

**Pinot Noir
Wraps You in
Silk Pajamas**

PinotFile

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Shea Vineyard: Dirt Counts

Shea Vineyard was first planted to wine grapes by Dick Shea and two east coast partners in 1989. Dick was an Oregon wine pioneer in the sense that he was the first to plant Pinot Noir in the now well-known viticultural area known as the Yamhill-Carlton AVA in the heart of Oregon's Willamette Valley. Now the Shea Vineyard is surrounded by several premier Pinot Noir vineyards including Willakenzie, Patricia Green and Beaux Freres. In the early 1990s, Dick bought out his partners and remains the sole owner today. Although he had no farming experience himself, he was able to surround himself with very talented winegrowers like Javier Marin who farmed his vineyard early on while he remained on the East Coast working on a Wall Street trading floor. In 1999 he moved to Portland, Oregon for good to devote himself full time to winegrowing.

Today this large vineyard consists of 200 hillside acres of which 135 acres are planted to Pinot Noir and 5 acres of Chardonnay. The vineyard faces south at an elevation of 320-620 feet and is divided into two hills, named "East" and "West" separated by a valley containing native plants and trees. The soil found on Shea Vineyard is characterized by shallow sedimentary Willakenzie topsoil and fractured sandstone subsoil. The Pinot Noir is divided into 33 blocks, consisting of numbered blocks 2-14, 19-27, 30-33 and named blocks North, South, Oak Lane, Back, Dierdre's (formerly 28, 29) Michael's (formerly 16) and The Terrace. Some blocks contain uncultivated native plants and trees. Confused? - see below.

Dijon clones have had a large beneficial impact on the quality of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in Oregon. Dijon clones like 114, 115, 667, 777 and 828 ripen earlier and perform better in cooler climates like that found in the Willamette Valley.



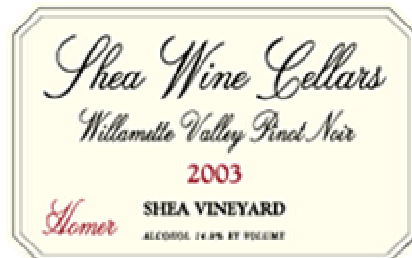
The original plantings of Pommard and Wadenswil clones were on their own roots. Inevitably, Phylloxera afflicted the vineyard and planned replanting has progressed through the last several years and was completed in 2005. The newer plantings include Dijon clones 114, 115, 777 and 828. The vineyard has never been irrigated.



Vineyard Manager Javier Marin & Dick Shea

Grapes from this impeccably maintained site are highly-sought after by many of Oregon's top wineries. The list includes: Beaux Freres, Bergstrom, Broadley, Elk Cove, Francis Tannahill, J.K. Carrier, Ken Wright Cellars, Panther Creek Cellars, Penner-Ash, Raptor Ridge, Scott Paul Wines, St. Innocent and Torii Mor. The most unusual source is 950 miles away in Ojai, California - Sine Qua Non. The Shea Vineyard Pinot Noirs of Sine Qua Non have been reviewed in the PinotFile and they are stunning wines. Unfortunately, winemaker Manfred Krankl has decided to devote himself to Rhone varietals and the 2003 Omega Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir is the last of the series. These grapes will now be sold in California beginning in 2006 to Brian Loring of Loring Wine Cellars in Lompoc who will bottle a Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir under his own label as well as another label, Pali, headed by Brian and financed by outside investors.

Since 1996, Dick Shea himself has his own label, Shea Wine Cellars. Although the Pinot Noirs have been vinified by several different winemakers to date, they have shown delicacy and balance and are full of intriguing nuances termed "Shea-ness." Many tasters have detected a consistent floral aroma and a certain dark red fruit character often with a hint of spice that seems unusually clear and unique to the vineyard. The Pinot Noirs are designated as Estate (a blend of several blocks), block-designates which vary from year to year and can be a challenge to configure, and a special reserve style wine labeled "Homer." Dick Shea is a baseball fan but in no way is connected to Shea Stadium in New York. Dick's wife, Deidre, often compares Dick to Homer Simpson so the name has dual meaning. This cuvee is from the best barrels and is the most voluptuous of the lineup, needing several years to reach its primedrinking window. The winemaker for the current 2004 vintage is Chris Matzepink, previously at Lemelson, with consulting input from previous winemaker Sam Tannahill.



Before last year's International Pinot Noir Celebration, I met up with Dick and his wife Deirdre at Adelsheim Vineyards where his Shea Wine Cellars wines are produced. Future plans call for a home and winery on the Shea Vineyard property. We tasted through the 2004 lineup out of tank just prior to bottling. Production for 2004 was 1,400 cases of five different Pinot Noirs. Noted Oregon wine writer and publisher of the *Oregon Wine Report*, Cole Danehower, says this about the great 2004 vintage in Oregon: "I happen to think that 2004 is Oregon's best overall vintage since 1999 - and perhaps the lowest-yielding vintage since 1998. I believe 2004 offers the best balance of varietal flavor, acidity, tannins and complexity - almost regardless of growing location - of any Oregon vintage since 1999." Yields were down at Shea Vineyard but Dick feels that the years of experience with his vineyard allowed him to harvest very good quality fruit and he is extremely pleased with the breeding of the resulting wines. The vintage was hot and similar to 2003 until early August when rain came. The harvest was spread out at the vineyard to optimize fruit maturity. "The 2004 wines in the Willamette Valley are not over the top and overripe like many 2003s and have higher acid than the 2003s, allowing them to age better."

2004 Shea Wine Cellars Estate Pinot Noir \$38. 60% of production. A blend of all of the clones in the vineyard, new and old plantings from 8 different blocks. An elegant Pinot Noir with bracing acidity. Ripe dark fruits float on a base of fine tannins.

2004 Shea Wine Cellars East Hill Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 180 cases, \$42. Previously this was the block 32 bottling but this block, first planted to Pommard clone in 1990, had become severely damaged by Phylloxera and had to be replanted. This wine is mainly from young plantings in Block 5 on the East Hill and some older fruit from block 32. The wine is composed of 85% Dijon clone 115 and 777 and 15% older fruit from block 32. Some whole clusters were used and fermentation was in wood fermenters. Tasted out of tank before bottling and recently tasted in bottle. Very nice aromatics which feature more earth, wood and alcohol than dark fruit at this point. The fruit is still closed and subdued. Very nice velveteen mouth feel. The finish is especially long and highlighted by that typical Shea spice. An intense and rich Pinot Noir that needs some time to flesh out.

2004 Shea Wine Cellars Block 23 Pinot Noir 425 cases, \$48. The Pommard clones in this block are part of the original Shea Vineyard plantings and were heavily infected with Phylloxera in this vintage. This bottling is always the first to be released. A huge nose leads to intense and showy dark cherry and blackberry flavors. A showy wine that can be easily poured now. A Pinot to envy.



2004 Shea Wine Cellars Wadenswil Pinot Noir 275 cases, \$48. The fruit for this wine comes from blocks 25 and 28, previously sold to Sine Qua Non, and block 32, previously a block designate. Dick says the Wadenswil clone only does well in certain areas. It has more backend tannin and is earthier than the Pommard clone. Chocolate is often featured. In tank this was still tight and barely showing its charms. Traditionally this fruit has produced prodigious Pinot Noirs that age beautifully. I could sense the potential and uniqueness of this wine and look forward to its release.

2004 Shea Wine Cellars Homer Pinot Noir 450 cases, \$75. This wine is an assemblage of the best barrels from Oak block and blocks 25. This wine has ripe Pinot fruit aromas and is brimming with black cherry fruit on the palate. A benevolent stew of flavors which are lush and voluptuous. Plenty of acid backbone for the long haul. An ultra plush wine not for the faint of heart. Needs meditation.

Dick decided to release the 2004 vintage wines sequentially. Block 23 and East Hill have been released, Homer and Wadenswil will be released in May, 2006. There is a small quantity of Chardonnay available also. Your best online source for the wines is www.avalonwine.com (which also has extensive coverage of Shea Vineyard including a number of gorgeous photos) and www.sheawinecellars.com.

Oregon Pinot Noir Underbelly - Wines < \$25

Finding exemplary Oregon Pinot Noir priced under \$25 can be done but the adventure is fraught with many missteps along the way that may do serious damage to your liver. In France, the under \$25 Bourgogne or village Burgundies are generally balanced wines that offer true Pinot aromas and flavors that entice you to pour a second glass. In Oregon (and in California for that matter), inexpensive Pinot Noir so often suffers from a lack of balance expressed by intrusive mouth-puckering acid, unwieldy oak tannins, high alcohol and short finishes. A well-balanced wine should have a harmonious blend of acid, alcohol, tannin and roundness. I like to call them “white bread Pinots” for they taste decent but are bland and dull and lack the aromatic and flavor delicacy that turns people on to Pinot Noir. To be sure, this is not a problem just confined to under \$25 wines, but the examples are more plentiful in the lower priced group of wines.

I recently tasted through 15 under \$25 Oregon Willamette Valley Pinot Noirs from the 2002, 2003 and 2004 vintages. The better balanced examples came from the outstanding 2004 vintage. Of the 15, there was only one wine that was knock-your-socks-off great and that I would highly recommend. There were also some decent Pinots. Most of the wines are available online at avalonwine.com.

The star:

2004 Broadley Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc, \$18. Craig and Morgan Broadley (father and son) make outstanding examples of Oregon Pinot Noir. The label says “a big, rich, complex style” and they got that right. Drink this wine if you want to know what all the fuss about Pinot Noir is about. A complete wine from nose to finish that is beautifully balanced. Deep purple, oodles of ripe (but not overripe) fruit, dusty tannins, a wonderful velvety mouth feel and a refreshing, lingering finish. A good wine at any price. Broadley’s premium bottlings, Marcille Lorraine and Claudia’s Reserve must really be something.

Decent:

2004 Harmonia Oregon Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$21. Quercus Wines in Amity, Oregon produces handcrafted Pinot Noirs in small quantities. Their tagline is, “I hope this Pinot Noir will enhance the sweetness and harmony in your life.” Michael Beckley is the winemaker. This wine is true to the varietal and sensibly balanced.

2003 Territorial Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$16.50). Appealing red Pinot Noir fruits in the nose and taste. Acid under control. A decent everyday Pinot for the table.

2002 Medici Vineyards Block I,II, Estate Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., \$26. Peter Rosback of Sineann fame is also the winemaker for Hal Medici’s Medici Winery. The wine is from a 40 acre vineyard in the Chehalem Range first established in 1965. Blocks I and II were planted in 1988. A lighter, elegant style of Pinot that needs some time in the glass to compose itself.

The rest:

2003 Lumos Oregon Pinot Noir (13%, \$22), **2003 Belle Pente Yamhill-Carlton District Oregon Pinot Noir** (13.7%, \$22), **2002 Stag Hollow Yamhill County Pinot Noir** (13.5%, \$17), **2004 Aramenta Cellars Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (\$14.1%, \$24), **2004 Allore Vineyard Fattoria Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (13.5%, \$17), **2004 Cloudline Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (14.1%, \$20), **2003 Ransom Wine Co Barrel Selection Willamette Valley** (14.4%, \$22), **2003 720 Wine Cellars Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (14.1%, \$19), **2003 Cardwell Hill Cellars Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (13.5%, \$19), **2004 Nekaia Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (13.5%), **2004 Scott Paul Cuvee Martha Pirrie Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (13.9%, \$20).

