



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir:
Why be difficult
when you can be
impossible!*

Along the Oregon Pinot Trail



Oregon's Willamette Valley has the most in common with Burgundy than any North American wine growing region. Some have called the Willamette Valley, "Burgundy of the West." The midpoint of the Willamette Valley lies at 45 degrees north latitude, the same as for Burgundy's Cote d'Or. Vintages in Oregon tend to parallel those in Burgundy. Oregon wineries have always been small, family owned affairs, just like in Burgundy. The Dijon clones of Pinot Noir were first brought into this country by workers at Oregon State University who had a close working relationship with the Burgundians. Reidel makes a distinctive Pinot Noir glass for Burgundy and Oregon.

Oregon's wine culture has always embraced Burgundian influence and is largely responsible for Oregon's success. The first winegrowers who came to the Willamette Valley in the 1960s and 1970s were not only deterred by the unaffordable land prices in California at the time, but also by California winemaking which used pumps, filters and technology suitable for Cabernet Sauvignon, but undesirable for Pinot Noir. In being among the first to embrace exclusive use of French oak barrels in the New World, it was only natural that Oregonians looked to Burgundy for guidance.

By 1981, Oregon had begun its annual Steamboat Conference with the original intention of sharing information between winemakers from Oregon and California. It was the Burgundians who began attending this event that created the most impression on Oregon winemakers. Robert Drouhin of Domaine Drouhin in Beaune, France, had visited Oregon in the 1970s, and in 1987, bought 180 acres in the Dundee Hills. Named Domaine Drouhin Oregon, this French-inspired winery brought vindication and notoriety to the Oregon wine industry and helped to foster a long-standing interchange between Oregonians and Burgundians. Véronique Drouhin-Boss has been the winemaker at Domaine Drouhin Oregon since its inception and was one of the first French-born winemakers in Oregon. Many others have followed suite, including Laurent Montalieu (WillaKenzie, Soléna Cellars), Jacques Tardy (Torii Mor), and Isabelle Dutartre (DePonte Cellars). Most recently, world-renowned Burgundian winemaker, Dominique Lafon of Meursault, chose Oregon for his New World winemaking consultancy project, The Evening Lands Vineyards, whose stateside winemaker is Frenchwoman, Isabelle Meunier.

The question that is often posed after considering all this French influence and camaraderie, do Pinot Noirs from the Willamette Valley resemble or even mirror their brethren from Burgundy? Well, yes and no. The best Oregon Pinot Noirs can and do approximate the quality of many French *bourgogne*, *village* and *premier cru* level wines. There are enough differences between the two regions, however, to insure that the wines are distinct. The *terroir* is disparate among the two winegrowing regions, with the *Cote d'Or* possessing limestone-laden soils while Oregon's soils are basaltic, sedimentary or loess in type with little underlain limestone. Rain is not unusual in the summer in Burgundy, but infrequent in the Willamette Valley. Burgundy vineyards are a clonal mix known as *selection massale*, while Oregon vineyards are composed of distinct blocks of separate clones and lack the age of Burgundian vineyards. Burgundy vineyards cannot be irrigated, while many of Oregon's vineyards receive a drink of water occasionally toward the end of the growing season. Oregon vineyards tend to have wide spacing of vines in contradistinction to the high-density plantings in Burgundy.

It makes little sense to spend time comparing Oregon Pinot Noir and red Burgundy. We should celebrate each for what it is, not for what it isn't. If a distinction must be made, this quote by Paul White best sums it up: "The Old World prizes structure and texture over fruit, with a liking for subtle, savory, gamy (at times bordering on filth), earthy characters, whereas New World wine is mostly about fruit." Jay McInerney put it another way, "Take Pinot Noir to the New World and it often goes native in an alarming way, shedding its Gallic intellectual vigor and displaying a fruity, flirty New World hedonism."

I have digressed. I spent a marvelous week before the recent International Pinot Noir Celebration traveling the back roads of Pinot country in the Willamette Valley. I met and renewed friendships with many hard working and passionate winegrowers and I tasted some stunning Pinot Noirs from both the 2007 and 2008 (mostly from barrels) vintages. There is a unique sense of freedom and pioneering spirit that comes with driving the picturesque unpaved roads of wine country to find a small, artisan producer of Pinot Noir. In the following pages, I will review my most memorable visits and wines. I urge you to followup these reports with your support, seek out these wines, and pay a visit to these producers. Remember, wines represent people and place and your enjoyment of drinking wine will be greatly enhanced when you look beyond the wine to embrace who crafted the wine and where it originated.



Laura Volkman Vineyards: "She clears the land and plants a vineyard"

Laura Volkman and her husband, Jim, bought a small farm several years ago in Newberg, Oregon. They cleared the land and planted 3.5 acres of Pinot Noir (Elle Rêve Vineyard), primarily Dijon 115, with lesser amounts of 114, 667, 777 and Pommard clones. Unlike most winemaking ventures where the husband is the principal winegrower and winemaker, Laura is the driving force who makes all the winegrowing decisions herself, performs practically all the physical work in the vineyard, makes and bottles the wines, and sells the wines. For the most part, she won't allow anyone else, even her husband, Jim, touch the vines. Jim says, "She takes every bottle personally," while she likens her passion to an author writing a great book who seeks a sequestered location to focus on the job at hand. She says with emphasis, "I have blinders on from April until the end of crush." For a slight woman who weighs only a smidgen over 100 pounds, you have to admire her gumption. Jim has his own profession, possesses the patience of a saint, and provides a helping hand and support only if needed.



Laura developed her winemaking acumen through the Northwest Viticulture Center in Salem, Oregon, and was mentored by Mike Etzel at Beaux Freres during the 2001 and 2002 crush. Her first wines were released from the 2004 vintage. She realized early on that Pinot Noir was the one grape variety that could be brought to perform brilliantly only through meticulous parenting in the vineyard and in the winery. This explains why some of the world's greatest Pinot Noirs come from very small producers who can personally nurse the frivolous grape every step of the way. Her back label says, "Atop a windy hill in the Chehalem Mountains, she dreams of a great vintage. The soil, the sun, nurturing the vines, harvesting at the peak of perfection, the fruit will make the wine."

Laura's winemaking is traditional and all hands-on. Fermentations are kept cool because Laura believes this preserves the delicate aromas of Pinot Noir. Different yeasts are used to create distinctive flavor profiles that set apart her two major Pinot Noir bottlings, Rachel Estate and Jacob Estate. Absolutely no pumping is done. Aging is carried out in roughly 50% new French oak barrels. Once the wine is ready, it goes directly to tank for blending and then straight to bottle all through gravity flow. All of her Pinot Noirs are unfinned and unfiltered. She recommends that consumers wait a year after release to insure full integration of her Pinot Noirs.

The Laura Volkman Vineyards labels are quite striking and display artwork depicting Laura in her vineyard from noted watercolor artist, Terry Peasley. Her three Pinot Noir bottlings are named after family members: St. James Estate (spouse), Rachel Estate (daughter) and Jacob Estate (son). The Chardonnay, sourced from the

Celilo Vineyard located in the Columbia Gorge region of Washington, is named after the family dog, Bella. Total production is tiny, less than 500 cases. The wines are sold through a mailing list and on the website at www.volkmanvineyards.com. Tasting is available by appointment at the vineyard at 13000 N.E. Quarry Road in Newberg (503-806-4047). The photo below shows Rachel, Bella and Jacob in their natural habitat.



I was very impressed by the 2006 vintage Laura Volkman wines and raved about them in previous issues of the *PinotFile*. I have sampled the 2006 Pinot Noirs on numerous occasions with consistent results. While in Oregon, I met with Laura at August Cellars (a cooperative winemaking facility, pictured below) located near her vineyard where she crafts her wines. We tasted through her lineup of 2007 wines and barrel samples of separate 2008 Pinot Noir clonal wines from new oak barrels (they will be blended with clonal wines from neutral barrels when bottled). Yields were slightly decreased in 2008. The 2008 Pinot Noirs are darkly colored due to prolonged end of summer heat. They have plenty of tannin that is good (astringent) rather than bad (bitter) in type. Laura calls 2008 “a big, lush vintage with alcohols in the 13.5 range.” I thought Laura’s 2008 Pinot Noirs were spectacular and in line with other stellar 2008 wines I had tasted elsewhere in the Willamette Valley on this visit. I came away from this tasting with continued respect for Laura’s winegrowing and winemaking aptitude.

2008 clone 667: *Deep red plum fruit that is very lush with restrained astringent tannins.*

2008 Pommard clone: *Plush deeply flavored dark fruits that are very “pretty.” Plenty of tannin.*

2008 clone 114: *Bright raspberry fruit with appealing spice and herb accent. Silky textured.*

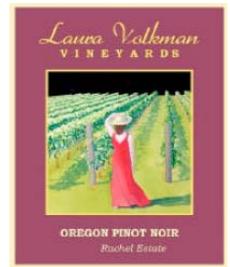
2008 clone 777: *Redder fruits balance out the healthy tannins nicely. Touch of citrus.*

2008 clone 115: *Rich fruit with hi-toned spice and a touch of pepper on nose. Notable but soft tannins.*





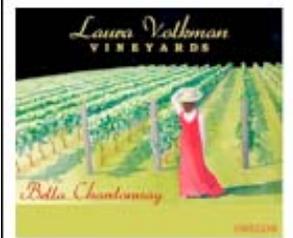
2006 Laura Volkman Vineyards Rachel Estate Oregon Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 100 cases, \$38 (sold out). Clones 114, 667 and Pommard. One yeast is used to create a fruity profile and a second Burgundian yeast is used to produce a drier finish. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color. Lovely aromas of black cherry jam and spice. Very tasty and perfectly ripe black cherry and raspberry fruit with a faint citrus underbelly. Hints of sandalwood, spice and earth add interest. A beautiful wine that is rich, yet lively, with supple tannins, a velvety texture and bright acidity on a lengthy finish. Still my favorite Laura Volkman wine.*



2006 Laura Volkman Vineyards Jacob Estate Oregon Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 200 cases, \$42 (a few cases remain). Clones 114, 115 and 777 from the East block of the Volkman Vineyard. Yeasts were manipulated to produce a richer wine. *The nose is quite subdued today featuring dark fruits and damp earth. Deliciously rich berry fruit that is supported by a fine tannin structure. Impeccable balance with a cherry and berry charged finish that leaves a lasting impression.*



2007 Laura Volkman Vineyards Bella Chardonnay 13.8%, 120 cases, \$25. Sourced from the Celilo Vineyard in Washington. Wente clone. Partial MLF. Fermented in 50% stainless steel and 50% oak (25% new). *A very vibrant Chardonnay that strikes a compromise between non-oaked and oaked vinification. Appealing scents of pears and butter with a rich mid-palate of white stone fruits ending with a pleasing citrus lift.*

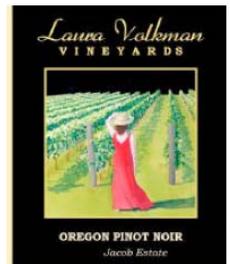


2007 Laura Volkman Vineyards St. James Estate Oregon Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 160 cases, \$20. Primarily neutral barrels used. Mainly press wine. A value-priced "stimulus" Pinot Noir. *Light in color and body but possessing appealing aromas and flavors of spice-marked red fruits. A very easy drinking wine with gossamer tannins that charmed me with its yeast-induced spiciness. This is a perfect every day aperitif or mealtime wine to buy by the case.*

2007 Laura Volkman Vineyards Rachel Estate Oregon Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 95 cases, \$38. Raised in 50% new French oak. This wine has been slow to open and was only released in May 2009. Composed of 114, 667 and Pommard clones. *Demure aromas of confected cherries and red raspberries, brioche, hay and spice. Packed with deep red fruit flavors augmented with subtle oak and some earthiness. Very silky and diaphanous. Ripe tannins enhance the structural integrity and the finish has a pleasing grip of acidity. Still not at its apogee, but a very promising feminine-styled Pinot.*



2007 Laura Volkman Vineyards Jacob Estate Oregon Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 120 cases, \$45. Clones 114, 115 and 777. Barrel aged on the lees in 50% new French oak. *Moderately light reddish-purple in color. More intensity and richness with more tannins than the Rachel Estate. Not as plush or big-boned as the 2006 vintage but plenty to like. Flamboyant scents of black cherries and black raspberries with hints of oak and cigar box. Packed with dark berry and stone fruit flavors augmented nicely with toasty oak. Hints of citrus peel, cola, root beer and spice add interest. Like all of Laura Volkman wines, the finish has remarkable persistence. A more masculine interpretation of the vineyard that is singing nicely now.*



Anne Amie Vineyards: Wines with a New Spirit

Going back a few years, the wines I had sampled from Anne Amie Vineyards were technically fine, but lacked spirit and sophistication. When I visited Anne Amie Vineyards before the 2009 IPNC, I was happy to find that the current releases show a new vitality and the staff's esprit d corps is infused into every bottle. Wine is really all about the people, and proprietor Dr. Robert Pamplin, Jr., has gathered an impassioned staff to pursue the goal of producing world-class wines. Winemaker Thomas Houseman, viticulturist Jason Tosch and sales manager Kim McLeod have guided Anne Amie to the top echelon of Oregon wineries while kicking up their heels and thoroughly enjoying themselves along the way. Their spirit is evident in the photo below (from L to R, Houseman, Tosch, Prince, Kim).



Dr. Robert Pamplin, Jr., is a man of varied talents who has earned eight degrees in business, economics, accounting, education and theology. He is Chairperson, President and CEO of the R.B. Pamplin Corporation and is the founder of the Portland Tribune newspaper, Columbia Empire Farms, and Your Northwest retail stores. He is the author of 13 books. His record in philanthropy is commendable with 10 percent of pre-taxed profits of the R.B. Pamplin Corporation donated to nearly 200 charities nationwide.

Dr. Pamplin bought the former Chateau Benoit Winery in Carlton in 1999. The name, Anne Amie, is in honor of Dr. Pamplin's two daughters. The initial winemaker, Scott Huffman, was a holdover from Chateau Benoit and some credible wines were produced. The 2002 vintage Anne Amie Vineyards Pinot Noir was one of the top rated Pinot Noirs in Oregon according to the *Northwest Wine Press*. Huffman was succeeded by Thomas Houseman. Houseman's story would make a good movie. He was an accomplished modern dancer living in New York and traveling the world when he began to assist his company's lighting director in making beer. Sufficiently intrigued by fermentation and its after products, he left New York and enrolled in the enology and viticulture program at University California Fresno. His love for Pinot Noir led him to winemaking jobs at Husch Vineyards in the Anderson Valley of California and Bleinheim Winery and Bell Hill Winery owned by the Giesen brothers in North Canterbury, New Zealand. Upon returning to the states, he was mentored by Dick and Luisa Ponzi at Ponzi Vineyards in Oregon before becoming Director of Winemaking at Anne Amie.

The important role of a viticulturist in the production of Pinot Noir cannot be underestimated. The Director of Viticulture at Anne Amie, Jason Tosch, is an Oregon native who came to Anne Amie from Ponzi Vineyards. He has transformed all the Anne Amie estate vineyards to LIVE (Low Input Viticulture & Enology) and Salmon Safe certification. He notes, "Encouraging the vines using balanced and sustainable practices in the vineyards creates the stage for what Pinot Noir in Oregon soils is meant to do: perform beautifully."

Anne Amie farms several vineyard sites. The Estate Vineyard (photo below with winery in background) surrounds the winery and consists of 18.7 acres of Pinot Noir (115, Pommard) planted between 2001 and 2007, 6.4 acres of Riesling and 15.37 acres of Müller-Thurgau in Willakenzie soil. The Boisseau Vineyard was planted between 2000 and 2007 to 11.9 acres of Pinot Noir (114, 667, 777, Pommard), 3.3 acres of Chardonnay (76) and 1.6 acres of Pinot Gris (146) in Laurelwood soil. Louise Vineyard was planted in 2003 and 2007 and contains 5.5 acres of Pinot Noir (777 and Pommard), 3.1 acres of Pinot Gris (146), 3.1 acres of Pinot Blanc and 2.1 acres of Chardonnay (95) in Laurelwood soil. Marilyn Vineyard is planted to 4.6 acres of Pinot Gris (146). Justin-Grant Vineyard was planted in 2007 to 9.5 acres of Pinot Noir (113, 667, 777, Wädenswil, Pommard) and 6 acres of Pinot Blanc (French 07, Italian 05, 06) in Laurelwood soil. Robert Vineyard is the youngest with 18.35 acres of Pinot Noir (667, 777, 828 and Wädenswil) in Laurelwood soil. Many of the vineyards are not yet in full production. The future holds great promise for Anne Amie Vineyards as Houseman will have a widely varied site and clonal palate to work with. Anne Amie also sources grapes from several prominent vineyards in the Willamette Valley.



Houseman is an unpretentious figure who is a minimalist in the winery. For Pinot Noir, grapes are de-stemmed and 80% of the berries reach the open-top fermenters intact. Fermentations are extended up to 28 days and beyond on the skins, for Houseman believes this leads to better resolution of tannins and wines with softer textures. The wines are moved by gravity flow and bottled with no fining or filtration.

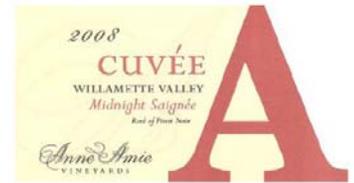
Anne Amie is located in Carlton on just west of Highway 99 at 6580 NE Mineral Springs Road. The wines are sold on the website and at the winery's tasting room which is open daily from 10:00 to 5:00. A vineyard and winery tour is available Wednesday through Sunday at 11:00 AM by reservation (503-864-2991).



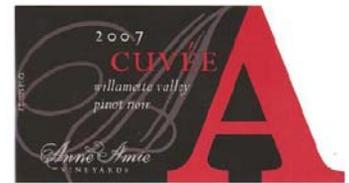
2007 Anne Amie Vineyards Pinot Blanc 12.5% alc., 550 cases, \$25, released March 2009. Whole clusterpressed, cold fermented, aged in 60% new French oak on the lees for 8 months. Sourced from Helmick Hill Vineyard. *Pale yellow color. Pleasant aromas of pears, white peaches, apples and bananas. Charming marriage of pears and citrus fruits, a hint of oak, and zippy mineral-infused acidity on the refreshing finish. A perfect OTC (Other Than Chardonnay) white wine that performs well as an aperitif or with lighter summer fare.*



2008 Cuvée A Midnight Saignée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir Rosé 13.43% alc., 309 cases, \$15, released May 2009. Grapes are de-stemmed, cold soaked for 5 days, with a saignée on the second day to concentrate flavors. The wine is a blend of all Pinot Noir saignée lots representing multiple vineyards and AVAs. Barrel fermented in neutral French oak barrels to dryness, remaining on the lees until blending. *Pretty coral color. Aromas and flavors of fresh summer strawberries, cranberries and cherries with respectable mid-palate richness. Clean, pure and satisfying.*



2007 Cuvée A Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 3,200 cases, \$25, released February 2009. The difference between the Cuvée A and Winemaker's Selection Willamette Valley bottlings is the tasting decision with the Cuvée A featuring more red fruit and softer tannins. Primarily sourced from volcanic (Jory) soils. Grape are cold soaked for 4-7 days followed by extended maceration for 28-40 days. Aged on lees in 11.5% new French oak barrels for 10 months and aged 8 months after bottling before release. *This is the winery's value*

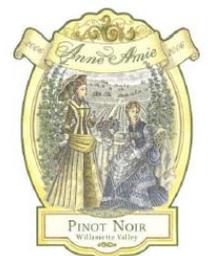


play Pinot Noir and fits the bill perfectly. Bright scents of red cherries, strawberries and cream soda. Light and soft in the mouth with a red fruit punch flavored core underlain with spice and citrus notes. A perfect back porch sipper.

2008 Cuvée A Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (barrel sample blend trial) *Darker in color with more body and richness than the 2007 vintage. Intense dark cherry fruit with soft, restrained tannins. Should eclipse the excellent 2007 version.*

2006 Anne Amie Vineyards Winemaker's Selection Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 3,400 cases, \$35, available. *Very aromatic with scents of raspberries, cherries and herbs. The flavors echo the aromas with an added underpinning of earthiness. Smoothly textured with fine-grain tannins.*

2007 Anne Amie Vineyards Winemaker's Selection Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 3,500 cases, \$35, November 2009 release. An 8-vineyard blend of clones 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, 828, Pommard and Wädenswil grown on all three of the Willamette Valley's main soils - Willakenzie, Jory and Laurelwood. A true representation of the entire Willamette Valley. *Moderately light garnet color. Elegantly styled with bright acidity. Vivid raspberry flavors with a touch of minerality and forest floor. More austere than the 2006 vintage of this wine but will compliment food nicely.*



2008 Anne Amie Vineyards Winemaker's Selection Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (barrel sample blend trial) *Intense garnet color. Brioche and dark berries on the nose. Lush darker fruits with notable tannins. This will be a crowd pleaser.*

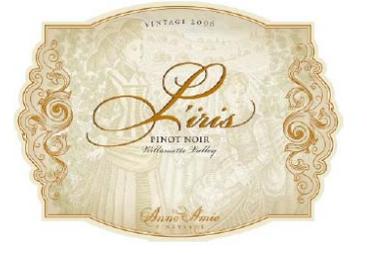
2007 Anne Amie Vineyards Estate Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 150 cases, \$50, November 2009 release. A 9-vineyard blend of clones Pommard 4, Wädenswil, 115 and 667. Grapes are de-stemmed into 2-ton open-top stainless steel fermenters, followed by a 5-day cold soak, inoculated with yeast, racked into 27% new French oak barrels and aged for 11 months. Blended and bottled unfiltered and unfinned and bottle aged for 18 months before release. *Admirable that the producers chose to release this wine only after adequate integration of its components. A huge nose of summer stone fruits that really grabs your attention. Luscious cherry and berry core with a compliment of earth and briar flavors. Deft use of oak and supple tannins that caress the fruit nicely. A wine of glass-filling presence.*



2007 Prismé Willamette Valley Pinot Noir Blanc 14.1% alc., 390 cases, \$45, November 2009 release. Named after the word prism which is splitting of white light into its corresponding colors. With this wine the reverse is being done, that is, making a white wine from Pinot Noir. Grapes are gently pressed, liberating free run juice but no inclusion of the color or tannins from the skin. 100% Pinot Noir, Pommard clone, barrel fermented in French oak puncheons (25% new), lees stirred, full MLF, and aged on its lees for 18 months before bottling. *Aromas of pear, lemon, smoke and wax. Flavors of yellow raspberries, green apples, brioche, and slightly toasted oak. Very smooth and creamy on the palate ending with a lengthy impression. Big in stature like a full-blown Chardonnay. A unique wine that forces you to abandon your ideas of traditional Pinot Noir and look for new expressions of the grape.*



2006 L'iris Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 1,200 cases, \$75, Released May 2009. A blend of Anne Amie Estate (33%), Boisseau, Louise, Hawk's View, and Deux Vert vineyards (Yamhill-Carlton and Chehalem Mountain AVAs). Clones 115, 777 and Wädenswil. 5-day cold soak, 10 day fermentation. Free-run juice aged in 62% new French oak for 18 months, bottled unfiltered and unfiltered, and aged an additional 18 months in bottle. *This is essentially a reserve wine but is not turned up in amplitude. Marvelous aromas of crushed berries, bramble and roasted nuts. A wine of mouth filling richness that coats every nook and cranny, yet is light on its feet. Beguiling flavors of cherry, raspberry and blackberry fruits with hints of vanillin and mocha. The tannins are so fine as to be imperceptible and the texture is Elvis on velvet soft. The powerfully aromatic finish is stunning.*



Shea Wine Cellars: Pinot Dreams Come True

In 1989, Shea Vineyards was one of the first plantings of Pinot Noir in the now esteemed viticultural appellation known as the Yamhill-Carlton District of the Willamette Valley. Little did Dick Shea, an emigrant from New York's Wall Street, realize the good fortune that the future held for him. That is not to say that he did not meet challenges. The original Pommard and Wädenswil clones of Pinot Noir were planted on their own roots and inevitably, phylloxera afflicted the vines, making necessary planned replanting of many vines which progressed through 2005. Dick did have the foresight to seek out knowledgeable people to assist him. When asked about the secret of his success, Dick told me, "What I did right was putting plenty of effort into finding good people to advise me and later work for me. I have picked up my knowledge from them." One of these people was viticulturist Javier Marin who has managed the vineyard from the beginning.

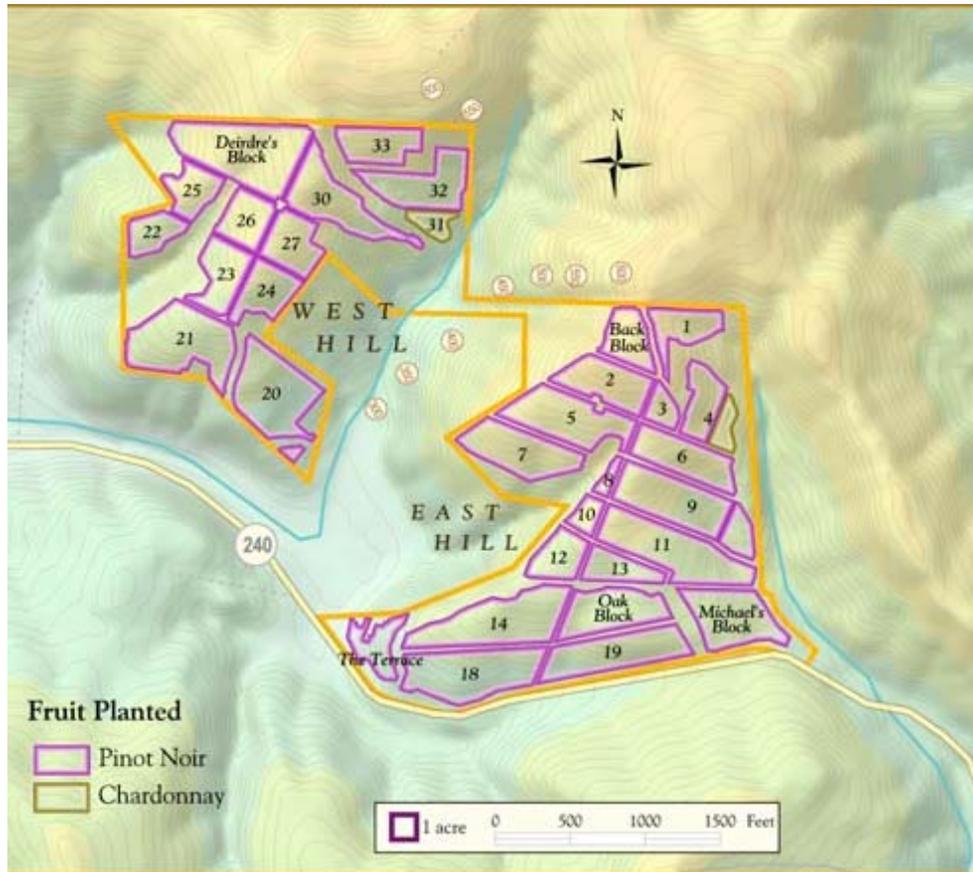
Today, Shea Vineyard consists of 140 acres of Pinot Noir and 5 acres of Chardonnay and includes the newer Pinot Noir Dijon clones, 114, 115, 777 and 828. The soil at Shea Vineyard, shallow sedimentary Willakenzie topsoil with underlying fractured sandstone, turned out to be a perfect match for the fickle grape. The Coast Range of mountains to the West creates a rain shadow over the District, and the ancient marine sediments drain quickly to create a natural deficit-irrigation effect. Shea's vines are never irrigated except for new plantings during the first year. Shea Vineyard is one of 32 farms in the Yamhill Basin that has received the highest level of stewardship of agricultural lands and is both LIVE and Salmon Safe certified.



Grapes from this distinguished site are highly sought after by many of Oregon and California's top wineries. Since 1996, Dick and his wife, Dierdre, have had their own label, Shea Wine Cellars, and it has taken them over ten years to arrive at a consistent style that they now comfortably embrace. They seem to have found the right winemaker match in Drew Voit, who took over with the 2007 vintage (the 2008 vintage is the first that Drew vinified from start to finish), and a new winery on the property allows them to tightly monitor and control all aspects of winemaking. About 25% of production is held back for the Shea Wine Cellars wines.

The labeling of Shea Wine Cellars Pinot Noirs has been something of an enigma through the years, with multiple bottlings including an estate bottling, various block-designates, clone-designates and vineyard division-designates (the vineyard has 33 blocks with both numbered and named designations and the vineyard is divided into two portions: West Hill and East Hill), and a reserve bottling labeled "Homer." It helps to have some familiarity with the vineyard layout (below). For the 2008 vintage, all the wines will have block designations.

In 2008, there are 18 wineries sourcing Shea Vineyard fruit and most bottle a Shea vineyard-designate Pinot Noir Because they each source from different blocks of the vineyard, each Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir will be distinct.



The Pinot Noirs from Shea Vineyard typically have a dark red to black fruit character, a complimentary earthiness and a substantial structure now recognized as typical for the Yamhill-Carlton District. Experienced tasters talk about a certain “Shea-ness” that is expressed in the wines from this vineyard. A consistent floral aroma and a dark red fruit character with spice seems unusually clear and unique to this vineyard.

It has been a tradition for me to visit Shea Wine Cellars just before IPNC each year and taste the latest releases. This year I sampled the lineup of 2007 wines and finished 2008 wines which were scheduled to go into bottle shortly after my visit. I just can't say enough about the quality of all the Shea Wine Cellars Pinot Noirs in both of these vintages. I came away shaking my head and muttering to myself, “How do they do that?” I have tasted every bottling back to 2002 and in most of these past vintages there were outstanding single wines, but there was uneven consistency across the entire lineup. In 2007 and 2008, every wine in the entire lineup was stunning. You need these wines in your cellar. When a die hard California wine geek says to you, like one of my acquaintances did recently, “I don't like Oregon wines,” pull the cork on one of these beauties and you will have a lifelong convert.

The 2007 wines, which include a Chardonnay, were bottled in August 2008. Winemaking is traditional for the most part. Fermentations are stroked with inoculated yeasts. The oak regimen is quite restrained with oak never peeking out in either the 2007 or 2008 vintage wines. Gentle crossflow filtration is employed and the wines are unfined.

Shea Wine Cellars wines are sold primarily through a mailing list at www.sheawinecellars.com with limited retail distribution (check www.avalonwine.com). Some of the 2007 wines are still available in very small quantities. Phone 503-241-6527 for inquires or e-mail Dick Shea at dickshea@sheawinecellars.com. The winery and vineyard are not open to the public.

2007 Shea Wine Cellars Willamette Valley Chardonnay 13.2% alc., 325 cases, \$35. Dijon clones 76, 548. 90% complete MLF. Raised in 15% new oak, 15% stainless, and 70% neutral oak. Blocks 4, 31. *This wine occupies the middle ground between full MLF and full barrel fermented Chardonnay and un-oaked stainless steel fermented Chardonnay. Classy aromas of pears, apples and wet stone. Modestly rich pear flavors with a hint of oak spice and a frisky finish framed with bright acidity.*



2007 Shea Wine Cellars Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 4,100 cases, \$48. Pommard, Wädenswil, Dijon 114, 115, 777 and 828 clones (every clone on the property) from both young and old vines. 6% whole cluster. Aged in 38% new French oak barrels. Blocks 7, 9, 11, 14, Oak, 19-24, 28, 29, 32, 33. *Moderately light garnet color. Typical roseate aroma of Shea Vineyard Pinot Noirs. Tasty mix of red, blue and black fruits with a touch of underlain earthiness. The lasting impression is one of freshness and brightness brought on by lively acidity. Read to drink now. The core wine of Shea Wine Cellars that represents beautifully the entire vineyard.*



 **2007 Shea Wine Cellars East Hill Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 325 cases, \$55. Wädenswil, Dijon 115, 777, 828. 11% whole cluster. Aged in 43% new French oak barrels. Blocks 5, Oak, 7, 9, 19. One of the 2009 IPNC featured wines. *Deeper, darker and richer than the Estate bottling. Sumptuous mid-palate featuring dark fruits especially plums and black currants. The tannins are barely perceptible and the long, chewy finish has a pleasing grip of acidity.*



2007 Shea Wine Cellars Pommard Clone Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 275 cases, \$55. 6% whole cluster. Aged in 64% new French oak barrels. Blocks 23, 32. *Leads off with tenacious scents of ripe dark red berries and cherries with an underpinning of spice and violets. Earthy, savory and brambly in the mouth with dark fruits and tannins that are mouth coating. This wine is built for the long haul.*



2007 Shea Wine Cellars Block 33 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 100 cases, \$65. Dijon 777. 100% wood fermented. Aged in 75% new French oak barrels. This is the first single Dijon clone wine from Shea Vineyard. Dijon clone 777 is the most widely planted in the vineyard. *Floral aromas are striking along with pleasing scents of spiced cherries. Plenty of dark-fruited Pinot sweetness. Softly textured, medium-weighted, sturdy on the palate with a dry finish. Needs more time but a pretty classy ride now.*



 **2007 Shea Wine Cellars Homer Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 325 cases, \$82. Wädenswil, Pommard, Dijon 777, 115. 9% whole cluster. 36% wood tank fermented. Aged in 71% new French oak barrels. Blocks 7, 32, 5, Oak. The best barrels in the cellar. *Penetrating and uplifting aromas of dark stone fruits. A great expression of Pinot Noir with layers of powerful flavors including mushu plum sauce, black raspberry, gregarious baking spice and exotic tea. A tannic edge suggests age ability. A memorable wine that deserves to be opened for a special occasion.*



The 2008 vintage wines are bigger than the 2007 wines with more color, tannin and lush fruit. Alcohols are in the 14s, less than 2006 but more than 2007. 2008 was a slow ripening vintage featuring a little rain in early October and then dry until November. Grapes were picked primarily in later October. The 2008 Pinot Noirs from Shea Wine Cellars are stunning wines that are at the uppermost echelon of Oregon Pinot Noir.

2008 Shea Wine Cellars Block 22 Pinot Noir From old vines planted in 1990. Produce small crop and ripen 2-3 weeks later. *Beautiful spice on the nose and palate. Gracious and pleasing now*

2008 Shea Wine Cellars Block 31 Pinot Noir Pommard and Wädenswil clones. *A big earthy wine with mouth filling richness. Powerful aromatic finish.*

2008 Shea Wine Cellars Block 7 Pinot Noir 100% Wädenswil, the backbone of Homer bottling. *Extroverted nose with prodigious fruit and a long, opulent finish.*

2008 Shea Wine Cellars Block 5 Pinot Noir 100% clone 777. *Showing a little reduction but the lush black cherry fruit is evident. I wrote, "great."*

2008 Shea Wine Cellars Homer Pinot Noir Primarily Wädenswil clone. *Intense dark fruit still showing some toasty oak. Very clean and pure. A mouth coating wine of amazing density.*



Lenné Estate: Hard Work Pays Off

Steve and Karen Lutz, along with a group of investors (HLC Wines LLC) launched Lenné Estate in 2002, dedicated to producing ultra premium Pinot Noir from a 20.9-acre vineyard near the town of Yamhill, Oregon. The site is on low vigor sedimentary and volcanic soils and has many famous neighboring estates such as WillaKenzie, Shea Wine Cellars & Vineyard, Soléna, Soter and Beaux Frères. Steve and another partner, Scott Huffman, had worked together at Anne Amie and searched for the perfect site since 1999. Together they laid out the vineyard and planted the first 10 acres of Pinot Noir (Dijon 115, 777 and Pommard) in 2001.

Establishing the vineyard presented several challenges. The vines were dry-farmed from the start. The steepness of the site made farming difficult. 35% of the vines were lost in the first year and in 2003, an additional 2.5-acre block of Pommard succumbed to the record heat of that year. In 2004 and 2005, the Pommard block was replanted along with an additional 2.5-acre block of Dijon 114 and 667. As we walked the vineyard together, I could sense in Steve the dedication and hard work that had driven him to create this magnificent site for Pinot Noir. The payoff for Steve and his partners has come with the Pinot Noir wines springing from Lenné Estate, which are among the finest I have had from the Yamhill-Carlton district.



The name, Lenné, sounds French, but is derived from Steve's father-in-law, Len, who raised his family, including Steve's spouse Karen, on a chicken farm west of London, England. Len passed away in 1999, but he contributed part of the down payment on the vineyard so it seemed only natural to honor him. The first two vintages of Lenné Estate Pinot Noir were released under the LeNez label (also pronounced "Lenay"), and in 2006, the Lenné Estate label was added. The wines under the Lenné Estate label represent the best barrels from the vineyard in each vintage.

Steve struck up a relationship with noted Oregon vintner, David O'Reilly, and the Lenné Estate wines are produced in collaboration with O'Reilly at Owen Roe. At some point, Steve hopes to have a winery on site where the current tasting room sits (pictured above). Winemaking proceeds with as little oxidation as possible. At most, 30% new French oak is used (20%-25% in 2007). Certain special barrels, chosen for their mid-palate and finish are used for the Lenné Estate Pinot Noirs. Some clones stand out in certain vintages and they are bottled as clone-designated Pinot Noirs. The wines are unfinned and unfiltered as a rule. A saignée Rosé was made in 2008 (55 cases).

Some grapes are sold to Owen Roe but more are being retained for the Lenné Estate wines with each vintage. Production in 2008 was 1,300 cases and in 09 is projected to be 1,500 cases. Projected maximum production from the estate will be 2,000 cases annually.



When I visited Steve before the 2009 IPNC, we tasted through the lineup of 2007 Lenné Estate Pinot Noirs which were released in January 2009. I previously reviewed these wines and the 2006 vintage wines in the *PinotFile*, but will include my tasting notes below from July 2009 as well. 2007 was a challenging vintage that forced Steve to ride out some rain before picking, but the steep, windy and warm sites like Lenné Estate performed well in 2007. I also tasted the 2008 Lenné Estate Pommard Pinot Noir. Steve is thrilled with the 2008 vintage wines which sport “mouthwatering acidity, deep color, and well-developed skin and seed tannins.” He said that yields were generous in 2008 leading to well-structured, long-lived wines.



2007 LeNez Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$30. Contains each of the five clones of Pinot Noir grown on the estate vineyard. *Charming and highly approachable red-fruited wine that is fresh and vibrant with supple tannins.*



2007 Lenné Estate Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$45. *Nicely scented nose featuring well-spiced cherries and violets. Mid-palate fruit intensity and tenacious persistence on the finish stand out in this lovely wine. Outstanding.*



2007 Lenné Karen's Pommard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 73 cases, \$55. *Darkly colored and flavored, sporting red plums, black cherries and an appealing earthiness. Ripe tannins indicate age ability. A dancing Pinot with a creamy, sexy quality.*





2007 Lenné Estate Jill's 115 Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 49 cases, \$68. The two best barrels in the cellar of 115 clone. *Dreamy aromatics that keep on coming over time in the glass. Berry, cherry, and currant scents echoed on the palate with added hints of cola, mocha and brown spice. The tannins are supple, the texture is silky and everything is working in harmony. Potent for a 2007 Oregon Pinot Noir. I am not usually a fan of single clone Pinot Noirs but this one is a complete wine.*



2008 Lenné Estate Pommard Clone Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir *Still brooding with a prodigious tannic core surrounding layers of bright Pinot fruit. Not as appealing as the 2007 wines at this stage, but this will be a profound wine in a few years.*

Lenné Estate is an exemplary producer of fine Yamhill-Carlton District Pinot Noir. You can taste the heart and soul of Steve and his crew in every bottle. The wines from this special vineyard seem to speak to me and I have quickly become a fan. Get on board through the mailing list, or buy the wines offered on the website (www.leneestate.com) and through the quaint tasting room (pictured below with Steve) at 18760 NE Laughlin Road in Yamhill. The tasting room is open from 12:00 to 5:00 on weekends or by appointment (503-956-2256). There may be an investment opportunity at Lenné Estate which would allow the investor-partner to enjoy the property and participate closely in brand development (contact Steve at steve@leneestate.com).



Styring Vineyards: Texas Transplants Escape Corporate World

The story is not an unusual one among Oregon vintners. Steve and Kelley Styring had all the trappings of success in Dallas, Texas, but they had tired of the corporate world. In the summer of 2002, they visited Oregon and fell in love with the wines and the rural countryside. The next year they bought 40 acres of land in the Ribbon Ridge area, quit their jobs, packed up their two children, ages 3 and 7, and headed to Oregon. As fate would have it, they ended up 2.5 miles from Avalon B&B, where they had stayed on their trip in 2002.

The Styrings initially planted 5 acres of vines, adding 5.5 acres later creating a vineyard consisting of Pinot Noir (primarily clones 115 and Pommard), Pinot Gris and Riesling. For a few years, they apprenticed as volunteers at Willamette Valley wineries to learn the business. They launched their commercial venture with the 2004 vintage and became the first winery on Ribbon Ridge Road (now joined by Trisaetum, Redman and Utopia). Their disdain for the corporate mill has led them to continue slowly and concentrate on small lots of hand-crafted quality wine. Production in 2008 was 36 barrels.

Their winery is not fancy and very small, but this is precisely the type of facility that lends itself to artisan production. Styring Pinot Noir spends 16 to 18 months in barrel and 1 year in bottle so the current releases are from the 2006 vintage.

The name Styring is Viking in origin with the Styring history in England linked with farming as far back as 1100 A.D.. Steve's parents emigrated from England in 1956, following a sister who had married an American G.I.. Steve is a first-generation American.



When I visited the Styrings in July, we tasted a vertical of Styring Wit Reserve Pinot Noir, 2004-2006, and the 2006 Styring Premier Estate Pinot Noirs and 2006 Styring Signature Pinot Noir. The 2006 Styring Wit Reserve was awarded the prestigious David Lett Award at the 2009 Northwest Wine Summit, designating it as the best Oregon Pinot Noir in the competition. The wine also won a Gold Medal at The Summit, as did the 2006 Styring Premier Estate Pinot Noir.

Styring wines are sold on the website at www.styringvineyards.com. Tours of the property and tasting are welcome by appointment (503-866-6741). The address is 19960 NE Ribbon Ridge Road. Check out the adventures of Molly the wine dog on Twitter@[mollythewinedog](https://twitter.com/mollythewinedog) and at www.mollythewinedog.blogspot.com., and watch the video, "Passion for Pinot," at www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCV5ExULNz4.

2004 Styring Vineyards Wit Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$38, available. Sourced from a vineyard in Forest Grove planted in 1971 and heavily cropped to restrict yields. *Secondary characters of brown spice, root beer, fig and leather highlight this darkly fruited wine with a stewed quality. The oak is evident but restrained and the tannins have melded nicely.*

2005 Styring Vineyards Wit Reserve Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$38, available. Sourced from two Yamhill-Carlton vineyards planted in 1977 and 1998. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color. Given some air time in the glass, the wine blossoms revealing scents of wild berries, cardamon and Asian five-spice. On the palate, there are bright blue and black berry fruits, a hint of oak and grilled meat and some savory herbs in the background. Flavorful and smoothly textured with supple tannins and brisk acidity on the finish.*



2006 Styring Vineyards Wit Reserve Pinot Noir 15.8% alc., 50 cases, \$55, available Thanksgiving Weekend 2009. Sourced from the Ridgecrest Vineyard in Ribbon Ridge which had not sold grapes to other vintners in the eleven years prior. *Red and black fruits are front and center in this wine which has considerable charm. The flavor of plum reduction sauce saturates the mid-palate. The lasting finish, although leaving a bit of heat in its wake, is filled with spicy aromatics. This wine will definitely find fans of hedonistic Pinot Noir.*



2006 Styring Vineyards Premier Estate Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 75 cases, \$45. The inaugural Estate Pinot Noir is sourced from the first 5 acres planted on the Styring Ribbon Ridge estate in 2003. *The nose is shy and brooding, reluctantly offering ripe dark fruits, forest floor and smoky aromas. Very tasty core of blackberries and black raspberries with an appealing nuttiness. Smooth and seamless with plenty of richness to satisfy. The tannins are barely perceptible and the finish has admirable persistence. Still drank beautifully two and three days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle indicating this wine will improve over time and age extremely well.*



2006 Styring Vineyards Signature Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 120 cases, \$30. *Very intense and enticing scents of cherries, berries, roasted hazelnuts, summer herbs and oak toast. A charming wine replete with cherries and berries, notes of vanillin and warm nuts, with a very smooth and sensual texture. Evolves nicely over time in the glass making it a wine to spend the night with.*



Adelsheim Vineyard: Still Good After All These Years

David and Ginny Adelsheim were part of the wave of Pinot Noir pioneers who launched wineries in the Willamette Valley in the 1970s. Unlike so many of the others, however, David Adelsheim did not immigrate to Oregon. He moved to Newberg from Portland with his wife in the early 1970s, planted 15 acres of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Riesling in the Chehalem Mountains in 1972, released his first wines in 1978, and became one of the most successful and iconic wineries in the valley.

Adelsheim Vineyard now farms over 170 acres of vines in nine estate vineyards and produces 42,000 cases of wine annually in a modern 35,000 square foot winery at Calkins Lane Vineyard. The winery was completed in 1997 and expanded in 2008, and has four underground barrel caves. Co-owners Jack and Lynn Loacker joined Adelsheim Vineyard in 1994, and assisted in the financing and planting of a 120-acre site on Ribbon Ridge, the source of much of the Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris grapes since 1998.

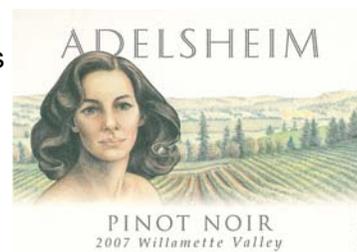
David Adelsheim remains a revered figure in Oregon wine after having participated as a respected spokesperson on practically every important issue facing the Oregon wine industry over the years. He remains quiet and unassuming, with a charming sense of humor, all attributes that bely his considerable achievements.

Winemaker David Paige has been at Adelsheim since 2001. Typically, Adelsheim's wines undergo pre-fermentation maceration and slow, cool fermentations. The wines are bottled after spending 10-12 months in French oak barrels. The Adelsheim Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir blend remains the workhorse of the winery. Elizabeth's Reserve Pinot Noir and vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs are the prestige bottlings. Multiple other varietals are also produced.

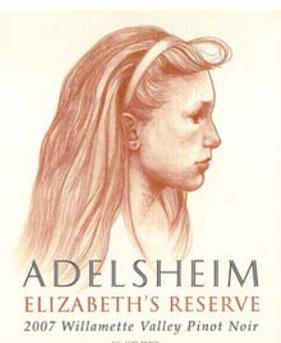
Tastings are available at the winery at 16800 NE Calkins Lane in Newberg from 11:00 to 4:00 daily. Guided in depth tours of the winery are offered by appointment (503-538-3652). The wines are available on the website at www.adelsheim.com and through retail distribution (the single vineyard Pinot Noirs are only sold in the tasting room and to wine club members).

I visited Adelsheim Vineyard and tasted a number of fine wines with David Paige and David Adelsheim. All the wines show the effects of the lighter 2007 Oregon vintage but they have plenty of charm and are notably bright with crisp acidity.

2007 Adelsheim Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 12.8% alc., 17,425 cases, \$32. This bottling has been made since 1979. A blend of multiple vineyards including 7 estate vineyards in the Chehalem Mountains AVA (75%) and 9 other vineyards in other parts of the Willamette Valley (25%). 60% of the wine is Pommard 5 and Wadenswil clones. 100% de-stemmed, 6-day pre-fermentation maceration, aged in French oak barrels. *Slightly muted aromas of red Pinot fruits. Tasty berry melange of strawberries, raspberries and cranberries. Elegantly styled with lively acidity on a clean finish. A dependable daily drinker.*



2007 Adelsheim Vineyard Elizabeth's Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 12.9% alc., 1,192 cases, \$48. Since 2000 this has been a "best of winery" reserve, the best barrels from the best lots. 4 to 6 day cold soak, inoculation with commercial yeast, aged in 30% new French oak barrels for 10 months. Named after David Adelsheim's daughter. *Intense aromas and flavors of cherries and berries, both red and black, with a subtle hay note. Discreetly concentrated and well-crafted with enough structure to last in the cellar for up to ten years.*

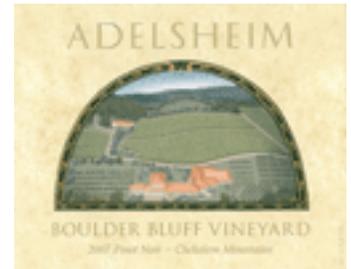




2007 Adelsheim Vineyard Boulder Bluff Vineyard Chehalem

Mountains Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., 240 cases, \$58. From a 10-acre Chehalem Mountains vineyard bought by co-owners Lynn and Jack Locker in 2000. The vineyard is planted to a Burgundy clone called AS2 and another of unclear origin also planted at Adelsheim's original Quarter Mile Lane Vineyard in 1974. Soils are basaltic in origin. The grapes were

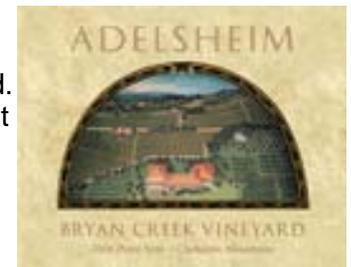
de-stemmed into open-top fermenters followed by a 4 to 6-day cold soak. Aged in 33% new French oak barrels for 10 months. *I liked this wine for its rich pure black cherry and black raspberry fruit, its undertones of spice and roasted hazelnuts, its smooth mouth feel, and its clean and zippy finish. Very impressive classy juice.*



2007 Adelsheim Vineyard Calkins Lane Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir 249 cases, \$58, club release September 1, 2009. Dijon clone 667 and Wadenswil. *Scents of red fruits, hazelnuts and hay. Discreet core of perfumed red fruit with brisk acidity on the mildly floral finish.*

2007 Adelsheim Vineyard Bryan Creek Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Pinot

Noir 280 cases, \$68, club release September 1, 2009. From a 20-acre leased vineyard located across the road from the original Quarter Mile Lane Estate Vineyard. A single-vineyard bottling has been produced since 1998. Basaltic, clay-loam soils at 700+ foot elevation. Clone is Pommard 5 planted in 1989. Aged 10 months in 33% new French oak barrels. *Light garnet color. More delicate this vintage but still delivers plenty of pleasure. Rich mid-palate array of red and black fruits which are powerfully flavored. Acidity is toned down compared to other vineyard-designates. Plush, velvety mouth feel with soft ripe tannins. Very drinkable now and quite enjoyable.*



Ponzi Vineyards: Setting the Standard for Innovation

Richard Ponzi and his family founded Ponzi Vineyards in 1970. He was an unlikely candidate to become a winegrower. Ponzi was an engineer who designed amusement park rides in California. His introduction to wine was through his immigrant Italian father who made wine each year with California grapes that were shipped to his Michigan home. Richard moved out to California in 1962 with his spouse Nancy shortly after their wedding. He lived in Los Gatos and began to make wine at home as part of the family tradition and began to be intrigued with Pinot Noir. Knowing that Oregon had about the same climate as Burgundy, Richard and Nancy moved to Portland and Richard began to search for an appropriate vineyard site. He found his spot in Beaverton, a suburb of Portland, and planned to make wine for the local market in Portland. Planting began in 1970 and the first wines were released in 1974. By the 1990s, Ponzi was crafting world-class Pinot Noirs and his reputation soared. I was a devotee of the Reserve Pinot Noirs that Ponzi crafted in the early 1990s at a time when I was getting firmly hooked on Pinot Noir. My Oregon wine epiphany was a 1992 Ponzi Reserve Pinot Noir that was made from a single vineyard that was 18 years old at the time.

Ponzi's small winery had no master plan and periodically a new addition would be added in a haphazard manner. To look at the original winery today, it seems impossible that nearly 30,000 cases of wine could have been produced there. A few years ago, Richard began to realize his dream of nearly thirty years to have a large, modern winery of his own design. The new Ponzi Winery has been completed and sits on a 42-acre parcel between Beaverton and Newberg on Chehalem Mountain, about a 15 minute drive from the old winery site. The 30,000 square foot winery is a four level gravity-flow design constructed primarily from concrete and metal with wood accents. Solar panels provide energy. The building is 80 percent buried in the ground to aid in insulation and along with the reflective metal roof, there is no need for air conditioning. When I visited in July, I was amazed how lit up the interior was simply by strategically placed windows at the top of the building. The generous size of the winery will easily accommodate the production of 50,000 cases of wine annually. The winery is not open to the public but the original tasting room in Beaverton will remain open.

Ponzi Vineyards has always been an innovator. The Ponzis were instrumental in obtaining state permission to allow wineries and adjoining tasting rooms be constructed on agricultural land in Oregon. Together, they helped to found the Oregon Winegrowers Association and the Oregon Wine Advisory Board (currently known as the Oregon Wine Board). In 1984, they established Bridgeport Brewing Company, Oregon's first craft brewery, and in 1998 established a regional wine bar and bistro in downtown Dundee. Nancy Ponzi was one of the key founders of the International Pinot Noir Celebration, Oregon Pinot Camp, and the ¡Salud! Barrel Auction to benefit seasonal workers' health care in Oregon.

The evening before the 2009 International Pinot Noir Celebration, there are several dinners held at Willamette Valley wineries which spotlight the hosting winery as well as other featured wineries of the IPNC event. I was fortunate to attend the pre-IPNC dinner at Ponzi Vineyards, held in a beautiful hospitality center that was formerly the Ponzis home. Jason Stoller Smith from the Dundee Bistro created the exceptionally tasteful menu. All the wines were notable and I considered this the best wine dinner (of many I attend) I had ever been a part of. A copy of the menu is included below.

2008 Ponzi Vineyards Willamette Valley Arneis. 13.7% alc., 250 cases, \$20. Something different in a dry wine. First planted by the Ponzis in 1991, they are one of only three Arneis producers in the United States. The grape originated in the Northern Piedmonte region of Italy. Whole cluster pressed and cool fermented in stainless steel and French oak barrels. *Full of vim and vigor, this wine is endowed with bright flavors of pears, green apples and citrus. The lively acidity provides a refreshing finish that has the slightest sweetness.*

2007 Ponzi Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 6,764 cases, \$35. A blend of fruit from multiple sustainable vineyards. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, fermenters aerated or punched down before lightly pressing at dryness. Aged in 30% new French oak barrels for 11 months. Aged in bottle 5 months before release. *This wine was served along with the two 2007 red Burgundies from Domaine Fourrier and got somewhat lost in the competition. The Fourrier wines were two of the best I tasted during my July visit to Oregon this year. That said, the Ponzi Willamette Valley is a dependable wine that is styled more elegantly*



than the Reserve. Red fruits were at the forefront with hints of savory herbs, oak and grilled meats. Nicely composed and quite decent.

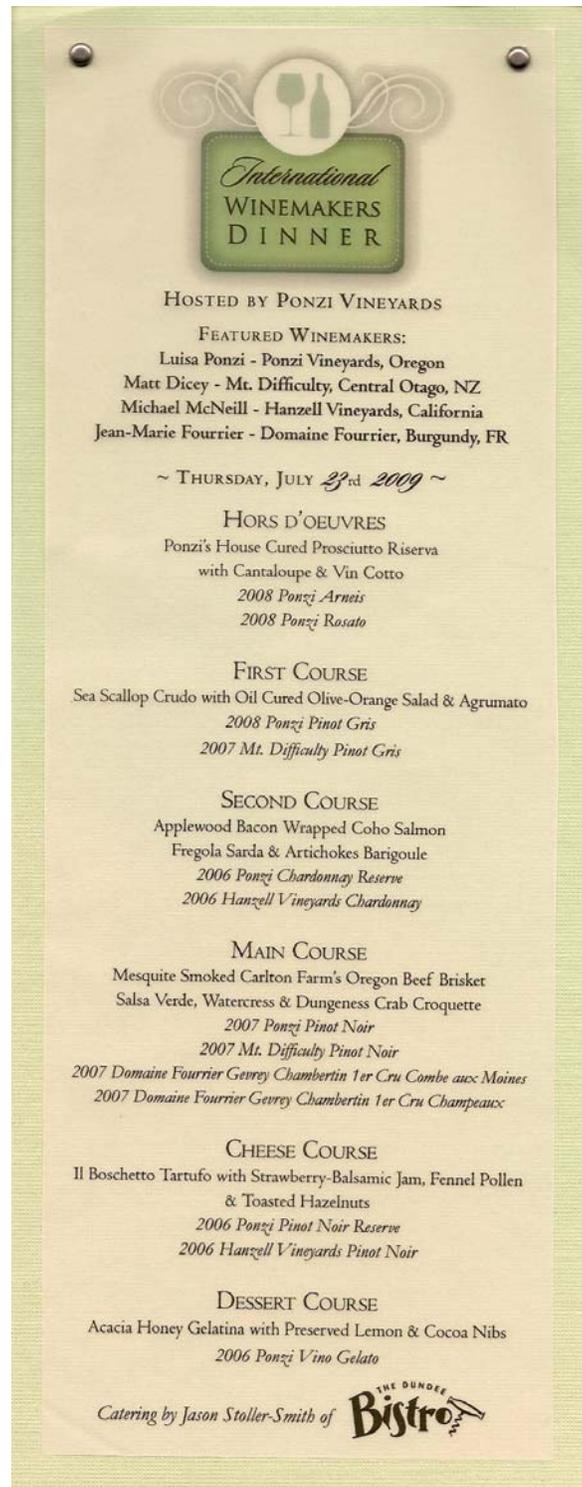


2006 Ponzi Vineyards Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 2,100 cases, \$60. An outstanding wine in every vintage and one that I have been buying since 1992. The wine is a blend of grapes from the older vines of Ponzi's Madrona, Abetina and Aurora vineyards with smaller amounts of purchased fruit. Fermented in small lots with 5 days of cold soak. 7 days of post fermentation maceration to increase structure and length. Aged in 50% new French oak barrels for 20 months.



Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered and aged in bottle for five months before release.

Enticing aromas of black cherry and Satsuma plum nicely spiced. The stone fruits deluge the mid-palate with richness which is augmented by subtle notes of earth, oak and tea. Very harmonious and stylish. Drinking beautifully now but will last.



More Sips of Oregon Pinot Noir

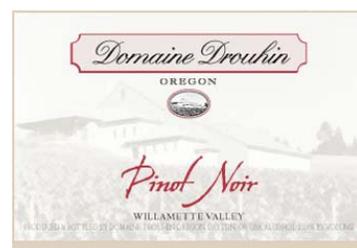
Domaine Drouhin Oregon

This French-owned winery is one of the most visible and consistently fine producers of Pinot Noir in the Willamette Valley. The estate consists of 225 acres in the Dundee Hills, 90 acres of which consist of densely planted hillside vineyards managed by Phillippe Drouhin. The vines are perhaps the most densely planted in the New World, with an average of 3,300 plants to the acre. Veronique Drouhin-Boss has crafted the wines here in every vintage since the beginning in 1988. The Pinot Noirs show more elegance and less power than many Oregon Pinot Noirs and they age extremely well. Three Pinot Noirs are produced from the estate: Classique, Laurene and Louise. A Chardonnay program was begun in 1996, and in 2008, a Rosé was produced for the first time.

The wines are sold in the tasting room, on the website (www.domainedrouhin.com) and through fine wine retail stores. The winery's tasting room is open 11:00 to 4:00 Wednesday through Sunday. Tours are available by appointment (503-864-2700) which include the opportunity to taste Drouhin wines from both Oregon and France.



2006 Domaine Drouhin Oregon Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$39. Hand-picked, hand-sorted and de-stemmed at the four-level gravity flow winery. Fermentations are lengthy. Aged in approximately 20% new French oak barrels custom made for DDO in Burgundy. *Really lovely perfume of ripe strawberries, raspberries, candied apple and a hint of warm cookies and baking spice. Heavenly nose. Rich on the palate without being cloying. Hi-toned red fruits are featured with a gentle accent of oak, cigar box, graham and toll house cookies. Good structural bones for aging with some tannins to shed. Very softly textured and an appealing gentleness that exemplifies Pinot delicacy.*



Ken Wright Cellars

Ken Wright launched his eponymous label in 1994 in Carlton, Oregon. He has become an iconic winemaker in Oregon, having created two previous well-regarded brands, Panther Creek and Domaine Serene. After graduating from University California Davis, he made Pinot Noir in California's Central Coast for eight years before moving to Oregon. He became a champion of vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs that were highly reflective of each individual vineyard's terroir. He has produced as many as twelve different vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs (there are ten from the 2008 vintage) from vineyards he owns, leases or from ones he contracts fruit. He also produces a small amount of non-oaked Chardonnay from Celilo Vineyard in the Columbia Gorge region of Washington and Pinot Blanc from a one-acre planting of Freedom Hill Vineyard.

You need a different mindset to approach Ken Wrights Pinot Noirs. Think of future potential. The wines are reserved, disjointed and unfriendly upon release. They need several years to come around. On the Ken Wright Cellars website, an aging chart is provided to illuminate drinkers. The chart needs updating but you can see that Wright recommends that Pinot Noir from most vineyards find optimum drinkability several years after the vintage. Ken Wright's Pinot Noirs are definitely not for those who age their Pinot Noirs in the back seat of their car on the way home from the wine store. No instant gratification spoken here.

The wines have widespread retail distribution and are sold as futures in case lots on the website (www.kenwrightcellars.com). The winery is not open to the public. The phone is 800-571-6825.

2007 Ken Wright Cellars Carter Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$47. This vineyard is owned by Jack and Kathleen Carter and was planted in 1983 on Nekia soil at the northern end of the Eola Hills. The vines are own rooted and unirrigated. Clones are Pommard and Wädenswil. Ken Wright Cellars manages the vineyard. *Aromas of toasted oak and black cherries. Earthy with a heavy tug of oak overwhelming the tart cherry flavors. Bright acidity with an underpinning of citrus peel and moderately firm tannins.*

2007 Ken Wright Cellars Savoya Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$47. The vineyard is located in the Yamhill-Carlton District, owned by Ken and Karen Wright, and managed by Mark Gould. Five clones. *Sensual nose displaying bright red berries and red plum aromas. Packed with hi-tone cherry, berry and pomegranate flavors that are caressed by ripe fine-grain tannins. The finish shows a zippy acidity. The fruit is linear at this stage with hints of persistence but the potential is evident.*



2007 Ken Wright Cellars Guadalupe Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$47. Sourced from a vineyard located in the southwestern end of the Dundee Hills just north of Lafayette planted in 1989 in Willakenzie soils. Owned by Jim Stonebridge and Kathleen Boeye and managed by Ken Wright Cellars. *The nose has reluctant fruit aromas but pleasing notes of exotic spice and oak char. On the palate the fruit remains in the background with a heavy tug of oak and herbal flavor dominating. Tasted the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was much better, with the dark fruits advancing to the forefront and the oak receding along with a smoother mouth feel. Wait at least 2 to 3 years on this one.*



 **2007 Ken Wright Cellars Shea Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$47. From the noted Shea Vineyard planted on Willakenzie soils in the Yamhill-Carlton District. *Deep aromas of black fruits, forest floor and loam draw you in. Earthy dark fruits flood the mouth and fill every nook and cranny. Noticeable oak and tar with a hint of citrus peel on the finish. Big-boned and brooding. Picks up expression with time in the glass. This is a wine of obvious pedigree that has the potential to sparkle. Drinking well the next day.*

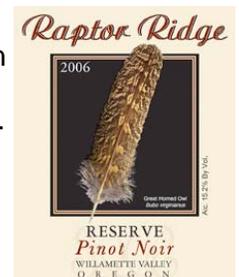


Raptor Ridge Winery

Raptor Ridge is a Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris specialist located on the northeastern side of the Chehalem Mountains, 10 miles north of Newberg. Wines are crafted from the 27-acre estate Tuscowallame Vineyard as well as several other well-known winegrowers in multiple Willamette Valley appellations. The name of the winery relates to the birds of prey that share the property.

The founder and winemaker of Raptor Ridge Winery is Scott Shull. Scott eschews watering and acidifying his wines. Current production is about 6,500 cases. The Pinot Noir lineup includes a Willamette Valley and Reserve bottling as well as vineyard-designated wines. The wines have received considerable praise in the wine press and the winery was named a 2009 *Wine & Spirits Magazine* Winery of the Year. The wines are sold through the website at www.raptoridge.com and fine wine retailers. Tastings are by appointment at the production facility located at 130 West Monroe in Carlton (503-628-6255).

2006 Raptor Ridge Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 15.2% alc., 1,104 cases, \$29. A blend of seven Willamette Valley vineyards and a potpourri of all commonly grown clones in Oregon. 100% de-stemmed into 1.5 ton fermenters for a 4-day cold soak. Fermentation initiated naturally and then inoculated with commercial yeasts. Aged in 44% new French oak. *Spiced cherry and melon aromas. Moderately rich core of dark red fruits with a deft touch of oak. Fat on the palate and polished with supple tannins. The alcohol is well-integrated. Quite decent but not exceptional.*



WillaKenzie Estate

Bernard and Ronni Lacroute bought a 420-acre cattle ranch in the hills of the Chehalem Valley (Yamhill-Carlton District AVA) in 1991. The site reminded Bernard of his Burgundy origins. The estate took its name from the Willakenzie soil, a reddish yellow rich clay loam over siltstone and sand. Over 100 acres have been planted to the Pinot family of grapes, with 68 acres of Pinot Noir. All the vineyards are planted at 1,200 to 1,800 vines per acre, running north to south, allowing for maximum sun exposure. The plants are grafted onto phylloxera-resistant rootstock and trained in the modern upright, double guyot trellising system. WillaKenzie Estate emphasizes sustainable viticulture, clonal and rootstock diversity, estate-grown fruit, and gentle winemaking practices. Noted French-born and now Oregon winemaker, Laurent Montalieu joined WillaKenzie Estate as a partner and winemaker in 1994, departing in 2003 to focus on her own label. The current winemaker is Thibaud Mandet.

A modern gravity-flow winery was built into a hillside in 1995. Since then, Willakenzie Estate has implemented a number of innovations in their winery, reflecting Lacroute's background as an engineer. "The Big Chill" cold storage facility was introduced in 2007. This small building uses high-velocity, cool air forced through small, slotted bins full of grapes to cool the grapes. A carbon dioxide reclamation system was developed also in 2007. Carbon dioxide is captured from fermenting tanks and piped into red wine tanks during the post-fermentation phase, protecting the wines and reusing the carbon dioxide effectively.

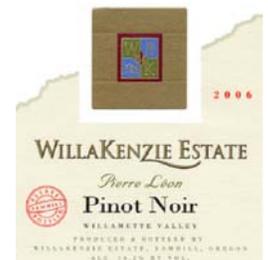
This winery produces consistently fine Pinot Noirs that are sold on the excellent website (www.willakenzie.com), through a wine club mailing list, and through a nicely appointed tasting room located at 19143 NE Laughlin Road in Yamhill. WillaKenzie Estate offers at least eight different Pinot Noirs as well as special single clone and small lot bottlings only available to wine club members. All the wines are bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. The three Pinot Noirs reviewed below were are very well crafted.



2007 WillaKenzie Estate Estate Cuveé Estate Bottled Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., \$26, screw cap. Represents the entire estate. Maceration in open-top fermenters. A blend of free flow and press wine. Aged 10 months in 20% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color. Attractive aromas of dried cherries, herbs and oak with a floral accent. Light in weight featuring cherry and cranberry flavors with bright acidity. Very drinkable now. Good for what it is.*

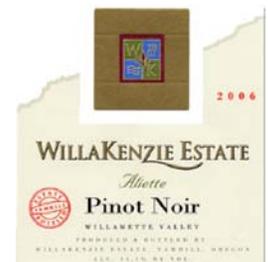
2006 Willakenzie Estate Pierre Léon Estate Bottled Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

14.2% alc., 2,433 cases, \$43. Primarily 113, 114 and 115 clones. Yield 2.8 tons per acre. Aged 14 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Deeper aromas of black berries and cherries, wooded forest and oak which pick up intensity with time in the glass. Palate shows off decent mix of cherry and berry fruits with a hint of herbs and oak in the background. Elvis on velvet in texture with some persistence on the finish. Still lacking development, requiring some time in the glass to open up. Warrants cellaring for another year or two.*



2006 WillaKenzie Estate Aliette Estate Bottled Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

14.1% alc., 793 cases, \$48. Selection of estate-grown Pommard clones from the Aliette Vineyard and small amounts of Dijon clones. Named after Bernard Lacroute's mother, Aliette was the first vineyard planted at WillaKenzie Estate in 1992. Yields were 2.8 tons per acre. Cool maceration followed by 25 days of skin contact and daily punch downs by a pneumatic punch down device. Aged 14 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Lovely perfumed nose of black cherries and black raspberries with the right hint of oak in the background. A lip smacker on the palate with discreetly concentrated berry fruits enhanced by underlying earthiness. Finesse trumps over fruit heaviness in this wine. Seamless, with soft tannins, a perfect grip of acidity and a finish that lingers. I like this wine for its Pinot delicacy, great scent and great persistence. Still drank beautifully the next day from a previously opened re-corked bottle. Dreamy!*



¡Salud!

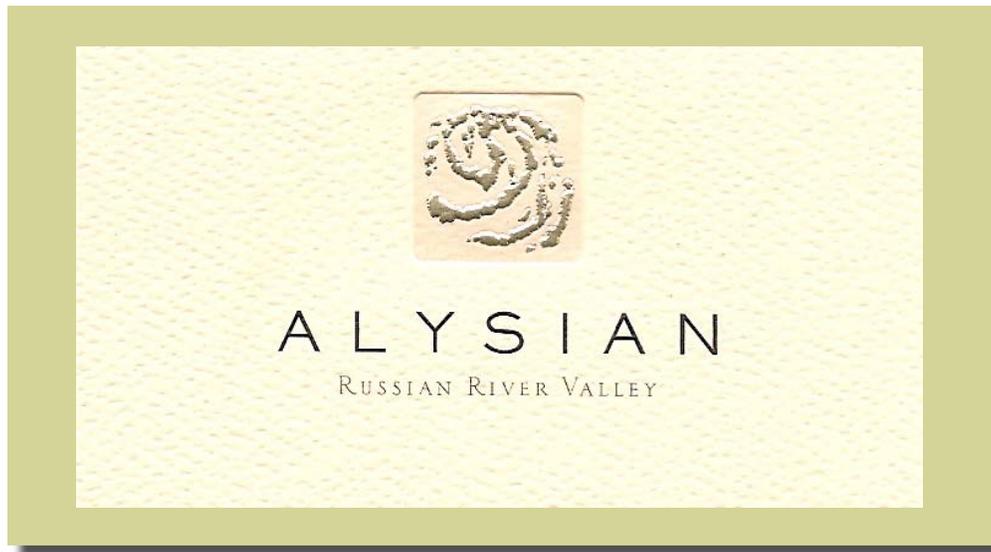
¡Salud! is uniquely Oregon and represents a collaboration between Oregon winemakers and healthcare professionals to provide access to health care for Oregon's seasonal vineyard and winery workers and their families. A dedicated group of vintners and Tuality Healthcare physicians created ¡Salud!, named for the traditional Spanish toast, "To your health!" In 2008 alone, over 3,000 seasonal workers and their family members received health education and healthcare through ¡Salud!

This year's Eighteenth Annual ¡Salud! Oregon Pinot Noir Auction will be held on November 13 and 14, 2009. Guests are invited to a Big Board Auction at Domaine Drouhin Oregon where Pinot Noir aficionados can sample and acquire some of Oregon's finest Pinot Noirs from the 2008 vintage. 42 of Oregon's top Pinot Noir producers (the "Vintner's Circle") craft five cases of a special ¡Salud! Pinot Noir cuveé, four cases of which are then offered at the Big Board Auction. Attendees can mingle with the celebrated winemakers, enjoy the Northwest cuisine that is offered, and sample the exclusive cuveés. These exclusive cuveés are not available in stores, restaurants or tasting rooms. The following day, a formal dinner and auction is held in Portland at the Governor Hotel where an impressive collection of one-of-a-kind live and silent auction items are offered along with a dinner to complement the featured Oregon wines. This two-day event raised over \$735,000 last year.

Participating wineries in The Vintner's Circle include: Adelsheim Vineyard, Amalie Robert Estate, Antica Terra, ArborBrook Vineyards, Archery Summit, Argyle, Ayres Vineyard, Beaux Frères, Bergström Wines, Bethel Heights Vineyard, Chehalem, Cristom Vineyards, Dobbles Family Estate, Domaine Drouhin Oregon, Elk Cover Vineyards, Erath Vineyards, Evening Lands Vineyards, Hamacher Wines, Ken Wright Cellars, King Estate Winery, Lange Estate, Maysara Winery, Patricia Green Cellars, Patton Valley Vineyards, Penner-Ash Wine Cellars, Ponzi Vineyards, R. Stuart & Co., Raptor Ridge Winery, Rex Hill Vineyards, Scott Paul Wines, Shea Wine Cellars, Silvan Ridge, Sólana Cellars, Soter Vineyards, St. Innocent Winery, Stoller Vineyards, Torii Mor, Westrey Wine Company, WillaKenzie Estate, Willamette Valley Vineyards, Winderlea, and Witness Tree Vineyard.

A limited number of tickets are available online at www.saludauction.org. For more information or to donate to the auction, contact Maria McCandless at maria@mccandless@tuality.org.





Gary Farrell Debuts Alysian Wines

Gary Farrell's wines since the 1980s have been among the best from the Russian River Valley. After making his first wines at Rochioli Vineyards and Davis Bynum, Farrell started his own label in 1982. His first Pinot Noir was 50 cases of a blend of Rochioli West Block and Allen Vineyard and sold for \$80 a case. His 1985 Pinot Noirs, which offered elegance yet intense and nuanced flavors, low alcohol levels and generous acidity, really spurred my enthusiasm for the potential of California Pinot Noir. Farrell was to sell his eponymous label and Westside Road winery to Allied Domecq in 2004. Subsequently, it was sold to Beam Wine Estates. Gary Farrell Winery was then acquired by Ascentia, the current owners. Farrell, now 57 years old, had difficulty working under corporate ownership of his winery and was unable to remain connected to all phases of winemaking. He left the winery in 2006 to return to his roots as a micro-producer of Pinot Noir. Farrell has partnered with Bill Hambrecht to found his own new label, Alysian Wines (ah-liss-ee-uhn). Alysian refers to an endeavor arising from intuitive creativity and artistic resolution. The goal is small amounts of "no compromise" Pinot Noir. A new winery will be built at the Floodgate Vineyard along Trenton-Healdsburg Road. The first three 2007 releases are scheduled for September 2009 release followed in early 2010 with vineyard designates from Rochioli Vineyard, Starr Ridge Vineyard East Terrace and Hallberg Vineyard Crossroads. Total production in 2007 is 3,000 cases. The wines will be sold through a mailing list at www.alysianwine.com, 707-431-4410. I was fortunate to be able to sample the first three releases. These are marvelous wines and I would URGE you to sign up for the mailing list so as to get your hands on these beauties. They will achieve cult stardom quickly.



2007 Alysian Cresta Ridge Vineyard Taurin Block Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.3% alc., 469 cases, \$38. Heavy bottle. *Heavenly scented with honey and biscuits. A classy wine with vivid flavors of lemon curd, pear, banana and smoky oak with a slightly creamy texture. Perfect fruit and acid balance. I have been tasting over 50 premium California Chardonnays for an upcoming feature and this wine was one of the top three I tasted.*

2007 Alysian Russian River Selection Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 1,524 cases, \$48. *Pleasant but delicate aromas of black cherries, strawberries and savory oak. Soil-infused black cherry fruit layered with herbs, loam, cola and oak with a grapefruit note on the finish. Still sporting some dry tannins that need resolution and not as showy as it will be in another year.*



2007 Alysian Floodgate Vineyard West Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 444 cases, \$55. The packaging makes a statement with a very heavy bottle incorporating a large punt and sporting a classy label. *Perfumed with violets, Bing cherries and sandalwood. Opulent and layered, ephemeral yet gutsy. Cherries jubilee with touches of raspberries, vanilla and citrus. Impeccably balanced t n' a for age ability. An endless echo of scent and fruit on the finish. This is a heart throb and a 2009 All-American for me.*