

BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU ARRIVES



At midnight Wednesday, **Bistrot du Coin** in Dupont Circle hosts the year's most raucous party for the release of 2006's Beaujolais Nouveau. French law dictates the year's new Beaujolais may not be tasted until the third Thursday, hence the delay to pop the corks.

SCOTT GREENBERG *Vine Guy*

300 wineries ...

734 vineyards ...

14,100 acres of land ...

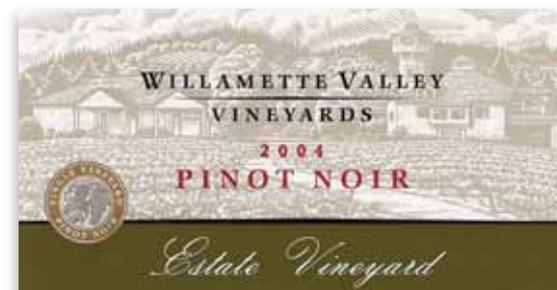
Oregon knows. its wines

If you're lucky enough to teach a course on the history of California winemaking for the Smithsonian Institution, as I was, you would be doubly fortunate to be invited back to teach another class on the wines of Oregon and Washington state.

With the help of Jim Bernau, founder of Willamette Valley Vineyards in Oregon, the Smithsonian Associates attending the second class in the series "Exploring Lesser-Known American Wineries: North American Style" were treated to an extraordinary pinot noir experience. But before I tell you about the tasting, let me put Oregon's winemaking history into perspective.

According to the Willamette Valley Wineries Association, Vinifera grapes have been grown in Oregon as far back as 1825, when settlers from Europe migrated into that area. Tales of plentiful water and moderate weather lured them to the fertile farmlands with vines from their homeland and a rich history of winemaking knowledge.

Unfortunately, Prohibition hit Oregon hard, and while California's wine business managed to just barely survive, Oregon's wine industry went into hibernation. But as winemaking in California began its climb to worldwide recognition, Oregon began a quiet



that each emphasized a specific characteristic found in pinot noir, i.e. fruitiness, acidity and structure (tannins). Each student developed their own blend and then sampled others at their table.

This instructive exercise really helped the class cultivate a taste for what was to come. Retail prices are approximate.

2004 Willamette Valley Vineyards Pinot Noir (\$22)

A supple wine with a pleasant mouth-feel, the aromas of black cherries, Asian spices and vanilla play off well against the round flavors of cherries, raspberries and pumpkin spices. Intriguing notes of smoke sneak in on the pretty finish. Serve this with roast rabbit or chicken.

2005 Adelsheim Vineyard Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$30)

This wine displays a bolder nose of black cherries and ripe boysenberries. Wonderful notes of ripe dark cherries and raspberries play off of mocha notes found in the finish. Could be a good choice with wild salmon or trout.

2004 Bethel Heights Freedom Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$40)

Attention-grabbing nose of bright red cherry, plums, cinnamon, and rose petals. Fleshy fruit flavors (cherries, raspberries and plums) fill the mouth while the still-young tannins deliver hints of "pinot dust" to the back of the palate. Try it with Asian-style braised pork.

2002 Cristom Reserve Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$40)

According to the winemaker, Steve Doerner, the 2002 vintage was "a brilliant vintage ... potentially the best in a series of strong vintages." It certainly displays big aromas of wild strawberries and hints of cloves and cinnamon. Flavors of ripe, dark plums and lush black raspberries dominate the front of the palate while smoked meats and toasty oak weigh in on the back of the tongue. The firm structure keeps it all in place.

Just the wine to enjoy with Peeking Duck.

2004 Bergstrom Vineyard Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$75)

As Burgundian as Oregon gets, this wine offers up a subtle nose of red raspberries and rose petals. Beautiful flavors featuring red strawberries, dark cherries and hints of cocoa fill the mouth and coat the tongue with a long, elegant finish that lasts

a good minute or more. A wonderful compliment to sushi-grade seared tuna.

Special thanks go to Sue Horstmann, of the Willamette Valley Wineries Association; David Adelsheim, of Adelsheim Vineyards; Patty Meuchel, of Bergstrom Wines; Pat Dudley, of Bethel Heights Vineyard; Steve Doerner, of Cristom Vineyards; and Jim Bernau, of Willamette Valley Vineyards.

Do you have a favorite Oregon wine? E-mail scott@vineguy.com.



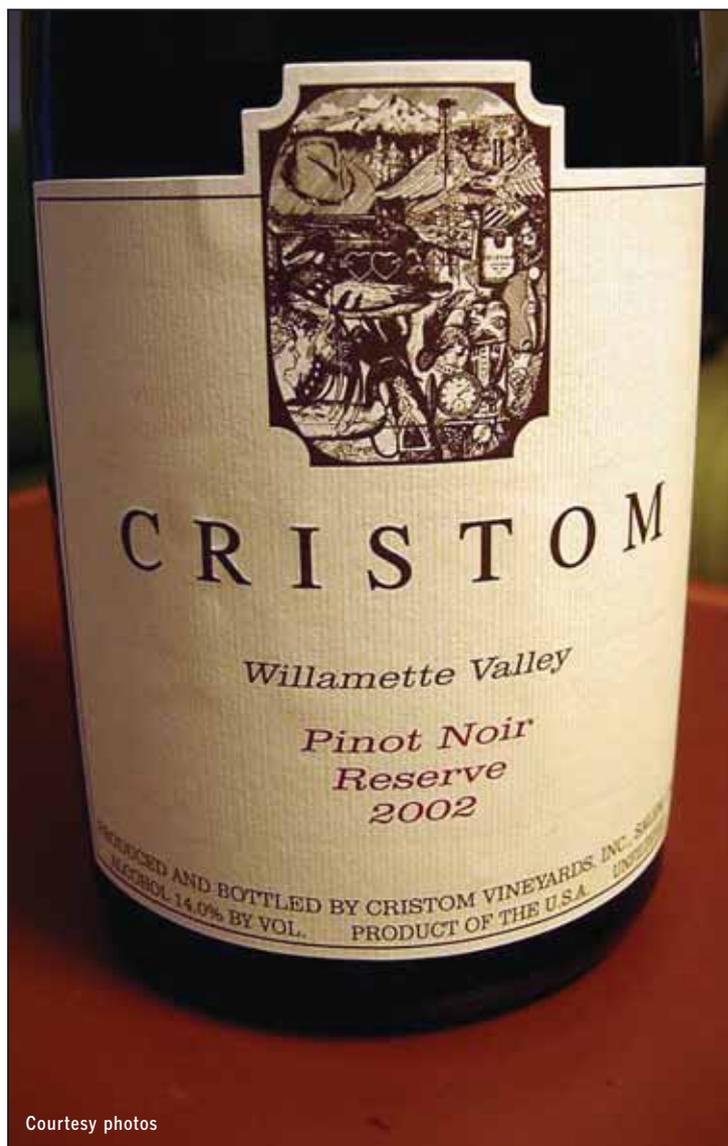
The Vine Guy takes a look at the state's long history in winemaking

journey toward re-establishing a viable wine culture. By the mid-1980s, word about Oregon wines, especially pinot noir, had gotten out. The biggest vote of confidence came in 1988 when Burgundy legend Robert Drouhin purchased a large property and began making pinot noir in the Dundee Hills. The floodgates opened and Oregon was back on the winemaking map.

Today, Oregon has more than 300 wineries, with 14,100 acres planted in 734 vineyards in eight distinct American Viticultural Areas.

Native Oregonian Jim Bernau was one of the early pioneers who helped resurrect the Oregon wine industry. The founder of Willamette Valley Vineyards, Jim purchased the original vineyard in 1983. Using a small tractor, he cleared away blackberry vines and remnants of an ancient plum orchard and began planting pinot noir. Jim was so committed to the project that he watered more than 1,000 feet of vine rows by hand with a garden hose. He was absolutely convinced that the cool climates of the Willamette Valley could deliver the true expression of pinot noir fruit and the balanced acidity he wanted. When the winery began its first crush, Jim served as its first employee and cellar rat. Today, it is Willamette Valley's only publicly traded winery.

Jim thought the best way for the class to gain an appreciation of the nuances Oregon pinot noir has to offer was to let them taste individual clones — strains of the same varietal — and then let them develop their own blends. He brought samples of three different strains



Courtesy photos