

# THE OREGON PINOT NOIR STORY

Welcome to Oregon! We are pleased you have joined us to investigate the New World home of Pinot noir—to explore Oregon’s uniqueness in climate, geology and people. Oregon is different. We have a relatively small wine industry, even though the state is third in number of wineries and fourth largest in wine volume in the U.S. Our approach to viticulture, winemaking and marketing is personal and handcrafted. There is a pioneer spirit here that speaks of the vision, innovation and independence required to succeed in a challenging cool-climate growing region. There is camaraderie and collaboration that values common good over individual benefit. There is accountability to the environment and for the well-being of our neighbors.

Assets for the Oregon Pinot Noir Story were written, gathered, curated and adapted by Jason Lett, and are used during Oregon Pinot Camp and in this document with his permission.

## SEMINAR DETAILS

More information including the panelists by site and wines tasted is available following OPC at [oregonpinotcamp.com/seminars](http://oregonpinotcamp.com/seminars).

## POINTS TO INVESTIGATE

Basic questions need to be answered to begin to understand *Why Pinot noir?* and *Why here?*

- What is special about our climate and what does it mean for our wines?
- What distinguishes the places Pinot noir grows best in Oregon, and are there real “terroir” differences in those places attributable to the site?
- What innovations in vineyard and winery practices have made it possible to make great wine in Oregon?
- What kind of people made the Oregon industry what it is today—pioneers, new waves, first and second generations?

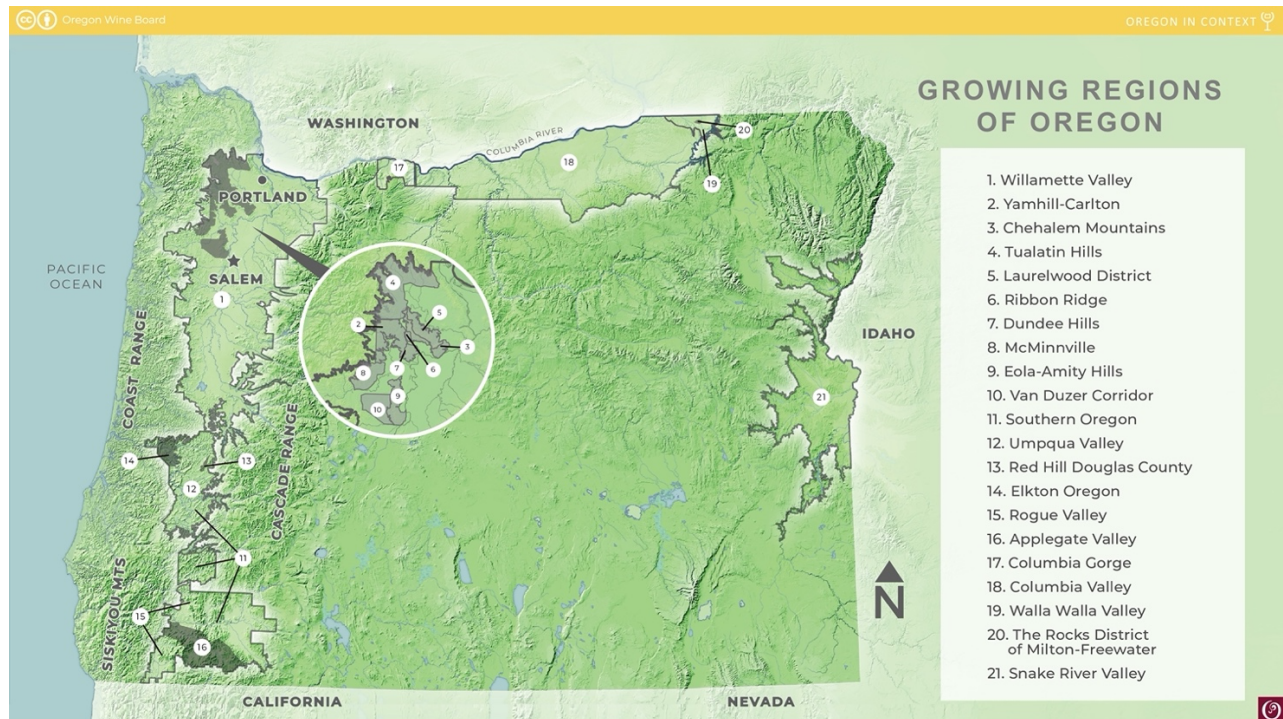
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## OREGON PINOT NOIR COUNTRY – THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY AND MORE

Oregon is a large state with seven major growing regions and 23 approved American

Viticultural Areas (AVAs). Pinot noir is the most important variety in the Willamette Valley, though there are plantings in the Umpqua and Rogue Valleys, Columbia Gorge and Columbia Valley. Approximately 81% of the state's Pinot noir is produced in the Willamette Valley. Those who try Pinot noir from Oregon most likely will be drinking a wine from this area. For the purposes of this discussion we will adopt, with apologies to the rest of the state, the common usage "Oregon," even as we recognize that we might be speaking accurately of only a much smaller area.



*Oregon AVA Map from Oregon Wine Resource Studio, [trade.oregonwine.org](http://trade.oregonwine.org).*

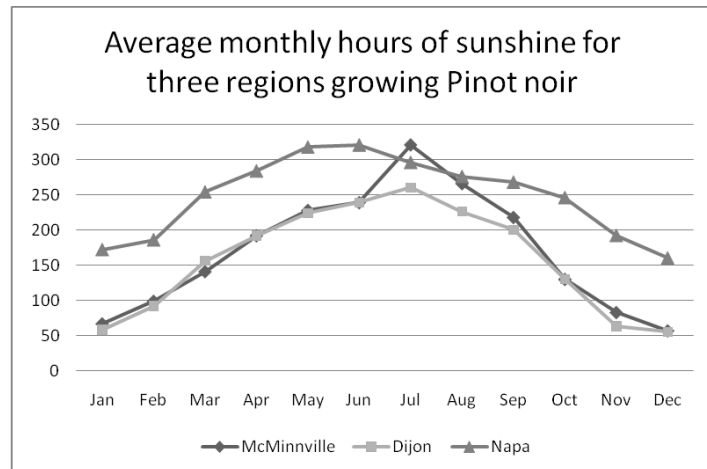
*Some new AVAs have been approved by the TTB but not yet added to this map.*

Oregon's wine pioneers came to the Willamette Valley looking for the perfect place to grow Pinot noir—a place where long hours of summer sun combined with cool temperatures at the beginning and end of the growing season. Wine grapes ripen slowly here, with a long period of flavor development at the end of the growing season and harvest in late September or early October.

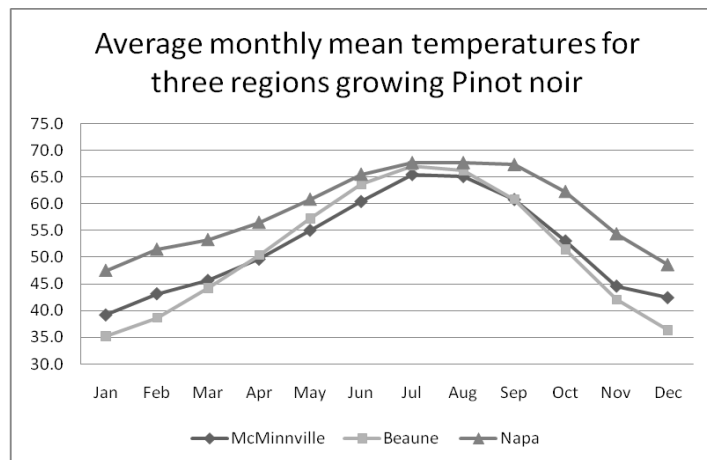
## THE COOL CLIMATE – LATITUDE, SUNSHINE, TEMPERATURE AND RAINFALL

The weather conditions of the Willamette Valley—and of most places in the rest of the state where Pinot noir is grown—are described as cool-climate.

- **Latitude:** The 45th parallel cuts through the Willamette Valley just north of Salem. We are sitting halfway between the equator and the North Pole, but so is Newfoundland. So what does that mean? Being so far north, between March 21 and September 21, we have more daylight hours than growing regions further south. On June 21 we have 1.5 hours more sun than in Napa.



- **Sunshine:** Latitude supplies a convenient, but only hypothetical calculation. When one looks at the hours of sunlight, the real uniqueness of Oregon's climate starts to emerge. Up through June, our vines get about the same amount of sun as those in Burgundy. Then suddenly, from July through September, we have more—in July, we actually have more sun than northern California. That very spiky growing season may explain why Oregon Pinot noirs have more fruit intensity than most Burgundies.

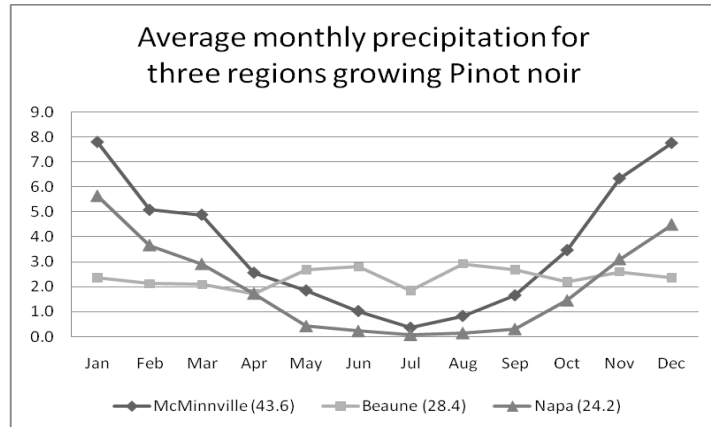


- **Temperature:** Ripening requires heat sufficient to physiologically mature grapes, but not so much as to deprive the grapes of acid, finesse and complexity. Northern latitude plus proximity to the ocean brings moderate temperatures year-round with no vine-killing cold in winter or serious frost in spring. Ocean breezes bring cool nights that are especially important for Pinot during the ripening period. The Cascade Mountains to the east protect us from the hot and cold extremes of the continental interior.

- Our winters are very mild with a mean January temperature of 42°F.

- Our summers are cool with July's average temperature being 68°F.

Harvest in the Willamette Valley usually occurs in late September to early October, compared to mid-September in Burgundy, and late August to early September in California. Big implications for Pinot noir style!



We have less heat than Burgundy through almost the entire growing season—our Septembers are similar and we're only warmer in October. Thus, the events during our growing season—bud break, bloom, veraison and harvest—take place a week or two after Burgundy in most years. Oregon depends on a long, but cool, period of flavor development at the end of the growing season. This is a key difference between cool- and warm-climate wines.

**Precipitation:** Moderate rainfall at the right time is the second key to the cool-climate advantage. The Willamette Valley is protected from extreme coastal rainfall (80" annual) by the Coast Range. It's still a lot of rain: 44" per year (compared to 28" in Burgundy). However, most of it falls in the winter. Average monthly rainfall in January is 7", but only 0.5" in July and August. Dry summers, compared to even rainfall through the year in Burgundy, mean low pressure from diseases like downy mildew and botrytis, but more issues with drought and irrigation.

## CLIMATIC CHALLENGES AND GLOBAL CHANGES

- Timing of bud break: early bud break can mean increased risk from spring frosts and can lead to earlier bloom and harvest. Late spring bud break can mean late bloom (leading to excess crop) and late harvest (in the rain!).
- Rain at critical points in the growing season: cool and rainy weather during flowering can lead to excessively small crops. Early fall rains can reduce wine quality and can threaten winegrower blood pressure levels.
- Global climate change poses the greatest long-term threat to Oregon viticulture. The uncertainty of how badly it may affect us is sobering and should prompt us to action to mitigate its effects.

## GEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY

Until about 12 million years ago, Western Oregon was on the floor of the Pacific Ocean. Before that, for 35 million years under the sea, it was slowly accumulating layers of marine sediment, the bedrock of the oldest soils in the Willamette Valley.

Starting about 15 million years ago, the pressure created along the coast by the collision of the

Earth's Pacific and North American Plates gradually pushed Western Oregon up out of the sea, creating the Coast Range and the intensely volcanic Cascade Mountains further inland. The Willamette Valley thus began as an ocean floor trapped between two emerging mountain ranges.

During this period of uprising, from about 15 million to 6 million years ago, rivers of lava erupting from volcanoes on the east side of the Cascades flowed down the Columbia Gorge toward the sea, covering the layers of marine sediment on the floor of the emerging Willamette Valley with layers of basalt.

The Willamette Valley continued to buckle and tilt under pressure from the ongoing coastal collisions, forming the interior hill chains that are typically tilted layers of volcanic basalt and sedimentary sandstone, such as the Dundee Hills and Eola Hills.

The next geologic activity to add to our soils was the creation of a layer of windblown silt (called Loess) on the northeast-facing hills west of where Portland sits today. This started as long ago as a million years and may have continued until about 50 thousand years ago. These silts were blown in from the valley floor, but they originated from the severely weathered basalts and sediments.

Much, much later, about 18 thousand to 15 thousand years ago, at the end of the last ice age, the melting of a glacial dam near the location of Missoula, Montana, repeatedly flooded the Willamette Valley, creating a lake up to the 400-foot contour level, with only the tops of the two-tone hills sticking out, and leaving behind deep silts.

Thus we have in the Willamette Valley a complex series of soils with interesting and diverse origins:

- **Marine sediments** that were laid down on the floor of the Pacific Ocean. Examples: Willakenzie, Bellpine, Chuhulpim, Hazelair, Melbourne, Dupee
- **Basalts** that originated as lava flows from eastern Oregon. Examples: Jory, Nekia, Saum
- **Windblown Loess**, silt blown up from the valley floor onto northeast-facing hillsides. Example: Laurelwood
- **Missoula Flood** deposits brought down the Columbia Gorge as the result of a repeatedly melting glacial dam. Examples: Wapato, Woodburn, Willamette

#### DIVERSITY OF VITICULTURAL AREAS WITHIN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY

Much is said about how and why the Willamette Valley is the perfect place to grow Pinot noir. But once that most fundamental choice has been made, it must be added that not every acre in the Willamette Valley is suitable for growing great Pinot noir. Indeed, most of the acres of the Willamette Valley are deep, rich valley floor soils that are paradise for a great diversity of crops, but they can spell trouble for Pinot noir. Pinot noir at low elevations is subject to frost damage in the spring.

In almost all cases, great Willamette Valley Pinot noir grows on hillsides, often quite rocky, facing southeast, south or southwest, at least 200' above sea level and avoiding cooler hilltop microclimates over 900'. This is a common factor amongst the eleven nested AVAs within the Willamette Valley, regardless of soil types and weather patterns.

The hillsides within the Willamette Valley are composed of a complex series of soils formed at different stages of geological history. There is no doubt that the fascinating diversity of Pinot noir wines grown in the Willamette Valley depends in part on the diverse origins of the soils in which our vineyards are planted.

### **INNOVATIONS IN COOL-CLIMATE VITICULTURE AND WINEMAKING**

Innovation, invention, curiosity, keen observation, energy and dedication are all characteristics of the Oregon wine industry. In the vineyards, every phase of grape growing, from the dirt itself to consideration of the weight impact of tractors on the dirt, has been and continues to be examined in serious, sometimes painful, detail. Inside the wineries, the same sort of reevaluation, rethinking and searching is constant. Many vineyard and winery practices now common in the U.S. were originally explored, innovated and refined in Oregon.

**Site Selection and Matching Clones:** Oregon pioneered the now accepted practice of matching site, climate, variety and clone.

**Trellising, Canopy Management and Spacing:** Vertical trellising has been standard Oregon practice from the first vinifera plantings. The goal is to maximize the amount and effect of sunlight on individual leaves and minimize shading. It also enhances airflow and aids in prevention of mildew. Leaf pulling around the clusters, an idea from Switzerland, is widely practiced—with thoughtful variations—to enhance ripening and prevent mildew. The effect of dappled sunlight heightens flavor and aroma development, while decreased leaves increase the efficacy of sprays to prevent mildew. There will probably never be consensus on the correct spacing between vines and rows. However, to compensate for low tonnage per vine—and perhaps get increased body and flavor in the grapes—there has been general movement toward tighter spacings over the years.

**Harvest and Processing:** In Oregon, every aspect of winegrowing and winemaking is permeated with the fundamental finding that gentle handling is intrinsic to the production of premium cool-climate varieties, Pinot noir in particular. Some of those gentle handling techniques, perhaps reinvented from old practices but certainly identified and valued in Oregon, include:

- Handpicking fruit into very small containers rather than gondolas.
- Moving grapes with conveyor belts rather than augers.
- Using sorting tables to remove any damaged fruit.
- Destemming while keeping each grape berry whole rather than crushing.
- Cold maceration (after all, Oregon's harvest is usually in October; the cellars are cold).

- Moving must and wines with gravity or gas rather than pumps.
- Fermenting in small containers (commonly 1.5- to 5-ton capacity) rather than huge tanks to provide appropriate temperature control and a manageable cap.

## A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE OREGON WINE INDUSTRY AND OREGON PINOT NOIR

### Pre-History

Vinifera winegrapes have been grown in Oregon since the first settlers put down roots in the nineteenth century. Accounts of vines being grown in the Oregon Territory go back as far as 1825. (By comparison, winegrapes were introduced into California in 1779, New Zealand in 1819 and Australia in 1832.) Over the next decades, settlers poured into Oregon lured by the tales of fertile open farmland, water, moderate weather and the excellent quality of the Oregon Territory's produce. Many early pioneers came from Europe, bringing dreams of producing wine in the "Promised Land." Indeed, by the 1890s, Oregon wines were winning awards and general acclaim.

Oregon's early adoption of Prohibition (1914) effectively put an end to that early chapter of Oregon winegrowing. After 1933, there remained no demand for local table wines. The wineries that started up focused on sweeter fruit wines.

The California industry managed to survive the socio-political-economic crisis, but just barely, and certainly not with an emphasis on quality table wines. Even by the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of California wines were of the bulk and sweet types produced from undistinguished varieties. Premium wines were in the future; Pinot noir was essentially unknown.

As the California industry refocused on quality in the 1960s, Oregon quietly began an era, not of revitalization, but actual discovery and birth of a wine region. In the early 1960s Richard Sommer planted vinifera vines in the Umpqua Valley, while both David Lett and Charles Coury founded vineyards in the Willamette Valley. More wine pioneers joined in: the Eraths, Ponzis, Blossers, Adelsheims, Campbells, Vuylstekes and Fullers in the Willamette Valley; the Wisnovskys in the Rogue Valley; and the Bjellands and the Giradets in the Umpqua Valley. In 1970 there was one vinifera winery in Oregon and fewer than 100 acres of vines planted. By 2010, there were 418 wineries with over 20,300 acres planted in 848 vineyards.

The wine industry in Oregon has changed the face of the land. Hillsides in the northern Willamette Valley—the nucleus of the industry—that once were planted with walnut, hazelnut, prune, peach and cherry orchards, and dotted with prune and nut dryers, are now covered with vineyards and architecturally imposing wineries as well. The transformation began in the last decades of the twentieth century as canneries closed, and fruit and nut processing was transitioned to more efficient commercial dryers. Land use laws passed in 1973 limited residential building in agricultural zones, raising the value of farmland dramatically and encouraging vineyards to be planted. A new wine economy thrived. In the 2004 elections, a new threat surfaced as a state measure was approved by voters to roll back the land use laws. Three

years later, Oregonians reaffirmed their desire to keep development off of farmland and maintain the tradition of valuing farmland as a resource.

The wine industry has improved the quality of life in Oregon on many fronts. Vineyards are scenic, as well as being one of the most environmentally friendly agricultural sectors. Most vineyards are farmed with a very conscious goal of sustainability. Oregon has earned a fine reputation for its excellent wines now sold nationally and internationally. The wineries themselves have become tourist destinations, attracting visitors from all over the world who come in order to appreciate the beauty and quality of Oregon wine country. The wine industry brings millions of dollars into the state in wine sales, and has a total annual economic impact on the state of more than \$1 billion.

### The Pioneers

The primacy of Pinot noir was super-imposed on the state of Oregon by a group of people who had done their homework in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The early pioneers studied the potential for vineyards in Oregon at UC Davis and at research centers in Colmar, France and Wädenswil, Switzerland. They used that background to select the North Willamette Valley as the prime place for superior New World Pinot noir production. Their sights were set on the flavor ripening capacity and low disease pressure provided by long, warm sunny summer days. Of equal importance, acid and structure-building derived from cool nights also made the region ideal. Abundant moisture during the dormant season to establish deep roots and mitigate irrigation issues added to the appeal of the Willamette Valley. Most of the first wave came from California, and they never looked back, because their science told them that they were planting the right grape in the right place and their heads told them that they were home.

The early wine pioneers were individualists. They didn't necessarily share a defined common goal: their original motivations varied with each stubborn, overly confident person. There has never been a single crusader, champion or leader in Oregon. Instead there has always been a collaborative approach, based on mutual respect, admiration and friendship. Whatever their personal reasons for placing themselves in Oregon, the early pioneers quickly recognized their interdependence. As a group they were highly educated, strong and resourceful, but short on experience. Naïve dreams of making quintessential Pinot noir in a land where no one knew or wanted Pinot noir bonded them like blood brothers and sisters. In truth, no one really knew how to grow or make wine in Oregon. The awareness of this somehow made the whole project even more attractive to that early odd lot.

They had more in common than unsupported ideals. They shared the common experience of limited finances and were forced to begin on very low budgets, buying used equipment and working other jobs to make ends meet. Having found each other, they met often to share information as they adapted and invented techniques to deal with their uncharted terrain. They learned to farm, incorporating the finer aspects of viticulture; they discovered the details of delicate winemaking; they navigated their way through bureaucracies and legislation. They learned that they had to learn how to promote and sell.



### New Waves

By the mid '80s, the word about Oregon wines, especially Pinot noir, had gotten out. New wineries, vineyards and out-of-state investments flowed in. Outside confirmation of Oregon as a wine region was welcome and exciting. In 1988, the wine world sat up and took notice when Robert Drouhin, of the prominent Burgundian producer Maison Joseph Drouhin, bought a large property and started vineyards and a winery in the Dundee Hills. Drouhin declared there were only two places in the world he would grow Pinot noir: Burgundy and Oregon. This investment proved the catalyst for a series of increasingly expensive and sophisticated winery facilities. Individuals with personal fortunes built many of these facilities, like WillaKenzie Estate, King Estate, Domaine Serene and Lemelson Vineyards. Others, like Archery Summit and Willamette Valley Vineyards, were built by groups of investors. The days of used equipment and individual owner sweat equity were long gone. The original pioneers found they needed to keep up, or be left in the dust. The state-of-the-art, both in viticulture and winemaking, had evolved considerably, and the new players had all the bells and whistles—grape sorting conveyors, gravity flow processing, actual barrel caves, commercial kitchens, culinary staff, entertainment facilities, gracious guest housing and more.

Many of the older wineries stepped up to the bar. Sokol Blosser engaged Oregon's prestigious architect, John Storrs, to design its new tasting room. Elk Cove Vineyards, Chateau Benoit and REX HILL Vineyards constructed attractive hospitality facilities to accommodate large corporate and private events. David Adelsheim researched winery design throughout Europe before building his impressive new winery. Ponzi Vineyards established their wine bar and restaurant in Dundee to attract and accommodate wine country tourism. Most wineries reviewed and strengthened their marketing programs with renewed seriousness.

On the sustainability front, Sokol Blosser led the way to earth-friendly building with an underground barrel cellar that became the first winery building in the world to earn the U.S. Green Building Council's prestigious LEED (Leadership in Engineering and Environmental Design) certification. At almost the same time, the Carlton Winemakers Studio won LEED certification for the entire new winery. Stoller Winery followed with the first Gold LEED certification for a winery in the United States. It integrates gravity-flow winemaking techniques, energy-efficient heating and cooling and wastewater reclamation to reduce negative environmental impact.

### Outside Confirmation

Two major wine tasting events, in 1980 and 1985, focused the world's wine press attention on Oregon. In Paris, in 1979, Gault Millau sponsored an international Olympiad of wine. An Oregon Pinot noir, The Eyrie Vineyards 1975 South Block Reserve, scored in the top ten in its category. In 1980, the winners of the Olympiad were challenged to a rematch, and the same wine placed second. This surprising achievement was widely publicized. Wine writers and consumers became aware of Oregon, and its place as a wine-producing region was confirmed. In New York, in 1985, the International Wine Center held a "Burgundy Challenge" to compare 15

of the top Oregon Pinot noirs with a similar number of high quality Burgundies. All were from the 1983 vintage. The tasters were all experts. When the wines were revealed, the august tasters learned they could not distinguish Oregon Pinot noir from Burgundy; moreover, the top five scoring wines were all from Oregon. The tasting had an immediate impact on the prestige and actual sales of Oregon Pinot noir. The combination of press attention and the demonstration of a critical mass of top quality Oregon wineries set the industry leaping forward.

#### Steamboat Conference

In 1979, two devotees of both Pinot noir and fly-fishing, Stephen Cary and Mick Richmond, came up with the idea of combining their obsessions with other like-minded folk in a sort of retreat/seminar/party. Their idea was to invite Pinot noir winemakers only for three summer days at an idyllic fishing lodge on the wild North Umpqua River in Southern Oregon to talk (incessantly) about, and drink, Pinot noir—at least when they weren't fishing. Amazingly, there were like-minded winemakers, and the annual Steamboat Conference has developed into the international font of knowledge for the production of Pinot noir. No press is allowed. Winemakers from around the world—honored to be invited—candidly discuss their observations, discoveries and difficulties with this fickle variety. From these honest exchanges, the quality of Pinot noir around the world has soared.

#### Oregon Wine Advisory Board

Established in 1983, Oregon growers and producers elected to tax themselves at the highest rate in the world, \$25 per ton. These funds, still relatively minor from a small region, have enabled Oregon to conduct vital viticultural and enological research and creative marketing programs. In 2004, the Oregon Wine Board replaced the Oregon Wine Advisory Board.

#### The International Pinot Noir Celebration (IPNC)

IPNC was founded in 1987, the brainstorming result of a small group of Oregon wineries and business people from the city of McMinnville. Their idea was to develop an event based not on competition, but on celebration. It has proven a continuing overwhelming success. Pinot noir producers, consumers and trade have responded with enthusiasm. The IPNC has gently and joyfully enhanced the position of Pinot noir, and Oregon, in the wine world.

#### ¡Salud!

In 1992, the Oregon wine industry, joining with a hospital located in the wine area and with local businesses, stepped up to the plate in recognizing their responsibilities for the health care needs of vineyard workers and their families. ¡Salud! (meaning health and a toast “to your health” in Spanish), an event and program very loosely modeled on the Hospice de Beaune Auction, was developed and set into action. The wineries who were invited to participate agreed to produce and donate a half barrel of Pinot noir each vintage...a half-barrel of not just Pinot noir, but their very finest, an exceptional, exclusive cuvée. The wine is presented by barrel tasting and purchased at an elegant, lively auction each fall. Pinot noir lovers and collectors have responded with enthusiasm and generosity. All proceeds go to the ¡Salud! Health Care

Program that provides dependable and consistent services for vineyard workers and their families throughout the wine region. Administered through Tuality Hospital, ¡Salud! supports a full-time Spanish-speaking medical staff, clinics, classes and mobile health vans that go directly to the wineries and vineyards. The innovative and effective ¡Salud! program has received numerous awards and recognition throughout Western states, serving as a model for other agricultural industries attempting to meet the needs of their valued workers.

### LIVE

The LIVE program was created by a group of winegrowers in the Willamette Valley led by Ted Casteel of Bethel Heights Vineyard and Carmo Vasconcelos of Oregon State University, with the goal of defining and promoting environmental stewardship with rigorous independent third-party certification for sustainable grape-growing and winemaking practices. LIVE has grown to become the most widely adopted certification program for winegrowers Oregon.

### Oregon Pinot Camp

Realizing the very best way for people to learn about Oregon wines, vineyards and winemakers is to see and experience the region firsthand, a group of winemakers dreamed up Oregon Pinot Camp. The idea was to invite people actually involved in selling Oregon wines—people who already knew and often loved Oregon wines—to come learn even more. Rather than a series of social tastings and marketing spiels, it was understood the campers deserved serious, substantive information and experiences—with a little fun on the side. The first Oregon Pinot Camp in 2000 proved a great success from all perspectives. Begun as an experiment, it has become an annual event, booking up as soon as invitations are received, with requests for invitations coming in from all over the country.

### Willamette: The Pinot Noir Auction

In 2016, the Willamette Valley Wineries Association launched its first trade-only wine auction, raising nearly \$500,000 for the association in its first year. The auction is now an annual event, promoting the Willamette Valley's most important grape variety, Pinot noir. Buyers from the wine trade attend the weekend immersion into the Oregon wine community and bid on unique, inimitable Pinots and Chardonnays from a single vintage.

### Willamette Valley Wine Foundation

In 2022, the Willamette Valley Wineries Association announced the establishment of the Willamette Valley Wine Foundation. This unprecedented philanthropic initiative enhances the wellbeing of winegrowing communities in the Willamette Valley through the development of program-enriched affordable housing and collaborative support of health services, family services, and personal development.

### The Future

The Oregon industry is a story by itself, but it is also a significant part of an international wine industry rebirth, which occurred simultaneously throughout the United States and in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, France, Italy and Germany. It began in the early 1970s with

countries working individually. Now the wine industry has become genuinely global. This is evidenced not only through international ownership of wine brands, but also through cooperation, friendship, international symposia and joint research that have been helpful to all. In addition, touring “wine country” has become a popular international pastime, stimulating the development in every nation of wine country inns, bed and breakfasts, related tourist attractions and fine restaurants serving wine-friendly cuisine.

As the Oregon wine industry continues to expand, most of the early winegrowers who developed the industry are still around. What a success story they have to tell! Out of nothing, an industry was built, one that has given Oregon a reputation as a visitor destination more romantic and glamorous than its stereotypical rugged outdoorsiness. It’s an industry that contributes substantially to Oregon’s economy through its many facets: agriculture, winemaking, support services and equipment, tourism and sales. The proximity of metropolitan Portland to the Willamette Valley winegrowing region has mutually enhanced wine country tourism, the hotel industry, top-quality restaurants and markets committed to all manner of locally grown and produced items.

For a lucky few of the early winemakers, the second generation is stepping up to the helm, working with their parents in some cases and taking over in others. They have a rich inheritance. When their parents started, no one noticed or cared what they were doing up in the northwest corner of the U.S. somewhere between California and Washington. Today, Oregon wine, especially Oregon Pinot noir, is recognized internationally.

The early winemakers are also substantiated and supported by hundreds of younger, talented, well-trained and energetic people who revel in the continuing spirit of discovery and possibilities of Oregon. This next generation’s challenge is to keep the momentum moving forward, to build on the earlier successes without losing the passion and focus on quality that fueled the pioneers and to continue the commitment to sustainability so they can in turn pass it on to their next generation. The world will be watching.

*Historical info edited by David Adelsheim and Nancy Ponzi. Drawn from An Overview: A History of the Oregon Wine Industry and Oregon Pinot Noir, by Diana Lett, for OPC 2000; The On-Going Experiment: Innovations and Revelations in Cool Climate Viticulture and Enology, by Nancy Ponzi, for OPC 2000; The Rallying Call to Pinot Noir: How Pinot Noir Came to be Understood, Admired...and Sold, by Nancy Ponzi, for OPC 2000; The Oregon Wine Industry: An Insider’s Perspective, by Susan Sokol Blosser, Introduction to Oregon Winegrapes Grower’s Guide 5th Edition, 2002; The Oregon Pinot Story short film, written and edited by Diana Lett, Harry Peterson-Nedry and Nancy Ponzi for OPC 2004. Updated by David Adelsheim and Annie Shull for OPC 2010. Ongoing minor updates 2017–2022 by Julia Burke.*

## OREGON WINE MILESTONES

**1961** Richard Sommer plants Oregon’s first post-Prohibition vinifera grapes, including Pinot noir, in the Umpqua Valley.

**1965** David Lett plants Pinot noir and related cool-climate varieties in the Willamette Valley.

First Oregon Pinot noir, from Hillcrest Vineyards in the Umpqua Valley, becomes available in Oregon market.

**1970** Five bonded Oregon wineries with 35 vineyard acres.

**1973** Senate Bill 100 is passed, which created Oregon's revolutionary comprehensive statewide land use planning goals and the great legacy of Governor Tom McCall. Many people involved in the then infant Oregon wine industry actively worked on the passage of this legislation. Their work is credited—in large part—for keeping the hillsides in agricultural rather than residential use. The result, even near urban centers, is acres of vineyards and orchards.

**1974** The existence of clones of wine grape varieties—and their potential importance—is first recognized by growers in the Willamette Valley. In the 1960s and early 1970s, growers only knew that they needed to match the variety to the climate. They simply ordered the cool-climate variety they wanted; no one mentioned a specific clone. By blind luck, Oregon started its Pinot noir plantings with the “Wädenswil” and “Pommard” clones, which happened to combine low production and high quality. Clones of other varieties were not as perfect. In 1974 Dick Erath helped bring more clones of Pinot noir and Chardonnay from UC Davis for potential study. Dr. Ron Cameron at Oregon State University agreed to set up a grapevine quarantine program so material could be brought to Oregon from outside the U.S. David Adelsheim first saw the clonal selection programs for Pinot noir and Chardonnay in Burgundy and arranged for the importation of a few clones of Chardonnay, Pinot noir and Gamay noir from a research station in Espiguette. With the help of Charles Coury, Jr., 15 clones of Alsatian varieties were sent to Oregon State University.

**1975** L'Omelette Restaurant, the trendy Portland spot in the '70s, introduces the first wine list featuring an Oregon wine section. The wine list was created by David Adelsheim, then sommelier, now president of Adelsheim Vineyard. Other restaurants soon followed suit.

The first coffee table book about the wines of the region, *The Winemakers of the Pacific Northwest* by Elizabeth Purser, is published. Though perhaps way before its time, this book with its full-page color photographs (and naïve text) is now considered a rare wine collector's item.

Table Wine Research Advisory Board is established to conduct needed research support for the young but growing wine industry. It received \$12/ton levied on grapes harvested in Oregon.

Oregon's strict wine labeling regulations, proposed by the industry, are adopted by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission. The innovative regulations are a bold component at the

foundation of the Oregon wine industry, and required the consent of every Oregon winery to be adopted. They continue to be the strictest wine labeling standards in the United States.

A handful of Oregon winery owners gather over a kitchen table to create the first “Discover Oregon Wines” brochure, to function as both a backgrounder and as a tourist guide.

Oregon Winegrowers Association is founded, a statewide trade organization merging the former Winegrowers Council of Oregon (representing the Willamette Valley) and the Oregon Wine Growers Association (of Southern Oregon).

**1979** Gault-Millau French Wine Olympiad places The Eyrie Vineyards 1975 South Block Pinot Noir in their top ten in the Pinot noir category, resulting in the first international recognition of Oregon.

Hugh Johnson visits Oregon. His discussions with Oregon vintners convinced him to add an Oregon map to his definitive World Atlas of Wines.

The Steamboat Conference is established by Stephen Cary (now at Yamhill Valley Vineyards, OR) and Mike Richmond (now at Bouchaine Vineyards, CA) and others. It is an annual three-day summer gathering of just winemakers. Initially, only winemakers from Oregon and California attended, but now they come from all around the world. The approach is simple: tastings of the best wines—and problem wines—from all the winemakers in attendance with in-depth, honest discussions on the true nature of Pinot noir wines and best practices to get there. This conference increased the wealth of knowledge about Pinot noir production and, incidentally, created a worldwide brotherhood of Pinot noir producers. The conference was named for the setting, Steamboat Inn, a world famous fly fishing lodge on the wild, remote North Umpqua River in Oregon.

**1980** Thirty-four bonded Oregon wineries with 1,100 vineyard acres.

A Robert Drouhin-sponsored French blind tasting reconfirms the high rating of The Eyrie Vineyards 1975 Pinot Noir. International coverage of the upset brought widespread attention to Oregon Pinot noir.

The dramatic volcanic eruption of Mt. St. Helen's brings world focus to the region. Feature stories speculated on the fate of grapevines and wines. In fact, some vines were damaged and a major industry-funded research project was launched to study the effect of volcanic ash on juice and wine. Oregon vintages are never normal, but this one was spectacularly unique.

**1981** Ponzi Vineyards is the subject of the first New York Times exclusive profile/review coverage of Oregon. Frank Prial featured the Ponzi 1979 Willamette Valley Pinot noir.

**1982** International Wine Competition, London: Double Gold medals are awarded to Tualatin

Vineyards 1980 Estate Pinot noir and 1980 Estate Chardonnay.

The Willamette Valley American Viticultural Area is approved.

**1983** Cary Oregon Wines, the first national brokerage for Oregon wines, is established by Stephen Cary (now winemaker at Yamhill Valley Vineyards) and Reuben Rich. This was the first attempt to systematically find wholesalers for Oregon wines outside the Pacific Northwest. Stephen presented premium Oregon wines—and the story behind those wines—to distributors in many parts of the United States. Wholesalers in Chicago, Boston, New York, California, Texas, Minneapolis and Kansas City took on multiple Oregon brands and became early adopters. Although the business no longer exists, many of the distributor/winery relationships developed then remain intact and successful today. The efforts of Cary Oregon Wines established acquaintances and set the foundations for many of the pivotal media events of the future.

Publication of the first edition of Oregon Grape Growers' Guide, the only basic handbook on cool-climate viticulture written by growers—Marilyn Webb, Ted Casteel, David Adelsheim, Susan Sokol-Blosser and others—for growers.

The Oregon Wine Advisory Board is established with the mission to promote marketing and research for the wine industry. Oregon growers and producers elected to tax themselves at the highest rate in the world, \$25 per ton, to fund the OWAB.

The Yamhill County Wineries Association is formed, beginning with 11 member wineries. Those wineries opened their doors for the first Wine Country Thanksgiving celebration that year, inviting visitors to taste and purchase wines from the source.

Rachel Starr (founder of the Portland wine shop, Great Wine Buys) sends samples of Oregon wine to Robert Parker of The Wine Advocate. The samples sparked an exploratory trip to Oregon by Parker, during which he toured, tasted and subsequently discovered Oregon wine. Parker's story and his enthusiastic review of the 1983 vintage brought the wine world's focus to the region.

Oregon State University and Oregon's wine industry envision, organize and host the first International Cool Climate Wine Symposium. The quadrennial event continues to be held in various cool climate regions of the world.

"Dijon clones" of Pinot noir and Chardonnay arrive at Oregon State University as a result of international collaboration. Their arrival has resulted in a profound improvement in Oregon Chardonnay, and greater complexity of flavors and earlier ripening times in Oregon Pinot noir.

The exceptionally cold, wet summer of 1984 leads to the latest and, by all accounts, the worst harvest season in Willamette Valley history.

**1985** Willamette Valley Pinot noir outshines French at the Burgundy Challenge at the International Wine Center in New York, at which the expert judges' top five wines consisted entirely of Oregon bottlings.

The first mention of Oregon wine in the Wine Spectator features the astonishing results of the Burgundy Challenge, including photos exhibiting the beauty of Oregon vineyards.

**1987** The International Pinot Noir Celebration debuts at Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon. Organized by a collaboration of local business people and wineries, the goal was to bring together the great Pinot noir producers of the world for a weekend of wine education, culinary excellence and friendship. Winemakers from Burgundy, California, New Zealand and Oregon rubbed shoulders with consumers and industry folk from across the United States.

The Drouhin family, owners of the important Burgundy negociant, Maison Joseph Drouhin, purchases 100 acres for vineyards and a winery in the Dundee Hills. Robert Drouhin had made several visits to Oregon, earning the respect and friendship of the larger wine community. His daughter, Véronique Drouhin, who worked harvest in Oregon in 1986 with three wineries, was appointed winemaker for the new venture. They made their first wine in 1988 from purchased grapes in a leased facility. This extraordinary Franco-Oregon venture was widely reported, underscoring the seriousness of Oregon wines and increasing the credibility of the Oregon wine industry. The flow of established winemakers from other regions to Oregon continues, from Australia, New York, Canada and California (among other corners of the world).

**1988** Governor Neil Goldschmidt presents Oregon wine to Burgundy. Goldschmidt, always a wine lover and later a winegrower in Dundee, elegantly traversed a minefield of potential social, cultural, economic and trade challenges to lead a group of winery owners on a mission to the heart of Burgundy. Roz Seysses of Domaine Dujac and Robert Drouhin were particularly helpful in overcoming the challenges of getting the cream of Burgundian wine society to show up at the tasting of Oregon wines. The wines were warmly and enthusiastically received. The Governor cemented a relationship between the two Pinot noir regions that thrives today, not only in friendships, but also exchanges of grape growing and winemaking techniques. There is also a continuing exchange of interns with young winemakers in Burgundy being able to list Oregon on their Curricula Vitae, and vice versa.

**1989** Pinot Noir: America, a collaborative effort of California and Oregon Pinot noir producers, begins a series of trade tastings around the country to popularize Pinot noir among chefs and sommeliers.

Jim Berneau, founder of Willamette Valley Vineyards winery near Salem, offers public stock to build his winery. Willamette Valley Vineyards is Oregon's first and only publicly held winery.

Seventy bonded Oregon wineries with 5,682 vineyard acres.



The Trappist Abbey in Lafayette opens the Abbey Wine Warehouse, offering important storage solutions to Willamette Valley wineries.

Phylloxera, a very small insect attacking the roots of grape vines, is identified for the first time in Willamette Valley vinifera vineyards.

**1991** The Hotel Vintage Plaza opens in downtown Portland with an Oregon wine theme, naming each luxury suite after an Oregon winery.

The ¡Salud! Wine Barrel Auction, the first U.S. hospital initiated and financed collaboration with local wineries, is founded. All proceeds provide health care for vineyard workers and their families.

The Oregon chapter of Women for WineSense is formed.

**1994** The Oregon Wine Marketing Coalition is founded. The cooperative marketing group of more than 40 wineries took Oregon on the road. For nine years, the Coalition presented educational seminars and tastings of Oregon wines throughout the United States.

**1996** Salmon-Safe, an environmental marketing program, is started by the Pacific Rivers Council and directed by Dan Kent.

**1997** The LIVE program is created by a group of winegrowers in the Willamette Valley led by Ted Casteel of Bethel Heights Vineyard and Carmo Vasconcelos of Oregon State University, with the goal of defining and promoting environmental stewardship with rigorous independent third-party certification for sustainable grape-growing and winemaking practices. LIVE has grown to become the most widely adopted certification program for winegrowers Oregon, with over 34% of total Oregon vineyard acreage certified LIVE in 2012.

**2000** One hundred thirty-five Oregon bonded wineries with 9,000 vineyard acres.

The first Oregon Pinot Camp (OPC) is held. Forty Oregon wineries combine their talents and resources to organize a remarkably creative and successful event. Selected retailers, sommeliers and distribution sales representatives from throughout the U.S. are invited to the vineyards and wineries of the north Willamette Valley. They learn about the region's grape growing and winemaking practices from its vineyard managers and winemakers. Along the way, they get a taste of the region's hospitality. Their enthusiastic response transformed this one-time experiment into an annual event. OPC has become one of the most beloved wine trade events in America and is credited with having radically increased support and sales of Oregon wines in the wine stores and restaurants of the U.S. and increasingly in other countries.

**2002** The first U.S. Green Building Council LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental

Design) certification for a winery building is awarded to Sokol Blosser for its barrel cellar.

The Carlton Winemakers Studio is founded as the first multiple-winery facility in Oregon, creating an innovative model for sustainability and collaboration.

**2003** Oregon State University Press publishes the fifth edition of Oregon Winegrape Growers' Guide, now titled Oregon Viticulture.

**2004** The Northwest Viticulture Center opens at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, offering hands-on instruction in winemaking and vineyard work.

The streamlined Oregon Wine Board replaces the Oregon Wine Advisory Board, with the same funding as the WAB but no longer under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture. Members of the board are appointed directly by Oregon's Governor.

The release of the film Sideways sparks widespread interest in Pinot noir.

**2005** The first four American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) within the Willamette Valley AVA, of the six petitioned for in 2003, are approved. They are Dundee Hills, Yamhill-Carlton, Ribbon Ridge and McMinnville.

**2006** Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Washington's oldest winery, announces that it will acquire the assets of Erath Vineyards, one of the Willamette Valley's pioneer wineries.

Two more new Willamette Valley AVAs, Eola-Amity Hills and Chehalem Mountains, are approved.

**2008** Fourteen wineries join forces with the Oregon Environmental Council to kick off the Carbon Neutral Challenge, the first wine industry carbon reduction program in the United States.

**2009** The Allison Inn & Spa, Willamette Valley wine country's first luxury hotel, opens in Newberg. Built within the urban growth boundary and featuring its own vineyard, walking trails, kitchen garden and greenhouse, The Allison offers award-winning accommodations and dining to the wine country visitor.

**2010** Four hundred eighteen Oregon bonded wineries with 20,300 vineyard acres.

Destination Races, a national half marathon series sponsoring races in America's beautiful wine regions, launches the first Oregon Wine Country Half Marathon, drawing participants from around the country to run 13.1 miles in the northern Willamette Valley.

**2011** Linfield College inaugurates an Oregon wine history project to preserve, study and

celebrate the state's wine history.

**2012** Wine Spectator magazine features Oregon wine as the cover story, highlighting the perfect match between the Willamette Valley climate and the Pinot noir grape. Harvey Steiman's extensive review of Willamette Valley Pinots concludes, "Pinot noir has found an American home" in Oregon.

**2013** California-based Jackson Family Wines purchases 1,385 acres of property in Oregon, including existing vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills and Yamhill Carlton AVAs, as well as the vineyard and winery that were home to Soléna Estate.

Burgundy producer Maison Louis Jadot purchases the Resonance Vineyard in the Willamette Valley, marking only the second time a French negociant has purchased land in Oregon (Maison Joseph Drouhin was first, in 1987). Jacques Lardière, Véronique Drouhin Boss, Dominique Lafon, Louis-Michel Liger-Belair and Jean-Nicolas Méo now all have winemaking projects in the Willamette Valley.

Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Domaine Drouhin, Laurent Montalieu, Elk Cove Vineyards, Domaine Serene and Precept Brands all make major vineyard purchases in the sell-off of sites owned by Premier Pacific Vineyards.

**2016** The Willamette Valley Wineries Association launches its first trade-only wine auction, raising nearly \$500,000 for the association in its first year. The auction is now an annual event, promoting the Willamette Valley's most important grape variety, Pinot noir. Buyers from the wine trade attend the weekend immersion into the Oregon wine community and bid on unique, inimitable Pinots from a single vintage in 5, 10, and 20 case lots.

**2017** Sue Horstmann is honored at the first annual Horstmann Dinner at Oregon Pinot Camp 2017, recognizing her 20 years of service as the Willamette Valley Wineries Association's first Executive Director and founding Director of OPC. Sue's love and dedication for the Willamette Valley wine community advanced the region for decades.

**2019** A seventh nested Willamette Valley AVA, Van Duzer Corridor, is approved.

**2020** Amid a global pandemic beginning in the spring and wildfires across the West Coast in the fall, the Oregon Wine Industry bands together to support hospital staff, maintain health care and services for vineyard workers, care for displaced families, keep each other employed and safe, and stay afloat. A bright spot comes with the addition of two new Willamette Valley nested AVAs, Laurelwood District and Tualatin Hills.

**2021** In the culmination of over a decade of hard work led by Harry Peterson-Nedry, the Willamette Valley becomes the second of only two American Viticultural Areas (joining Napa Valley) to receive Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) status from the European Union. The

Willamette Valley also welcomes its tenth nested AVA, Lower Long Tom, which is also the first AVA established in the South Valley.

**2021** Established in November 2021, the Lower Long Tom AVA sits within the west side of the Lower Long Tom Watershed, between Corvallis and Eugene, making it the Willamette Valley's southernmost nested AVA.

**2022** Mount Pisgah, Polk County, Oregon becomes Oregon's twenty-third AVA and the Willamette Valley's eleventh nested AVA. The Willamette Valley Wine Foundation is established with the goal of enhancing enhance the wellbeing of winegrowing communities in the Willamette Valley through the development of program-enriched affordable housing and collaborative support of health services, family services, and personal development.