

The Ransom Report is a column by *The SOMM Journal's* East Coast Editor David Ransom. In each issue, David will discuss what's currently on his mind—and in his glass—gathered from conversations and experiences in the world of wine, spirits, and hospitality.

Keeping Things Exclusive

THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY PINOT NOIR AUCTION ALSO OFFERS GREAT CHARDONNAY

story and photo by David Ransom

WILLAMETTE VALLEY PINOT NOIR has held a special place in my heart since the 1980s, when my family—then owners of a winery in New York—made an award-winning Pinot Noir from Willamette fruit. Yet, I'd never visited Oregon until earlier this year, when I was invited to attend the Willamette Valley Pinot Noir Auction. My visit was wonderful, the auction exciting, and the Pinot Noir, of course, top notch. But do you want to know what really got me excited? The Chardonnay, which also made an appearance at the event.

The Willamette Valley wine industry, only about 50 years old, is built on the passions and dreams of residents who sought to produce world-class expressions from Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and Chardonnay. A few visionary families got

things going: The Eyrie Vineyards was the first, followed by Elk Cove, Adelsheim, Bethel Heights, Ponzi, and Sokol Blosser. Most of these pioneering wineries are now run by second-generation family members who are writing a new chapter in the region by focusing on Chardonnay (don't worry, they're still making Pinot) as the next great Willamette wine.

It's a smart move: Like in Burgundy, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay both flourish in Willamette's cooler climate. The Chardonnay in particular is bright and filled with minerality while showing lively acidity; it takes to aging beautifully. It's a classic, more Burgundian style of Chardonnay and a welcome change from more run-of-the-mill California Chards, which are often quite oaky.

Now, about the auction. Formally known as Willamette: The Pinot Noir Auction, it's an invitation-only trade event of one-off cuvées. Often carrying catchy names (my personal favorite was producer Harper Voit's Basalt-n-Pepa), they're created by the region's wineries specifically for the auction. This iteration accrued just over \$1 million in sales—a record for the young event, now in its fourth year. Its success cemented the fact that Willamette Valley wines have gained the respect of retailers, restaurants, and private buyers alike (and, in turn, the eyes of collectors). So, if you want to provide your customers with a wine that's almost never seen on other lists or shelves, this is the place to get it—Chardonnay included. *SR*

Forty-two-year-old Chardonnay plantings at Bethel Heights Vineyard, a winery in Oregon's Eola-Amity Hills AVA.



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