



# A Quick Look at Slow Wine

**MANY WILLAMETTE VALLEY WINERIES ARE INCLUDED IN UPCOMING GUIDE**

BY NEAL D. HULKOWER

Visits to wineries selected for inclusion in the Slow Wine Guide USA 2024 ended at the end of August. The guide, an offshoot of the Slow Food Movement that started in Italy, includes only “good, clean and fair” wines grown without synthetic herbicides. Starting in spring, field coordinators, including me, set out

across California, Oregon, Washington and New York. Our mission: to taste with winery owners and winemakers, collect updates to existing listings or establish new ones. For each winery, an entry is prepared that includes a section called “Life” detailing the history and people. There are also sections describing the vineyards and wines. A farm audit concludes the listing; summarizes methods used to care for the soil and vines.

My beat is the Willamette Valley with four highlights:

Abbott Claim Vineyard is Anthony Beck’s project in the Yamhill-Carlton American Viticultural Area, or AVA. French winemaker, Alban Debeaulieu produces beautifully textured Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, both approachable when young, yet structured to age. The 2019 Abbott Claim Vineyard Pinot Noir exhibits a dense, complex nose with a delicate, well-balanced palate.

Belle Pente Vineyard & Winery was founded in 1994 by Brian and Jill O’Donnell. Brian creates fresh, age-worthy wines. From the Murto Vineyard in the Dundee Hills, he produced a youthful, nicely balanced Pinot Noir in 2019.

Josh and Caroline Bergström oversee Bergström Wines, founded by Josh’s parents in 1999. Chardonnays undergoes full malolactic fermentation and rest on a solera blend of lees. Pinot Noirs are fermented whole cluster to enhance structure and complexity. The 2021 Sigrid Chardonnay emits complex aromas of toasted hazelnut, flowers, lemon, and with air, graham crackers. The briny palate is light and mouthwatering, with a lemony finish.

Björnson Vineyard was founded by Pattie and Mark Björnson in 2006. Pattie serves as executive winemaker and produces wines made from an increasingly wide selection of varieties that display bright acidity with intense flavors. The 2021 Magnus Pinot Noir has a rich, handsome nose and an assertive, yet graceful, palate.

Doug Tunnell, founder and winemaker of Brick House Wines, fashions wines at his Demeter-certified biodynamic estate in Ribbon Ridge AVA.

His 2021 Les Dijonnais Pinot Noir fermented with 30 percent whole clusters exudes an intense floral nose and has a rich palate.

When Jon and Kathy Lauer acquired Bryn Mawr Vineyards, they engaged Rachel Rose as winemaker and vineyard director. Rose crafts wines that highlight the aromatics produced by from the winds through the Van Duzer Corridor. Her 2019 Estate Pinot Noir is intensely aromatic with a retronasally perfumed palate and smooth tannins.

Chris and Melissa Thomas purchased a 20 year old vineyard in 2020 and renamed it Celestial Hill Vineyard. They produce Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with bright acidity and compelling aromatics. With an aroma reminiscent of fresh line-dried laundry, the mouthwatering, saline 2021 Yamhill Carlton Chardonnay begs for food.

New to the Guide in 2024 is CHO Wines, founded in 2020 by Dave and Lois Cho. Dave makes acid-driven wines with lower alcohol, achieving delicacy over power. From the Tualatin Hills AVA, the 2022 Pinot Noir Pétillant-Naturel is an amazing, refreshing sparkling with bright cherry and watermelon on nose and palate.

Corollary Wines, founded by Jeanne Feldkamp and Dan Diephouse, dedicates itself exclusively to making Willamette Valley sparkling wine. Utilizing the traditional method and extended aging on lees, they achieve beautifully textured and richly complex bubbles. The 2018 Winter’s Hill Pinot Blanc contains aromas of brioche and apple with an intense lemony palate, great texture and long finish.

Cramoisi Vineyard was planted in 2012 by Sofia Torres McKay and her husband, Ryan McKay. The vineyard produces powerful complex expressions of Pinot Noir and rich, well-balanced Chardonnay. The 2019 Dundee Hills Cuvée Pinot Noir is intensely floral on the nose with a harmonious palate featuring red cherries and excellent acidity.

Venerable David Hill Vineyards and Winery in the Tualatin Hills AVA

is home to some of the oldest vineyards in the Willamette Valley planted by Charles Coury. Chad Stock fashions cerebral yet elegant whites emphasizing finesse over overt fruitiness. Old vine Pinot Noirs have complex aromas and great texture. The 2021 Whole Cluster Pinot Noir exhibits spice, bright fruit and wood on the nose, with a youthful palate, smooth tannins and excellent texture.

The venture of husband and wife Patrick Reuter and Leigh Bartholomew, Dominio IV, produces a range of varieties using a minimalist approach to preserve acidity, aromatics and ageability. The nose of the 2012 Voyager's Manuscript Tempranillo made from fruit from the Columbia Gorge has great depth, evoking dark fruit in a wooden frame. The understated, silky palate is of uncommon elegance with a medium-long finish.

Marcus Goodfellow and his wife Megan handle all aspects of production of Goodfellow Family Cellars. They create structured Pinot Noirs that are typically 75-100 percent whole cluster-fermented and puncheon-aged Chardonnays. A 2019 Lewman Vineyard

Pinot Noir Heritage No. 16 is beautifully perfumed with spice, flowers, fruit and stem influence. The youthful palate displays great acidity and structure.

Jay Somers and his wife Ronda Newell-Somers own J.C. Somers Vintner, fashioning wines with grapes sourced from several vineyards. The 2021 La Colina Vineyard Pinot Noir offers a pretty cinnamon spice, bright cherry nose and a young, but serious, dark cherry palate with a medium finish, good acidity and fine balance.

Another first-timer is Lafayette and White Cellars, a small batch producer started by Danielle Lafayette and

Andrew White. They employ minimal intervention and novel approaches to both expected and less common varieties. The 2022 Embue Pinot Gris is an amber wine sourced from the Tualatin Hills AVA. It offers aromas of fruit, spice with savory notes, yielding a pleasant perfume of cantaloupe as it warms. The palate features sweet melon.

Maysara Winery is a Momtazi family affair with founders Moe and Flora supported by daughters Tahmiene (she makes the wine) and Naseem and Hannah (they assist with sales and events). Momtazi Vineyard in the McMinnville AVA supplies all the fruit for beautifully balanced wines made with no additives. The stunning 2007 Mitra Pinot Noir is a classic example of cool vintage, cool climate Pinot. The nose highlights dark fruit and mint over savory notes. The palate is after the nose, elegant with a medium finish and fine tannins.

Chris and Hilary Berg started Roots Wine Co. in 2001. Chris specializes in crisp, sometimes weightless bottlings of whites and complex aromatic reds, plus uncommon blends and treatments.

Nicolas-Jay is the joint project of Burgundian winemaker Jean-Nicolas Méo and music entrepreneur Jay Boberg. Together with associate winemaker, Tracy Kendall, they produce elegant Pinot Noir and Chardonnay both complex, structured and capable of aging. The gorgeous 2021 Affinités Chardonnay presents aromas of juicy fruit, hazelnuts and the suggestion of chalk. Fruit plays across the lovely, delicate palate displaying freshness, great finesse, a hint of butterscotch

and a medium finish.

Remy Drabkin founded Remy Wines in 2006 and serves as the winemaker. She makes Old World-style wines from a range of varieties, specializing in those from Italy, with minimal

intervention and thoughtful use of new oak. The nose of the 2019 Dolcetto, from Jubilee Vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills, bursts with fruit and some oak. The elegant juicy palate offers excellent acidity, a medium finish and plenty of structure for ageability.

Industry veteran Harry Peterson-Nedry started Ribbon Ridge Winery as a side project in 2002. His daughter Wynne Peterson-Nedry joined in 2009 and is now the winemaker and proprietor. The wines are characterized by judicious use of new oak, occasional whole cluster fermentation for the Pinot Noir and bright acidity for the whites. The 2022 Ridgecrest Grüner Veltliner exudes bright aromas of white flowers. The mouthwatering palate is round and fruity with great balance and a medium-long finish.

Chris and Hilary Berg started Roots Wine Co. in 2001. Chris

specializes in crisp, sometimes weightless bottlings of whites and complex aromatic reds, plus uncommon blends and treatments. From the Estate East Vineyard in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA, the 2022 Rosé is a pale pink made from Trousseau, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir and yields mixed fruit aromas and a rich, juicy palate.

Since 2005, Jason Lett has headed The Eyrice Vineyards founded in 1965 by his late father, David, and mother, Diana. His emphasis is on ethereally elegant wines with excellent structure to ensure longevity. Though still young, the 2017 The Eyrice South Block Reserve Pinot Noir from the original plantings in the Dundee Hills tastes intensely perfumed and pretty as can be with a seemingly weightless palate. Some tannin is apparent in this nascent beauty.

Winderlea Vineyard & Winery was founded in 2006 by husband and wife Bill Sweat and Donna Morris. Sweat makes the elegant wines with consultant Robert Brittan, emphasizing delicacy and complexity with refreshing acidity and fine tannins to encourage ageability. From the McMinnville AVA, the deep yellow 2021 Meredith Mitchell Pinot Blanc has a nutty nose and rich, lingering palate with great balance and long finish. It makes people wonder why more of this variety isn't planted.

Deborah Parker Wong, the U.S. National Editor of the guide, and Pamela Strayer, the U.S. Senior Editor, working through the draft entries as well as reviewing and approving the nominations made by the field coordinators for wine and winery awards. They will produce the 2024 Guide, expected to be released next year. In the meantime, copies of Slow Wine Guide USA 2023 containing reviews of 290 wineries, of which 46 are in Oregon, can be ordered online at [www.slowfoodusa.org/product/slow-wine-guide-usa-2023](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/product/slow-wine-guide-usa-2023). 🍷



IMAGE PROVIDED

Deborah Parker Wong