

# WINE News

*On the Oregon (wine) trail.*



## SEPTEMBER 14, 2015 FEATURES

- 2 Cristom: Well Worth the Hike
- 3 Two Generations at Ponzzi; Character at Roco
- 4 Beyond Pinot: Oregon Chardonnay

## Willamette Valley: Pinot Noir And a Whole Lot More

*By Bryan Brick*

This year from August 3rd to August 6th, Joel Nicholas, Michael Jordan, Gary Norton, Dave Genevro and I were happily and dutifully tasting wine with some of our favorite producers in the Willamette Valley. Year after year, this is one of our favorite trips we take within the United States, and our 2015 trip certainly didn't disappoint. We mostly tasted the ripe, fleshy and crowd-friendly 2014s and the more balanced, feminine and pretty 2013s. But there were plenty of surprises along the way, like the amazing wealth of delicious Chardonnay we tasted, or the tremendous sparkling wines and the juicy rosés. Certainly there was no shortage of great wine to bring back with us. Sadly, we only have room for a select few here in this newsletter. So make sure to stop by one of our stores or call up our friendly and informative customer service staff. We'll be happy to get you all the information and recommendations you need.



*David Lett (left) and Mike Eldred with the K&L gang at Eyrrie Vineyards.*

Always a great place to start is at the beginning, and the beginning of wine in the Willamette Valley began in 1965 when David Lett planted the first cuttings of Pinot Noir in the valley. Fast forward 50 years, and

I think David, and the other pioneers who planted vineyards in the Willamette Valley early on, would have never expected the growth and unarguable success that is taking place currently. But more on that growth later. If we are truly starting at the beginning, we have to talk about the **2013 Eyrrie "Estate Grown" Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$34.99)**. From both the numerous estate vineyards and a couple lots of purchased fruit, this is the Pinot that it all began with in 1970. Savory aromatics of beets and sassafras combine seamlessly with ripe, fruity notes of cassis and crushed cherry. Lively and fresh, this is a lithe Pinot that seems to put weight on in the glass while it aerates. It adds complex flavors as it rolls on with fern, warm soil, cherry pit, wild strawberry and new leather notes building to the energetic and cutting finish.

The conversation about the Willamette Valley wouldn't be complete if we didn't discuss Pinot Gris. While Pinot Noir gets all the credit and all the accolades, Pinot Gris is the workhorse grape of the valley. It's the most widely planted and clocks in with the most cases made in the valley and the state. Sure, some of these wines are simple, neutral wines that just get the job done, but a select few have the depth, complexity and flat-out drinkability that is a perfect combo for the varietal. One of these is the **2014 Elk Cove Willamette Valley Pinot Gris (\$15.99)**, which floored all of us when we tasted it at the winery. Blasting out of the glass with heightened aromas of tangerine, lemon blossom and crab



*(Continued on page 2)*

## Cristom: Well Worth the Hike

By Joel Nicholas

Of all the remarkable tasting appointments on this year's K&L Oregon trip, our visit to Cristom may well have been my favorite. It could have been the gorgeous hike from Bethel Heights, over Temperance Hill, winding our way through Cristom's expansive estate vineyards down to the winery. Or maybe it was the clear views of Mount Hood and Mount Jefferson, or the fact that we were actually getting in some exercise for the first time in four days (watch out for shin splints!). Perhaps it was the spice-perfect, homemade, curry chicken sandwich that was waiting for us when we arrived—with excellent "bread integrity," as noted by K&L's Dave G. Or it could be that Steve Doerner is making some of the best Pinot Noir in the United States, and we were lucky enough to taste through their entire lineup of current releases, as well as a few other special bottles, during our visit. Yeah, on second thought, it was definitely the Pinot Noir (although the sandwich was a close second). I will definitely be adding a few of Cristom's 2013 Pinot Noir releases to my cellar, along with their unforgettable 2013 Syrah.

**2014 Cristom "Estate" Eola-Amity Hills Viognier (\$27.99)** Viognier doesn't have many supporters on the K&L staff, but the 2012 Cristom Viognier was a huge hit at an Oregon wines staff tasting two years ago. The 2014 is even better: it has all of the aromatic white peach, honeysuckle and orange blossom flavors you expect from Viognier, but it also has serious acidity and drive that are atypical of the varietal.

**2012 Cristom "Mount Jefferson Cuvée" Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$27.99)** One of the best values in Oregon Pinot Noir, year in and year out. Earthy, forest floor aromas dominate the nose and the palate is full of lush, dark fruits: wild raspberry and plum.



Steve Doerner and the K&L gang.

**2013 Cristom "Marjorie Vineyard" Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir (\$64.99)** From vines planted in 1982, the 2013 Marjorie Vineyard Pinot Noir was my favorite 2013 Pinot Noir from the trip. Pure red fruits—cranberry, red plum and ripe pomegranate—explode from the mid-palate and give way to a lengthy, elegant finish. A great candidate for short-term cellaring.

**2013 Cristom "Estate" Eola-Amity Hills Syrah (\$49.99)** Cristom's 2005 Syrah was one of the top wines we tasted on the trip, and their 2013 Syrah should be at least as good after a couple more years in bottle. A refined, cool-climate Syrah with a traditional, northern Rhône flavor profile: ripe blackberry and black pepper followed by waves of boysenberry, dark raspberry, clove and smoked meat.

## Brick's Picks

(Continued from page 1)

apple, this wine is instantly much more intriguing and alluring than the masses of others. Fresh and spunky from the moment it hits your palate, this has layers of orange flesh, lime juice, Asian pear and a slight honeysuckle note. This is just one of the best examples of the varietal you can find on the market today.

One of our favorite visits of the trip every year is when we get to see Jim Maresh at Arterberry Maresh. Now that Jim has a tasting bar and is getting more and more acclaim every year from his stunning wines from the Dundee Hills, I don't think he'll be much of a secret for much longer. The **2013 Arterberry Maresh Dundee Hills Pinot Noir (\$24.99)** comes from some of the best, and oldest, vineyards in the Dundee Hills and includes declassified barrels of his single vineyard wines. Asian plum, cinnamon, allspice and cherry skin combine on the intense nose. Sassy and bright, with a cool set of pliable tannins and tart cranberry fruit bolstered by a mid-palate loaded with cola and

loganberry flavors, this is packed with fun yet serious Pinot character. With the boisterous finish loaded with warm spices and more blue fruits, it's hard to beat this for the value.

One of the most unusual wines we tasted on the trip was the **2014 J. Christopher Willamette Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$23.99)**. I use the word unusual in a totally positive way, in that Sauvignon Blanc is just not something you find a lot of in the Willamette Valley. The ones that are made, in my experience, are delicious. This is no exception. Coming from the Croft Vineyard, possibly the most well-known site for SB in the valley, this sees mostly neutral oak and just a kiss of acacia barrels as well. Full of gooseberry, grapefruit flesh and lemon thyme, with a wealth of wet stone on the nose, this is like a wonderful hybrid of New Zealand and Loire styles. On entry, the palate explodes with energetic flavors of quince, lemon curd and a perfectly integrated acidity. Savory more than fruity, with a continuation of the minerality found on the nose, this is reminiscent of many of the hallmark styles of the varietal, but is something completely unique.

# Two Generations of Innovation: A Look Inside Ponzi Vineyards

By Gary Norton

On our recent trip to the Willamette Valley, we took a stroll through Ponzi Vineyard's uber-progressive, four-level gravity flow facility with second-generation winemaker Luisa Ponzi and brand specialist Brenna Patterson. During the tour, we touched on a variety of topics including Ponzi Vineyard's 45th anniversary and the region's recent reinvigoration for Chardonnay production, and dispelled some rumors surrounding the tempestuous vintage of 2013. A few of us even made a pitch for the inclusion of a corn hole game next to the bocce ball courts—a pitch we understand may actually come to fruition! Afterward, we sat down with Luisa's sister, Maria (current president and director of sales and marketing for Ponzi Vineyards), and tasted through their current offerings.

Located just above Newberg in the Chehalem Mountains is Ponzi's production facility and tasting room. Surrounded by an idyllic landscape and Ponzi's majestic Avellana vineyard, we sat down and tasted some tremendous bottlings from the 2012, 2013 and 2014 vintages.



*A view from Ponzi's beautiful new winery.*

One of the many standouts was **Ponzi's 2012 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$34.99)**. A beautiful expression of the famed 2012 vintage, this velvety Pinot is chalked with ripe raspberry, bramble, Bing cherries and finishes with a tinge of spice and a wonderfully smooth, unobtrusive tannin structure. We were told that the fruit for this cuvée was derived from older vines, ranging from 20 to 45 years, and sourced from roughly 11 vineyards in the Willamette Valley.

The 2013 vintage was largely defined by the fallout of a Japanese typhoon that dumped close to five inches of rain on the valley in the last week of September. Prior to the downpour, many believed that 2013 was going to replicate the highly acclaimed 2012 vintage. The **Ponzi 2013 "Reserve" Willamette Valley Chardonnay (\$34.99)** is the perfect example of what a polished winemaker can create with the brood of a difficult harvest. A gaudy, yet balanced, Meyer lemon and vanilla custard-laced wine that is a prime example of Ponzi's booming Chardonnay program, not to mention a genuine representation of the valley's latest swing back into high-quality, responsibly oaked Chardonnays.

After our appointment, we walked back to our "soccer mom-approved" Chrysler minivan and stopped to take one last look at the concrete-laden, perfectly angular winery. We shared a collective moment of admiration not only for what the Ponzi family started 45 years ago, but what is in store for the future, as well.



## What Great Character! My Roco Wines Experience

By Dave Genevro

Our appointment with Rollin Soles, the man behind some of the most-awarded Oregon wine at Roco Winery, was our first of the morning. The winery is tucked away off of the main highway, and farms properties in the surrounding mountains. When we arrived at the tasting room and winery, we were immediately introduced to the man himself, owner and winemaker Rollin Soles. Rollin was very kind to have his national sales representative, Justin Vajgert, pick us up a box of incredible scones and quiche, with some freshly made coffee. It was immediately apparent to me from the moment we came into the winery that these people were going to be treating us more like friends and family, than simply as business associates.

Rollin was more prepared for the sun than any of us California boys were, with a nice, large brimmed hat and outdoor boots. After breakfast, Rollin and Justin had us follow them out in the van to their main vineyard sites, tucked away even deeper in the Chehalem Mountains. Once we parked in the Wits' End vineyard, we were

given some background about the mountain range and got to enjoy Rollin's **2012 Roco "Wits' End" Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir (\$44.99)**. With a gorgeous red cranberry hue, the Wits' End is a stunner, at the very least. The nose is generous, with baking spices and ripe red berries. Minerals, wet stones, and leaves with a bit of dirt blast off on the tongue, followed by well-integrated tannin and acid structures. An amazing effort by our friends at Roco.

The **2012 Roco "Knudsen Vineyard" Dundee Hills Pinot Noir (\$44.99)** was rich and wholesome, with ripe red cherries and a focused mouthfeel. My favorite Chardonnay of the entire trip was the **2013 Roco Willamette Valley Chardonnay (\$34.99)**. The expressive fruit and balance were refreshing and inspiring, along with chalk, minerals and honey. The wine spoke to the degree of excellence and perfection that Rollin strives for. His wines have their own very unique sense of place and character. Actually, it would be a tough job to find which has more character and energy, Rollin or his wines.



*Dave Genevro taking in the view, and the Chardonnay, at Eyrie Vineyards.*

## Oregon Chardonnay: Rising from Obscurity

By Mike Jordan

**When people think of high-quality Chardonnay, most think of Burgundy and California.** There are other great Chardonnay producers in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, as well. But one rarely thinks of Oregon as a place to look when thinking of Chardonnay. After my visit to Oregon in August, I believe that is about to change.

Oregon has been producing Chardonnay for many years (the original plantings go back 40 years), but they failed to grab hold in the very crowded Chardonnay category. Many of the producers were making Chardonnay along the lines of California producers: heavily toasted new wood with full malolactic fermentation, and extremely ripe fruit. There is nothing wrong with that style, but in such a crowded category, breaking out would be very difficult.

Over the last couple of years, several wineries have looked at the Chardonnay grape differently, and are aiming to show what Oregon and its terroir can do with the grape. The 2013 and 2014 vintages will bring that greatness to the forefront.

Eyrie, Bethel Heights, Roco, Domain Drouhin, Evesham Wood, Arterberry Maresh and others are leading the way for the Oregon Chardonnay Renaissance.

**2013 Eyrie “Estate Grown” Dundee Hills Chardonnay (\$25.99)** Lean and fresh Chardonnay. Purity would be my main takeaway from this wine. Quality/price ratio is off the charts. I have a great love for all

things Eyrie, and this wine will blow you away. The 2014 will bring Eyrie Chardonnay to even greater heights.

### **2013 Bethel Heights “Casteel” Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay (\$59.99)**

The Chardonnays we tasted at Bethel were outstanding.

The 2013 Casteel, which was recently bottled, once again showed the purity of Oregon Chardonnay. A barrel selection makes up the Casteel, with hints of floral aromatics, lovely spice notes and just a touch of citrus and melon. The 2014 Bethel Chardonnays showed wonderfully from tank and barrel. I can't wait for those to come out next year.

### **2013 Domaine Drouhin “Arthur” Dundee Hills Chardonnay (\$29.99)**

Drouhin has been making Chardonnay for a long time, whether in France or Oregon. Véronique Drouhin-Boss and Arron Bell make deep, complex Chardonnay with wonderful depth and layers of flavor. The 2014 Chardonnay was amazing out of tank, and like the 2013, outstanding.



### **K&L REDWOOD CITY**

3005 El Camino Real, Redwood City, CA 94061  
**P** (650) 364-8544 **F** (650) 364-4687  
**HOURS** Mon-Fri 10-7, Sat 9-7, Sun 10-6  
**LOCKERS** Mon-Sat 10-6, Sun 11-5

### **KLWINES.COM**

Toll Free (877) KLWINES (877) 559-4637  
Email: [Wines@KLWines.com](mailto:Wines@KLWines.com)

### **K&L HOLLYWOOD**

1400 Vine Street, Hollywood, CA 90028  
**P** (323) 464-WINE (9463) **F** (323) 836-0853  
**HOURS** Mon-Thurs 11-8, Fri-Sat 10-8, Sun 11-6

### **K&L EVENTS & TASTINGS**

We host regular evening and Saturday tastings at each K&L store as well as many special events throughout the year. For the complete calendar go to [KLWines.com/Local-Events](http://KLWines.com/Local-Events).

### **K&L SAN FRANCISCO**

638 Fourth Street, San Francisco, CA 94107  
**P** (415) 896-1734 **F** (415) 896-1739  
**HOURS** Mon-Fri 10-7, Sat 9-6, Sun 11-6

**We accept American Express, Discover, Visa and Mastercard.**

**For Order Inquiries, Shipping Information, Local Events, Policies and Up-to-the-Minute Inventory, visit [KLWines.com](http://KLWines.com)**

**🍷 FOLLOW OUR BLOGS UNCORKED AND SPIRITS JOURNAL FOR THE LATEST UPDATES FROM K&L STAFF 🍷**