



LEFT: Evening Land Vineyards produces wine from vineyards in Sonoma Coast, Burgundy and (pictured here) the Eola-Amity Hills, a sub-AVA of Oregon's Willamette Valley. RIGHT: Josh Bergström, seen here in the cellar, biodynamically farms both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the Dundee Hills sub-AVA.

BLAZING THE OREGON TRAIL

**ANCHORED BY WILLAMETTE VALLEY PINOT NOIR,
OREGON PRODUCERS ARE HITTING THEIR STRIDE**

BY CHRISTY CANTERBURY MW

Oregon's modern wine scene began 50 years ago. Before the state rode the triumphal waves of Sixty Minutes' 1991 French Paradox report and the 2004 Pinot Noir—soaked movie *Sideways*, David Lett's *The Eyrie Vineyards Pinot Noir* ranked ahead of a Joseph Drouhin red Burgundy in the 1979 Paris Wine Olympics. Robert Drouhin, one of the first major outside buyers, founded *Domaine Drouhin Oregon* in the early 1980s. Today, investments pour in from all over as the Willamette Valley transitions from a sleepy winemaking community to a world-class act.

Oregon is the fourth largest U.S. wine-producing state, making over 1 million cases. Over half are Pinot Noir, made by 545 wineries from 905 vineyards, half are made by wineries producing under 5,000 cases. Consider that Washington, the #2 producer, makes 12 million cases a year. New York, the #3

state, is led by producers making over a million cases. In comparison, Oregon is still all about micro-production.

What's for sale besides Pinot Noir? Pinot Gris is the next most-planted grape followed by Chardonnay, Syrah and Riesling. But, that's not all: 72 varieties are planted in its 17 AVAs. Since small family wineries are the norm, it's tough to find under-\$15 wines. Values tend to range from \$15-30, whatever the variety.

Wine-driven excitement bubbles around the state, but it's the Willamette Valley and its six sub-regions that lead in quality, distribution and recognition. In fact, most of the state's high-end Pinot Noir is grown in a 20-mile circle in the North Valley, which represents about 60% of the Willamette's plantings.

THE WILLAMETTE

The TTB doesn't consider AVA applications through rosé-colored glasses and deem terroir their foundation. AVAs

require a locally well-recognized name and need neither to prove a consistent taste or style nor a specific quality level. As such, many Oregonian AVAs are derived from political and geographic decisions. While it pays to know a fact or two about each AVA, it's most important to know the winemakers' style and the vineyard's location. AVAs do not dictate style and flavor in Oregon.

By far Oregon's largest, stretching 120 miles from north to south, the Willamette Valley became Oregon's first AVA in 1984. (The sub-AVAs were declared in 2005 and 2006.) The Willamette (emphasis on the middle syllable: will-AM-it) is a cool, Pacific wind-influenced region that harvests as late as mid-November in chilly years like 2011.

The Willamette's primary cooling influence is the Van Duzer Corridor, which sucks in Pacific air as the valley between the Coast and Cascade Ranges



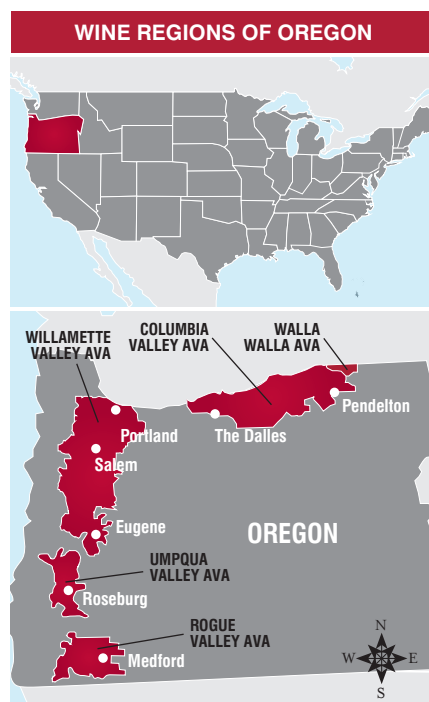
Wynne Peterson-Nedry was six months old when her father Harry Peterson-Nedry first purchased property in Oregon; she became Chehalem's winemaker in 2012.

heats up. The winds move northeast toward the northern Dundee Hills, making those vineyards much warmer. Still, "warmer" is relative. Growing season temperatures at Hyland Vineyard in the Dundee Hills average 71.2 F during the day and 45.9 F at night, according to Erath's Gary Horner.

Soils here range from deep alluvial deposits to eroded basalts and wind-blown loess to uplifted seabed sediment. The two best-known types are the deep, red, volcanic Jory and the shallower, yellow-brown, alluvial Willakenzie. Basalt (Jory) gives red and blue fruit with baking spice, softer tannin and enhanced acidity. Marine sediment (Willakenzie) offers blue and black fruits, earthiness and bigger tannins. Mark Vlossak of St. Innocent says, "The darker the fruit and the edgier the tannins, the more the vine has struggled."

Vines planted in sedimentary soils drain faster, hence they struggle. Dick Shea claims, "We have two seasons: wet and dry. It's one or the other." The Willamette receives almost no summer rain.

An exciting take-away is that many high-end Oregon wines, thanks to their perky acidity and low yields, are ageworthy, despite the fact they're hard to resist in their youth. ■



RELIABLE WINES

HIGH-END PINOT NOIR: Adelsheim, Temperance Hill; Archery Summit, Arcus Estate; Domaine Drouhin "Cuvée Laurène"; J.K. Carrière, Shea Vyd.; Domaine Serene, Côte Sud; Soter, Mineral Springs Ranch; Van Duzer "Alchemy"

PINOT NOIR UNDER \$30 SRP: Bethel Heights, Estate Grown; Broadley, Brooks "Janus"; Cristom "Jefferson Cuvée"; Elk Cove; Lemelson, Thea's Selection; Walnut City Wineworks

HIGH-END CHARDONNAY: Bergström "Sigrid"; Chehalem "Ian's Reserve, Stoller Vyds.; Evening Land "La Source" Seven Springs

CHARDONNAY UNDER \$25 SRP: Alloro; A-to-Z; The Eyrie Vineyards

PINOT GRIS: Erath Pinot Gris; Lumos "Julia"; Seven Hills; Sineann, Wy'East (Columbia Gorge); WillaKenzie Estate

RIESLING: Anne Amie Estate Dry; Ponzi Estate; Trisaetum Dry

SOUTHERN OREGON WINES: Abacela Viognier, (Umpqua Valley); Foris Vineyards Pinot Blanc (Rogue Valley)

SPARKLING: Argyle Brut; Soter Brut Rosé, Mineral Springs Ranch

THE WILLAMETTE'S SUB-AVAS

MCMINNVILLE

In the western Willamette, McMinnville's southern border sits on the Van Duzer corridor. There's good elevation here, but McMinnville's written upper limit is 800 feet; above that, vines encounter too much heat loss.

DUNDEE HILLS

Originally known as the Red Hills of Dundee, based on the color of its rather fertile, predominately Jory soil. This is primo Pinot Noir country.

RIBBON RIDGE

Contained within the Chehalem Mountains, this is Oregon's smallest and most homogenous AVA. Mike Etzel of Beaux Frères says the topsoil varies from 11 inches to four feet.

YAMHILL-CARLTON

Uncreatively named after a school district, Yamhill-Carlton is a hodge-podge of soils and elevations. Sitting at Willamette's northern end, this AVA is home to many high-end wineries.

EOLA-AMITY HILLS

Eola is derived from Aeolus, Greek for the god of wind. These hills are the bullseye of the Van Duzer Corridor's winds.

CHEHALEM MOUNTAINS

This 100-square-mile area boasts three soils (basaltic, ocean sedimentary and wind- and loess) and the Chehalem Ridge, the Willamette's highest point. Elevation is key, making a two-week difference in ripening between vineyards.