Oregon Pinot Noir.

Evesham Wood Winery is nearly 25 years of age and based on that longevity alone, the winery is an Oregon original and must be considered one of that state's legacy wineries. I have been attracted to the wines for many years and for good reason. All the wines produced at Evesham Wood come strictly from sustainable-grown grapes and non-irrigated vineyards. Grapes are only sourced from the estate Le Puits Sec Vineyard and prestigious growers in the neighborhood. Pinot Noir winemaking has always emulated as close as possible the Burgundian model. No filtration or must concentrating devices are employed. A very modest amount of new oak barrels are used for aging insuring that one never thinks of oak when drinking Evesham Wood Pinot Noir.

Evesham Wood Winery founder Russ Raney was studying abroad in Germany as a young man when he took a liking to wine. He obtained a degree in viticulture and enology Bad Kreuznach and returned to the United States to work as a wine buyer for a wholesale company in St. Louis, Missouri. He was attracted to Pinot Noir but discovered few examples in the 1980s that were comparable to the red Burgundies he found compelling. He decided to craft his own Pinot Noir, moved to Portland in 1983, and searched the Willamette Valley for an appropriate location. For a few years he worked wine-related jobs including some for Ponzi and Adelsheim wineries. He settled on Oregon's Eola-Amity Hills west of Salem and launched the Evesham Wood Winery in 1986.

Raney named his winery, Evesham Wood, after the Vale of Evesham in the Cotswold Hills of England because the site bore a resemblance to that part of the English countryside. Evesham Wood is pronounced "Eve" like in Adam and Eve. Raney built an English Tudor-styled house on the property that overlooked the estate vineyard and later constructed a winery underneath the house. The wines have been made in this winery since 1991.

The 12.5-acre estate vineyard, Le Puits Sec (French for "The Dry Well," named for the first well drilled on the property that yielded no water), has 3 acres of own-rooted Pommard clone Pinot Noir plantings dating to 1986. Subsequent plantings and grafting over of Pinot Gris and Chardonnay added Dijon clones 113, 114, 115 and 777 bringing the total Pinot Noir plantings to 9 acres.

Le Puits Sec is situated on the eastern side of the Eola-Amity Hills ridge in an area known as Spring Valley and is one of the best microclimates in the region for producing Pinot Noir. Farming has been organic from the beginning and the vineyard was certified organic by Oregon Tilth in 2000 (the winery is also certified organic). The vines are closely-spaced and planted in volcanic basalt soils that lead to low yields. The older photo below shows Raney in the Le Puits Sec Vineyard with the house in the background.



Raney considered dry-farming after vines are established as essential if the climate is conducive. He has said, “Once the vines are into production our feeling is, in addition to wastefulness, the wines that are created from irrigated sites, although they may be quite nice wines, are often less distinctive and tend to be similar from year to year.” Raney was an early advocate of the Deep Roots Coalition (DRC), a group promoting wines produced exclusively from non-irrigated vines.

Raney was heavily influenced by Burgundian winemaking techniques and two of his former distant mentors were the famous Henri Jayer and the less well-known, but equally accomplished, Michelle Niellon. Raney’s admiration for the French is shown in the French names assigned to the vineyard and wine names.

In August 2010, Russ and Mary Raney sold Evesham Wood and Le Puits Sec Vineyard to Erin and Jordan Nuccio of Haden Fig Wines. Erin had worked as assistant winemaker at Evesham Wood since 2007 and assumed head winemaking duties in 2010. After 24 years, the Raney’s wanted to retire and spend more time in their home in France.

Erin, who had gained winemaking and viticulture experience and schooling in Napa and Sonoma, was a natural successor because he believed in retaining all the winemaking and vineyard management philosophies of Russ Raney. The Evesham Wood legacy was assured. Photo below shows Erin pouring his wines at the 2015 International Pinot Noir Celebration.



Master Sommelier Ian Cauble has this to say about Erin: “One thing that rings loud and clear is that winemaking sensation Erin Nuccio of Evesham Wood constantly delivers one of the greatest values in the world of Pinot Noir.” I agree the wines of Evesham Wood represent exceptional value considering the quality offered.

One can purchase seasonal releases directly from the winery’s website at [www.eveshamwood.com/shop/](http://www.eveshamwood.com/shop/) and avoid the hassle of allocation. What a joy: superb Pinot Noir at prices you can actually afford and easily obtain. That said, by joining the winery’s e-mail list one can be notified of the latest releases and other winery news. Some of the most desirable wines do sell out early. There is some nationwide distribution.

Erin has had his own label, Haden Fig, since 2007, and these Pinot Noir wines are excellent as well and also represent very good value. Evesham Wood ferments are inoculated with the same yeast that Raney isolated from a 1986 Domaine Henri Mayer Echezeaux in 1989, while Haden Fig Pinot Noir is fermented using native yeasts. Both labels undergo about a 21-day ferment with hand punch downs and no temperature control other than opening the doors of the winery. The Haden Fig wines are also sold on the Evesham Wood website.

Visitors are welcome for drop-in, unpretentious tastings of Evesham Wood and Haden Fig wines Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm in the winery’s Tasting Cabin (photo below). A private tour and tasting is available by appointment. Picnics can be arranged by appointment at the edge of Le Puits Sec Vineyard.



I recently had the opportunity to taste through several 2017 vintage Pinot Noir releases from Evesham Wood. This was a chance I could not turn down as the Pinot Noir wines from this winery are among my Oregon favorites. I previously reviewed the 2017 Evesham Wood Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (89, \$22). There is also an Evesham Wood Eola-Amity Hills Cuvée released in 2017 that is a blend of six vineyards (1024 cases, \$26).

The 2017 vintage continued a string of cooler vintages beginning in 2015. Heat summation was less than 2600 (cool but still about 15% above the 30-year historical average. Erin has characterized 2017 as a “balanced, zesty and cool-toned vintage.”



**2017 Evesham Wood Mahonia Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 174 cases, \$36. Released Autumn 2019. A 12 acre vineyard planted between 1985 and 1993. Pommard, 113, 114, 115, and 777 planted in Jory and Nekia soils at 450 feet elevation. LIVE Certified, Salmon Safe. Evesham Wood is the sole winery to work with the vineyard’s fruit and since 2019 have farmed the vineyard themselves and organically. Think “monopole.” Aged 20 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Pleasant aromas of red fruits, dried herbs and a hint of oak-driven spice and vanillin. A delicate wine offering light to mid weight flavors of red cherry and raspberry with underlying earthiness and a hint of herbal tea. Good vibrancy, with gentle tannins and a lip-smacking finish with some length.* **90.**



**2017 Evesham Wood Sojeau Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 150 cases, \$36. Released Autumn 2019. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. Formerly known as Sojourner Vineyard, this vineyard was first planted in 2007 at 583 feet elevation in volcanic soils. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Spellbinding aromas of red and black raspberry and exotic spices. A charge of delicious dark red cherry and raspberry fruit flavors that show exceptional purity. Mid weight plus in style, with felty tannins balancing the expressive fruit. Very giving, with an uncommonly generous finish. This wine stands out from the pack. Note: I have found Sojourner Vineyard designated Pinot Noir offered by a number of producers to be consistently outstanding so this is a vineyard to hang your hat on.* **94.**



**2017 Evesham Wood Illahe Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 119 cases, \$30. Released Autumn 2019. The vineyard is 62 acres in size with earliest plantings dating to 2000. Primarily sedimentary soils. Pommard, 777 and 115 planted at 250 to 400 feet elevation. LIVE Certified. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Delicate scent of red cherry and cardamom. Mid weight flavors of red cherry and pomegranate fruits enter with purpose and and impress with an expansive mid palate cherry-fueled finish. A juicy charmer with modest tannins and easy likability. 92.*



**2017 Evesham Wood Temperance Hill Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 74 cases, \$36. 100+ acres managed by Dai Crisp. Pommard clone planted on its own roots in 1982. Primarily Jory soils. 800 feet elevation. Certified organic by Oregon Tilth

in 2012. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, all neutral. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas purple and black berries arrive slowly over time in the glass. Intensely fruity in a mid weight style with plenty of black cherry and blackberry fruit goodness. More rugged and closed initially in comparison to the other Evesham Wood 2017 Pinot Noirs, but when sampled several hours after opening, the wine had become more cohesive with a seductively satiny mouthfeel. The sturdy but not muscular tannic frame is typical of this vineyard. A very individualistic and distinctive wine of uncommon pedigree that reflects its old vine heritage. 94.*



**2017 Evesham Wood Le Puits Sec Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 425 cases, \$40. Released Autumn 2019. USDA Certified, Oregon Tilth, Deep Roots Coalition, Salmon Safe, certified organic since 2000. Nekia and Jory soils. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. A different nose that emphasizes aromas of underbrush and spring lettuce mix over cherry fruit. The middleweight core of black cherry and boysenberry fruits is filled out with nuances of sauvage and herbs leading to pure Pinot pleasure. This is a wine of finesse with terrific balance and an unmistakable sense of terroir. The finish is both fruity and earthy in a Frenchie style and noticeably persistent. 93.*

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**2017 Evesham Wood Cuvée J Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 150 cases, \$55. Released Autumn 2019. A 6-barrel selection displaying elegance along with concentration and power. Aged 22 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. The best Pinot Noir the winery has to offer. *Moderately light garnet color in the*

*glass. This wine reminds me of the Le Puits Sec bottling but ramped up a notch with more noticeable drive and purpose. The array of aromas include cherry compote, dried herbs, damp earth and a whiff of teasing oak. This charming wine delights with lavish flavors of black cherry, boysenberry, spice, dried herbs including sage and mushroom. This impeccably balanced wine has a silken texture and a hi-collared demeanor on the palate. The finish is flat-out extravagant. As good as the wine is now, it will definitely benefit from more time in bottle at which time it deserves to be the centerpiece of a celebration. 94.*



# Cooper Jaxon: A Reasonably Priced Pinot Noir Blend Worth Touting

It is often said that in Pinot Noir you only get what you pay for. With the Cooper Jaxon California Pinot Noir from Loring Wine Company you get more than what you pay for.

This wine is crafted by veteran winemaker Brian Loring as an inexpensive offering for those seeking a reliably good Pinot Noir. The name refers to Brian's offspring, Cooper Jaxon, the next generation of Loring. It is a blend of multiple vineyards that in 2017 included Ranchi La Viña (Sta. Rita Hills), Kessler-Haak (Sta. Rita Hills), Close Pepe (Sta. Rita Hills), John Sebastiano (Sta. Rita Hills), Aubaine (Arroyo Seco), Rosella's (Santa Lucia Highlands) and Sierra Mar (Santa Lucia Highlands). The clones included "Pisoni," 113, 115, 667, 777 and 23.

The front label reads "California," but the back states "Santa Barbara County," apparently because the majority of the fruit came from that AVA. Brian says that he does not limit this wine to any specific AVA, but rather looks for a winning blend.

The quality of a blended wine is often a reflection of the expertise of the winemaker. Brian has been making Pinot Noir since 1997 and under the Loring Wine Company since 1999, and was one of the first boutique California Pinot Noir producers. He has refined his style over the years. Initially he was producing dark-hued Pinot Noir bursting with sappy, well-ripened fruit and infused with significant French oak toast. More recently, his wines have toned down for the better, with less ripeness, more acidity and better balance. He has used much less new oak (only about 15%). All wines are aged 10 months after which they are bottled under screw cap unfiltered and unfiltered.

The 2017 vintage of this wine (1,000 cases, \$29 with some retail sources \$24) was reviewed by me in February 2019: *Fresh flavors of dark red and black cherry fruits with hints of red licorice, spice, oak and earth. Easygoing, with commendable balance and some finish.* The *Wine Enthusiast* reviewer scored it **92** and the 2018 vintage **90**.



**2018 Cooper Jaxon Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.65, 800 cases, \$29, screw cap. Pre-release. A multiple vineyard blend: Boekenooogen (Santa Lucia Highlands), Peterson (Santa Lucia Highlands), Cortada Alta (Santa Lucia Highlands), Spanish Springs (San Luis Obispo), Rancho La Viña (Sta. Rita Hills), Kessler-Haak (Sta. Rita Hills), Peake Ranch (Sta. Rita Hills) and Cargasacchi (Sta. Rita Hills). Clones 113, 115, 667, 777 and 23. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Instant pleasure in the glass with fresh aromas and flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and spice invigorated with uplifting acidity and moderated by gentle tannins. Everything is working in harmony in this immensely appealing offering that defies its modest price tag. This is the perfect everyday, go-to Pinot Noir.* **91**.



Sign up with the Loring Wine Company mailing list to obtain this wine when it is released. Visit [www.loringwinecompany.com](http://www.loringwinecompany.com). The winery's new tasting room is located at 201 Industrial Way, Suite B, in Buellton, and is open Thursday-Monday. Grab a bite after at Industrial Easts that shares the same parking lot.

# Footnotes

## Portland Doctors Miles Hassell and David Ellis Tout Wine Consumption & Good Health

An article by Michael Albery appearing at <https://www.oregonlive.com/wine/2020/02/portland-doctors-offer-the-wine-industry-a-moderate-proposal-when-it-comes-to-health.html>, reinforces the value of the Mediterranean diet that includes moderate alcohol consumption. This diet can help prevent, and in some cases reverse, a variety of diseases such as heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Dr. Hassell noted, “We think the preponderance of data suggests a moderate amount of red wine is associated with better health results, driven primarily by diabetes and cardiovascular outcomes.” Dr. Ellis echoed the importance of moderation. “The vast preponderance of data, cardiovascular and otherwise, would dictate that consistent moderation is the ticket for red wine or anything else.”

**Polyphenols Associated with a Lower Risk of Alzheimer’s** Four polyphenolic compounds known as flavonols found in many fruits, vegetables and grapes, were studied as a part of the Rush Memory and Aging Project (MAP), an ongoing cohort study in Chicago begun in 2004. Annual neurological evaluations and dietary assessments were done on 921 participants without dementia. 220 participants (75% female) eventually developed Alzheimer’s disease. Participants who followed a diet regimen with the highest flavonol intake had a 48 percent lower risk of developing Alzheimer’s Disease compared to those who consumed the least. Consumption of the flavonol myricetin, which is found in wine, tea, kale, oranges and tomatoes, was linked to a 38 percent lower risk of developing dementia, and consumption of the flavonol isorhammetin, found in wine, pears, olive oil and tomato sauce, was associated with a 38 percent reduction rate. This study, recently published in the journal *Neurology*, adds to the growing evidence that moderate wine consumption is an important contributor to a cognitive-friendly diet.

**The Lowdown on Hungarian Oak** I recently reviewed a few wines from Bravium. Winegrower Derek Rohlffs combines Hungarian oak with French oak in aging his Pinot Noir wines with good results. Rohlffs explained why he uses Hungarian oak barrels. “About ten years ago, my eyes were opened to Hungarian oak during a blind tasting arranged by well-known barrel broker Mel Knox. I tasted the same Chardonnay and Pinot Noir raised in every manner of oak barrel and was drawn to wines aged in Hungarian oak. Research and a later trip to Hungary confirmed my sensory intuitions. As a result of the harsh growing conditions of the North Hungarian Range, the oak forests are composed almost exclusively of sessile oak or *Quercus Petraea*. Tight-grained *Quercus Petraea* has a high aromatic concentration matched with low tannic content resulting in wines of complex aromas, enhanced fruit character along with tension and brightness. The Zemplen forest, in particular, produces some of the tightest grain oak anywhere, with a higher percentage of *Patraea* trees (almost 100%) than the renowned Tronçais forest (80% *Patraea*) in France.” I think there has been a tendency to turn up our nose to wines made with Hungarian oak, feeling that it is cheaper and less successful for Pinot Noir. Derek and others are changing this misconception.

**Wine Reviews that Leave You Asking, “Say What?”** I recently received an allocation offering for 2016 Zena Crown Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noirs. Some of the wine descriptions left me puzzled. **2016 Zena Crown Vineyard Conifer:** “*Exemplifies summer with red fruit, floral femininity(?) and great acidity. Pine sap, plumb, lifted rose (?) and zebra stripe gum (?) aromas. The wine beads on the palate like morning dew on a bivouac sack (?). It is gracefully commanding and shaped like a fat arrow (?).*” **2016 Zena Crown Vineyard Vista:** “*Folded like an accordion (?), the 2016 Vista opens with red fruit and citrus up front. ....Aromas of clover blossom (?), tamarind, pipe tobacco, and tangelo (?) lead to flavors of cranberries, milk chocolate, sage and marjoram on the palate.*” **2016 Zena Crown Vineyard Block 6:** “*The 2016 Block 6 has invigorating acidity and flows across the palate like an umbrella covering the tongue (?). With Sizzler red licorice (?), champagne mango (?) and petunia aromas, and flavors of beet root, dates wrapped in bacon (?) and squid ink (?), the wine is as fresh as a warm spring day.*” **2016 Zena Crown Vineyard Block 14:** “*Light bodied yet viscous like water with high mineral content (?), the 2016 Block 14 soars across the palate like a hang glider (?). The wine’s aromas of boysenberry, black licorice, and wild rose(?) lead to flavors of maple sugar, dark rye, and golden beet. The thirst quenching, slightly salty Pinot has a texture reminiscent of juicy pomegranate and shiso leaf melange (?) with an everlasting finish.*” The writer of these reviews had to strive for a bit of tongue-in-cheek humor. He couldn’t be serious....could he?