

THE WORLD OF FINE WINE



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2023 BURGUNDY / 2020 BAROLO / OREGON PINOT NOIR / DRC / CLOS ROUGEARD

OREGON PINOT NOIR: STAYING TRUE TO THE PINOT IDEAL

Andrew Jefford introduces a tasting shared with Anthony Rose and David Williams that confirmed the Pacific North Western state's reputation as one of the world's most accomplished producers of the grape variety, with congeniality accompanied in many instances by great complexity

Early 2025 will mark 60 years since David Lett first planted Pinot Noir in Oregon's Willamette Valley. They weren't the state's first Pinot plantings—those took root in 1961 farther south, in the Umpqua Valley; while wine vines in general (notably "Klevner") have been grown in the state since the 1880s. Few 20th-century planting gestures have been as significant as Lett's, though. "Papa Pinot" famously claimed that he'd been hit by "a cosmic brick" during his winetasting classes at the University of California, Davis, a bolide dense with the disorientating seductions of red Burgundy. After graduation and a 1964 European research tour, he arrived (against the advice of his Davis professors) in Willamette "with 3,000 vines and a theory." He rooted the cuttings in a rented nursery block, then went out hunting for suitable land. Eyrie Vineyards in the Dundee Hills was established in 1966.

The theory has held; the cosmic brick, hurtling forward in spacetime, has blossomed into a meteor shower. In 2022, Oregon had some 18,010ha (44,487 acres) of vineyards, with more than two thirds of those (12,522ha [30,929 acres]) in Willamette. Almost 60% of the planted state acreage is Pinot Noir, and that proportion is even higher in Willamette: around 67%. The Valley and its 11 nested AVA subregions occupy a propitious West Coast "Middle Earth" for Pinot: cloudy, temperate, mild. You don't get the savage winter chills of Washington

State or British Columbia in Willamette; nor do you get the lavish summer warmth that increasingly characterizes California's Pinot grounds. Pinot clearly enjoys Willamette's complex soils, based on marine sediments, basalt, loess, and Missoula-flood deposits; limestone is not necessary to produce beautiful, shapely wines from this cultivar.

The number of wineries increased fivefold in the first two decades of the 21st century—and the economic model for these tends to follow the small-scale Burgundy blueprint; some 70% of Oregon wineries currently produce less than 5,000 cases a year. There's a quality emphasis. Oregon may account for less than 1% of US domestic production, but it still managed (for example) to win 23% of the "Top 100" wine slots selected by *Wine Spectator* critics in 2021. Oregon wines' average retail price is comfortably above that achieved by either California or Washington State (\$17.10 in 2021, compared with \$10.46 and \$8.15 respectively).

OUR THREE TASTERS WERE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE OREGON PINOTS WE SURVEYED, AND THIS TASTING WAS SUCCESSFUL, WITH THE TOP 25 WINES ALL AVERAGING 90 POINTS OR ABOVE

Affability and more

Our three tasters were all enthusiastic about the Oregon Pinots we surveyed, and this tasting was successful, with the top 25 wines (out of 45) all scoring an aggregate of 90 points or above. Scores of 93 or above equate to "Outstanding wine of great beauty and articulacy," according to the *World of Fine Wine* rubric. Our most enthusiastic taster—David Williams—found no fewer than ten wines meriting 93 points and two meriting 94 and 95. Anthony Rose noted four wines on 93 and two each on 94 and 95, while I had five wines on 93 with one each on 94 and 95. David drew attention to the "consistent ripeness sweet spot" of these "alluringly fleshy but fluent wines," which managed to avoid the pitching between over- and under-ripeness typical of non-Burgundian Pinot elsewhere. Anthony Rose, too, admired their consistency, though he chose to highlight their "excellent fragrance, freshness, energy, and charming drinkability, closer in style to red Burgundy than any other Pinot Noir region I can think of."

Both comments imply affability—and this is what I would underline. There wasn't a single difficult or forbidding wine in the top half of our entry, and those that did disappoint in the lower half generally did so due to over-exuberance with oak or with fruit expression, or because of a lack of purity or precision. The finest wines, meanwhile, conveyed compelling aromatic complexity married to impressive depth and structure—a combination rare outside Burgundy.

THEY ARE WINES TO SPEND TIME OVER, AND WINES FOR GASTRONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS, TOO. THE PINOT IDEAL OF TENDERNESS, INTRICACY, AND GRACE IS RARELY BETRAYED

They are wines to spend time over, and wines for gastronomic partnerships, too. You will generally get a little more in the mouth from Oregon than you will from the Côte d'Or or the Côte Chalonnaise, and its textures will be a little softer—but Oregon is elsewhere, and this should be so. The Pinot ideal of tenderness, intricacy, and grace is rarely betrayed here. It was noticeable, indeed, that even among the lower-scoring wines there was generally one out of our three tasters with clear enthusiasm for the wine in question—the play of enthusiasm was more subjective in this tasting than for most. There's a huge amount on offer.

All sub-regions can excel

Could we draw any conclusions about sub-regions from the tasting? The fact that there were 14 wines from the breezy Eola-Amity AVA (sited in southern Willamette) compared with significantly fewer samples from other sub-regions, surely told its own story, and this sample imbalance makes conclusions about sub-region tentative

at best, if not thoroughly unreliable. Let's try, though—for fun if nothing else. Excluding the four bottom-placed wines (all of which had queries over character and condition) as well as the five wines without a sub-regional AVA, gives us an aggregate score for each sub-region of 276.33 for Yamhill-Carlton (three samples only), 272.85 for Eola-Amity, and 271.60 for Laurelwood. Dundee Hills (two samples only) scored 270.50 and tiny Ribbon Ridge 270. The three wines sold under the Chehalem Mountains AVA (which includes both Laurelwood and Ribbon Ridge) aggregated 269.66, while there was a single sample each from Tualatin Hills (274) and McMinnville (271). At this stage of Willamette evolution, it would seem as if all of these sub-regions can excel—but, as Anthony Rose pointed out, six of the 11 top places is certainly encouragement for Eola-Amity. Particular congratulations, finally, to Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon's team at Walter Scott, who took the two top places in our blind tasting, exceeding their previous double top-ten showing in our last Oregon Chardonnay tasting (see *WFW* 79, 2023, pp.210–17).

AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES

	Average	Range
Tasting	90	79–95
AJ	90	79–95
AR	90	82–95
DW	90	83–95

ANDREW JEFFORD'S TOP WINES

Ponzi Vineyards Pinot Noir Laurelwood Willamette Valley 2021 95
Lingua Franca Wines The Plow Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2019 94
The Beaux Frères Vineyard Beaux Frères Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 93
Bethel Heights Vineyard Aeolian Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2022 93
Gran Moraine Gran Moraine Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley 2021 93
Ponzi Vineyards Avellana Laurelwood Willamette Valley 2021 93
Walter Scott Sojeau Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 93
Bethel Heights Vineyard Estate Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2022 92
Brick House Evelyn's Pinot Noir Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 92
Cristom Mr Jefferson Cuvée Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2022 92
Patricia Green Cellars Estate Vineyard Old Vine Pinot Noir Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 92
Hope Well Wine Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 92
Walter Scott Koosah Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 92
Martin Woods Winery Jessie James Vineyard Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 92
00 Wines Richard Hermann Cuvée Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 92
00 Wines Shea Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley 2021 92
Goodfellow Family Cellars Durant Vineyard Heritage No.17 2021 92
Goodfellow Family Cellars Whistling Ridge Heritage No.19 Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 92
Hundred Suns Wine Bednarik Vineyard Pinot Noir Tualatin Hills Willamette Valley 2021 91
Lingua Franca Wines Tongue'n Cheek Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 91
Ponzi Vineyards Abetina Laurelwood Willamette Valley 2021 91

**Walter Scott Koosah Vineyard
Willamette Valley Eola-Amity
Hills 2021 (13.5% ABV) | 93**

AJ | Dark black-red. Sweet, warm, rounded, and complete: very enticing aromas here. Sweet fruits and truffley depths. A touch of struck match for the hipsters. Sound, long, pure, brightly lit: classic, down-the-line Eola-Amity, with wonderful drive, swish, and follow-through—some older vines here? Commanding wine in pure, flute-note style. 2024-30. | 92

AR | Vivid, youthful ruby. Lovely, complex perfume, mingling just a hint of (stylish) oak-spice with the dark fruits—dark cherry, loganberry—of ripe but not overripe Pinot Noir; a perfume that's confirmed by the taste and the texture, both of which are extremely well-rendered here, the flavors of dark fruits shining through despite a crafty veneer of stylish oak, which helps to round out and yet bring grip to the textural quality of a truly stylish wine. Despite its youth, this is approachable now but could benefit from cellaring for a good five years yet. 2024-32. | 95

DW | Gorgeously fragrant, detailed nose—black and red cherries punctuated with darker, earthier notes. Seamless, harmoniously silky palate of very fine, ripe, polished tannins and perky acidity, then a long finish of cherries, herbs, and subtle mushroom savoriness. Stylish. 2024-30. | 93

**Walter Scott Sojeau Vineyard
Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills | 93
2021 (13.5% ABV)**

AJ | Dark black-red. Fresh, lively, with that wonderful Eola-Amity cologne fragrance of citrus peels and gentian root as well as the sweet cherry: a glorious nose that I don't see Central Otago matching any time soon. Stupendo: bravo. Magnificent aromatic complexity. And then this is a wine with terrific, resounding depth of fruit, booming out across the palate. It drives and searches and powers through. There isn't a great deal of tannic structure to shape it, so the athletic acids do all the structuring and shaping work; nor, as yet, does it have the same level of aromatic finesse as is evident on the nose. Very commanding and authoritative for all that, and a wine to watch as the years drop away. 2024-34. | 93

AR | A youthful medium-ruby hue, this is fresh and attractively perfumed in red-berry mold, a veneer of oak vanilla sitting just underneath the fruit; the fruit is delicately textured, with

**SOUND, LONG, PURE,
BRIGHTLY LIT:
CLASSIC EOLA-AMITY,
WITH WONDERFUL
DRIVE, SWISH, AND
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COMMANDING WINE
IN PURE, FLUTE-NOTE
STYLE**

a ripe cherryish sweetness mitigated by an energetic freshness in which the firm, demanding acidity brings a savory twist to the delicacy of the red-fruit flavors, while the tannins, although quite present, add something to the overall textural quality of the fruit in a seriously accomplished red that has yet to fulfil its potential. 2024-32. | 93

DW | Immaculate, mouthfilling succulence of cooked and super-fresh cherry; grilled and freshly squeezed orange citrus, too; racy and energetic, with mouthwatering, ripe, polished tannins and a very long finish, with delectable herbal contrast and citrus bite. Immediately appealing. 2024-30. | 94

**Brick House Evelyn's Pinot Noir
Willamette Valley Ribbon Ridge | 93
2021 (13% ABV)**

AJ | Translucent, dark black-red. Fresh, almost leafy nose—a cooler site? Or an earlier pick, a new wave? So, a kind of aromatic urgency here, and you expect a more slender palate... and indeed that's what you get. Not quite green, but the definition of "ripeness" here is rather different from the Willamette norm... it may, as I first wondered, reflect site. It's a good wine, very pure, lively, nimble, gastronomic, palate-cleansing, and stylistically exciting. I was going to reference Hautes-Côtes, but actually it is much better than that (as a norm), with a much firmer, riper, and finer fruit core. Valid. 2024-29. | 92

AR | Mid-ruby, now evolving and shading to garnet at the rim, this is attractively perfumed, mingling as it does both cherry and raspberry fruit aromas with distinct herbal notes of thyme and oregano, all underpinned by an additional spicy note from the oak interplay; the dark berry fruit spiced with herb and light spicy oak is underpinned in an elegantly textured red by a refreshingly juicy acidity whose savory finish makes it one of the most food-friendly styles I've yet encountered. 2024-31. | 94

DW | Concentrated but polished, this is a smartly tailored and elegant Pinot, with a lovely seam of fresh, almost mineral, acidity that brings so much energy and glide. I suspect this will age beautifully, but the finely judged tannins and that racy-raspberry quality make it very appealing and refreshing now. 2024-32. | 93

**Gran Moraine Gran Moraine
Willamette Valley Yamhill-Carlton | 93
2021 (13.8% ABV)**

AJ | Very dark black-red: dense scarlet-black. Sweet, warm, subtle but invasive—seductive, even: superfine raspberry, with an inviting pheromone sheen. Wonderful work here. Lithe and energetic, very much majoring on the wine's pristine fruit qualities, which we celebrate. Raspberry, plum, orange, rose petal: complex fruits, shaped by soft tannins and understated acidity. Breath-freshening, despite the intrinsic richness: a super mouthful here, zesty and athletic. 2024-30. | 93

AR | Youthfully vivid in color. The aromas of this Pinot Noir are attractively complex, combining stylish oak spice with vivid dark-berry fruit characters; there's plenty of juicy-textured, ripe loganberry and dark-cherry flavor here, and while there's lots of immediate appeal,

there's a slight element of chewy extraction that catches the breath... But thanks to its complexity and concentration, it makes for a fine savory red that cries out for food. 2024-30. | 94

DW | High-toned succulence: a mass of ripe, dark fruits of the forest and creamy oak; focus and spark, too, on the palate: a lovely seam of fresh-cherry raciness to penetrate the richness, then a beetroot-earthiness and tang on the long, engaging finish. 2024-30. | 92

**Lingua Franca Wines The Plow
Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills | 93
2019 (13% ABV)**

AJ | Dark, purposeful black-red. This is very good: warm, settled, rounded, built on a splendid core of fruit that has now modulated toward secondary resonance. Harmonious, glowing, enticing... though relatively warm, in truth. Perhaps that accounts for its swift passage toward full secondary characteristics. Grand wealth of fruit here, and fine structure, too. Open, glowing, and accessible; there may be developments ahead but it has achieved its full articulation for me. The affable tannins are holding it in place; the fruit is open, ripe, structured, and long, but thoroughly scrutable. Fine Pinot, with a broad beam to roll around in the mouth and linger with at table. Splendid tannins. 2024-28. | 94

AR | Youthful ruby for its age, slightly shading to garnet now. There's some initial raspberryish sweetness on the mid-palate, and while the aromas are now quite evolved (in a good way), the fruit, too, is quite juicy in dark berry fruit vein, with sub-threshold oak bringing a suppleness of texture and a nice overall balance to a wine that's ready for drinking now but, with its incisive freshness, should continue to drink well for another three to five years. 2024-29. | 90

DW | Wonderful, shimmering but focused concentration of raspberry, cherry, and dark currants; upright and serious, but with plenty of crunch and sap and vigor; the tannins are plentiful but fine and polished, the acidity is refined and enlivening—crushed-rock minerals on a cool, composed, long finish that is sensitively, perfectly seasoned with salt and pepper. Elegance, built to last. 2024-38. | 95

**Ponzi Vineyards Pinot Noir
Willamette Valley The Laurelwood | 93
District AVA 2021 (13.4% ABV)**

AJ | Dark black-red; the darkest of its Laurelwood cohort. Sweet, warm, bright, and engaging; raspberry coulis, with some deeper notes of forest and undergrowth behind. Excellent aromatics here, balanced and complete. Sweet, warm, tender, expressive, and vinified with great restraint (invisible oak). What a lovely wine! It has just a little nuance or two of forest darkness but you barely notice—just there to add chiaroscuro; the raspberry (and cherry) are pure as dawn. It fills the mouth but leaves it unexhausted, spring-heeled, wanting a turn or two more on the dance floor. Bravo. 2024-31. | 95

AR | An almost brooding, vivid, dark ruby shows a degree of energy in the glass, confirmed by vividly fresh aromatics, distinctly Pinot Noir, with a really nice amalgam of floral and dark-berry

fruit notes. Similarly, when you taste, there's an instant hit of juicy, fresh-strawberry and cherry ripeness, an opulence restrained, however, by a new dimension to the wine in which the supporting structural elements add nicely savory notes that will chime nicely with food. It's still youthful, almost muscular, in structure, and time in bottle should add to its appeal. 2024-31. | **93**
DW | A wine that leads with sweetly ripe, glossy red cherry, of which there is plenty to spare here; good flow and energy, too; there's a refreshing orange-citrus tang, almost pithy and bittersweet, that adds to the straightforward fleshy pleasure here; good length, very fine tannins, and that subtly bitter tinge keeps the finish refreshing. Another accessible, appealing, and true-to-type Pinot. 2024-28. | **90**

The Beaux Freres Vineyard Beaux Freres Willamette Valley Ribbon Ridge AVA 2021 (13.5% ABV) | **93**

AJ | Dark, clear black-red. Fresh, lively, lifted, and engaging: sweet cherry, with some tarry warmth. Dry straw behind. Energetic and sappy Pinot, with lots of freshness and pungency glowing in its rosy cheeks. Pure-fruited, without a lot of structuring tannin but the fruit quality is outstanding, uncloying, pure, true, and long, marbled with lively acidity. Excellent Pinot. Check out your afterbreath, once you've swallowed: you'll find it fine, pure, pristine. Another testament of quality. 2024-31. | **93**
AR | Youthfully vivid in color, this is fresh and distinctively Pinot Noir in its perfumed fruit character, if still a tad on the shy side; the fruit is dark cherry- and loganberry-like, showing a marked, ripe sweetness and good full flavor, undercut by an almost-crisp, fresh acidity that adds a nice dimension to the character of the wine, a kind of savory, mouthwatering element that says, bring me to the menu; it's an understated, elegant style, seamlessly put together, a wine any Pinot lover would be happy to have in their cellar (i.e. me). 2024-34. | **92**

DW | An unforced and frictionless flow of enchantingly ripe cherry-blackberry fruit sashays across the palate in this immensely and immediately attractive wine; very harmonious, with a burgeoning forest-floor character and seamless tannins; gossily appealing and gulpable wine, with just enough earthy-rooty-bitterness to keep it from facile fruitiness. 2024-32. | **93**

OO Wines Shea Willamette Valley Yamhill-Carlton 2021 (14% ABV) | **93**

AJ | Dark black-red. This is very good. It doesn't give you everything straight away (so not a fruit-charging nose) but it's complex, engaging, even challenging—you need to strike in and look about. Forest, flowers, root spice, dried peels—all the good things, over a very quiet ground of cherry and plum. Terrific craft here. Deep and resourceful on the palate. Perhaps there is a bit too much dimension and structural grandeur here to appeal to Pinot classicists, but it is a wine full of layers and interest and makes up in width and allusion for what it might lack in primary fruit drive. 2024-30. | **91**

AR | Youthfully vivid ruby hue. This is fresh and sweetly perfumed, with strawberry and cherry

notes, the oak nicely playing second fiddle; there's some lovely, sumptuous dark-cherry fruit purity when you taste the wine, underpinned by stylish oak, good intensity of vivid loganberry and mulberry fruit flavors, with stylish oak adding a touch of spice but above all nicely rounding out the texture with a light grip, adding to the refreshingly juicy feel of an energetic, sumptuously pure Pinot Noir, with excellent aging potential. 2024-34. | **95**
DW | Very keen, tangy, yet darkly engaging fruit; earthy and botanical and sappy, some dark-chocolate bitterness, too; quite tight and coiled but full of contained energy; one to watch. 2024-30. | **92**

Lingua Franca Wines Tongue'n Cheek Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (13.5% ABV) | **92**

AJ | Dark black-red. Warm, plummy, rich; wonderfully enrobed. Seamless, so almost hard to pick out the detail, but a beautifully complete aroma. Impeccable oak here, just filling without ever forcing. It is the bigger, more orchestral style of Pinot. And that will be very clear on the palate, too: lush, lavish, ample, but the quality of the fruit at the core of this wine is outstanding. Relatively discreet tannins, but the ripe acids hold the wine well on track. Bottled as semi-mature, so you don't need to wait long to explore everything on offer here. 2024-29. | **91**

AR | Mid-ruby, youthful hue, still elemental in aroma, smells like a dry red of indeterminate origin; the flavors are attractive, however, lots of fresh, crunchy dark berries, nicely expressed, with no excess oak in the flavors, while the texture is firm, vigorously youthful, albeit a tad tough, showing quite some extraction, but that in itself brings a certain energy; needs patience for the dark arts of this Pinot Noir to shine through. 2024-30. | **90**

DW | Wonderfully refined and detailed nose, with vivid berry fruits—so fresh and inviting; the palate courses and surges with that finely glimmering red and black fruit, there's sappiness and fine mineral acidity—a wine of immediate charm and verve but one with enough to intrigue over time, too. 2024-32. | **95**

Evening Land Vineyards Summit Seven Springs Estate Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2022 (13.2% ABV) | **92**

AJ | Scarlet-black, but perhaps with less polyphenolic density than the '21s. Rounded, fresh, and classical, with both black cherry and raspberry fruits. Soft-focus but very enticing here, and a lovely, falling sweetness: cherry Chantilly cream. A leafy note brings freshness. Vital and mouthfilling, with the leafy note a bit more prominent than I thought it would be on the nose. Zesty Pinot. 2024-28. | **90**

AR | Vivid and youthfully ruby-hued. A sweet, spicy, and refreshingly herbal perfume, and distinctively Pinot Noir, although still youthful, the sweet red-cherry and raspberry fruit, tinged with herb, is already approachably juicy and hard not to drink, even if it will continue to improve in bottle over the next five years or so, given its balance and elegance. 2024-29. | **92**

AN UNFORCED AND FRICTIONLESS FLOW OF ENCHANTINGLY RIPE CHERRY-BLACKBERRY FRUIT SASHAYS ACROSS THE PALATE IN THIS IMMENSELY ATTRACTIVE WINE

DW | Very primary and youthful: unmediated red-cherry juice; shimmering with fresh-fruit concentration and succulence, supple, ripe tannins, and a lovely, freshening streak of blood-orange tang and pithy bite. A delightful, young, fresh red wine filled with verve and life. 2024-30. | **93**

Bethel Heights Vineyard Estate Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2022 (13.3% ABV) | **92**

AJ | The darkest of the run of '22 Eola-Amities: deep black-red. Warm, open, well-rounded aromas of chunky red fruits, tobacco, root spice, oat flake, and leather. Very attractively fashioned and controlled. An animal hint behind a big depth-charge of fruit: plum, raspberry, currant, pomegranate, and black cherry—they're all there. Wow: splendid. The oak is well done, shaping and cossetting. Nothing much secondary yet, but give it time... the aromas show that those nuances will eventually fetch up on the palate, too. A grand wine for the next decade in relatively ostentatious style. 2024-32. | **92**

AR | A vivid, deep, youthful ruby, promising a lot, if the color is anything to go by. It's a little bit shy in aroma but ticking the boxes of freshness, floral perfume, and red-berry fragrance without the interference of obvious oak; and when you taste, there's plenty of youthful vigor there, almost an attack on the tongue, lots of juicy, red-berry fruit, with crunchy, cranberryish acidity and oak very much a background feature; still too young at this stage to enjoy drinking, I would gamble that it will gradually open out from (not very ugly) ducking into a (fine) swan in three to four years. 2024-32. | **90**

DW | Sumptuous, plush, polished, and ripe: delightful fruit quality here, so inviting, yet not at all overbearing or excessive; there's a real streak of tingling acidity and beetroot earthiness that contrasts and enlivens. Real clarity and verve on the long finish. 2024-30. | **93**

Hundred Suns Wine Bednarik Vineyard Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Tualatin Hills 2021 (13.6% ABV) | **91**

AJ | Clear, dark black-red. Ample sweet charm here—not just the cherries, but the cherry blossom, too. Holds well in the glass. Bright, sweet, textured, fresh—very much the mouthful you'd expect from the aromas, save that it has a little more substance and drive. There are some

ANTHONY ROSE'S VERDICT

A year on from our Oregon Chardonnay tasting, the tasting of Oregon Pinot Noir was a revelation in similar but different ways... and it lies in the nature of Pinot Noir itself. For while the forgiving nature of Chardonnay has made it such a successful globetrotting grape variety, Pinot Noir is by its very nature so much harder to get right. Not for nothing known as the heartbreak grape, it demands more specific soils, altitudes, exposures, and climate, and is more susceptible to vintage variation.

From a winemaking perspective, I found that these wines were for the most part made with clear confidence, experience, and skill, rising to the quality challenge. Oak was in a minor key throughout and was rarely overt. Wine faults were few and far between. Most of the wines were under cork, but only one wine was obviously corked. Given how youthful the wines were, it was testament to the skill of the winemakers that these were wines of immediate appeal. They can happily be drunk young, even if the best will show secondary complexity with a few more years in bottle.

Given the proximity of the vineyards and the AVAs within the wider Willamette Valley, it was possible to detect stylistic differences. At the same time, there has been much success

in locating the best climate and soils within the Willamette Valley (leading to its distinct AVAs). It's not a competition, but the Eola-Amity Hills AVA perhaps shone brightest, taking six of the 11 top spots. Overall, what came across most strongly was the extent to which the cool climate of the valley, aided and abetted by proximity to the Pacific Ocean, produced truly delicious wines of excellent fragrance, freshness, energy and charming drinkability, closer in style to red Burgundy than any other Pinot Noir region I can think of; not California, not Australia, not New Zealand, not Germany.

Oregon Pinot Noir has its very own distinctive character. More often than not they are wines of beguiling floral and fruit fragrances, enhanced but not overwhelmed by the judicious use of oak, sumptuous fruit characters in the spectrum of raspberry through cherry and strawberry to darker berry fruit, often with an umami-like, savory dimension derived from the natural acidity that underpins almost every wine. Vintage of course plays a part, and while some of the 2022s are still slightly rough diamonds, yet to fulfil their potential, the thoroughly accessible 2021s and older vintages will test your resolve and challenge you to resist temptation.

TOP WINES

00 Wines Shea Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley 2021 **95**

Walter Scott Koosah Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **95**

Brick House Evelyn's Pinot Noir Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 **94**

Gran Moraine Gran Moraine Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley 2021 **94**

Cristom Jessie Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

Domaine Drouhin Oregon Laurene Dundee Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

Ponzi Vineyards Pinot Noir Laurelwood Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

Walter Scott Sojéau Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

00 Wines Richard Hermann Cuvée Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **92**

Adelsheim Breaking Ground Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley 2021 **92**

The Beaux Frères Vineyard Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 **92**

Evening Land Vineyards Summum Seven Springs Estate Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2022 **92**

Adelsheim Laurel Leaf Vineyard Laurelwood Willamette Valley 2021 **91**

Hundred Suns Wine Bednarik Vineyard Pinot Noir Tualatin Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **91**

Penner-Ash Wine Cellars Willamette Valley 2021 **91**

Trisaetum Estates Reserve Pinot Noir Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 **91**

firm, meaty-juicy tannins that are very welcome and bring a little grandeur to the fruits. A delicious Chambolle-style wine. 2024-30. | **91**

AR | Good depth of vivid, youthful ruby. This sets out with good intentions, showing an attractive, Turkish delight-like, floral fragrance tinged with raspberry and an underlying hint of fresh herb; the fruit is really well-handled, showing off the raspberry, juicy texture at first, with no obvious oak other than in the rounded, supple texture of the wine, whose adolescent muscle then kicks in, bringing enough structure to the wine for cellaring for five years plus. 2024-30. | **91**

DW | Very pretty nose, with a lilting violet tone to the scents of this attractive middleweight,

with a lovely, feathery feel to the tannins and nice depth of airy, red-cherry fruit and a fine mist of almost-orange-citrus acidity; a beguilingly gentle, summer-breezy ambience to a charmingly accessible Pinot. 2024-28. | **92**

Adelsheim Breaking Ground Willamette Valley Chehalem Mountains 2021 | **91**
(13% ABV; screwcap)

AJ | Dark black-red though translucent; scarlet (like most). Ample fruity, but lacks a little purity and lift. More compote-like; still agreeable, of course. Lots in here, but all a bit stuffed-in; I feel we need more purity and architecture. The ample

fruit suggests the site is a good one, and I should stress that no one need feel short-changed here—it's a delicious mix of red and black fruits, full of life and zest. 2024-30. | **90**

AR | Good, youthful, vivid ruby. This is sweetly perfumed, showing red berry and an undertone of fresh mint; there's plenty of sweetly ripe dark-cherry fruit to be enjoyed with a hint of oak spice, all buoyed by nicely textured, sinewy tannins and mouthwateringly fresh acidity; overall, this is an attractive, well-made style of Pinot, readily accessible in its youth, but with enough grip and structure to age and even improve in bottle over the next five years. 2024-29. | **92**

DW | Sweet, mossy *sous-bois* and strawberry—we're in Pinot country. Juicy yet savory; supple tannins and a satisfyingly chewy, subtly aniseed-bitter finish of some intensity. 2024-30. | **92**

Cristom Jessie Vineyard Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 | **91**
(13.5% ABV)

AJ | Light, clear black-red. Sweet and warm, though with a little less complexity and grain than the very best of its peers. Svelte, lifted cherry fruits. Ditto on the palate: delivers amply, but without the engraving and shadowing and aromatic resonance of the very best of its sub-AVA peers. Lovely fruits, nonetheless. 2024-29. | **89**

AR | A youthful mid-ruby in color, this shows an attractive, classic, berry-fruit Pinot Noir fragrance and freshness; the fruit, when you taste it, is delicate and flavorsome, possibly a touch on the lean side (old-timers might say Old World), but extremely well-wrought, with the oak very much in the background and the fruit itself hovering between red-berry sweetness and umami-like savoriness; overall, this is fine-boned and finely balanced, only just a tad dry on the finish, but nothing that a good plate of food wouldn't enhance. 2024-30. | **93**

DW | Sweet, grainy oak and baked strawberry, a little spice, too: intriguing. There's richness and intensity here, but a certain delicacy of expression all the same in soft-focus style, the finish filled with easy, soft-berry fruitiness. 2024-30. | **92**

Ponzi Vineyards Avellana Willamette Valley The Laurelwood District AVA 2021 (13.4% ABV) | **91**

AJ | Dark black-red, with plenty of black in the mix. Much deeper fruits than many. No longer sweet cherry, but pippy raspberry and even a little plum. Exuberant, cleanly defined and enticing. Ample wealth of fruit on the palate, falling like autumn rain on the grateful tongue. It's sweet—but not too sweet; firm—but not too firm. There's a savory/earthy note, too, and lushly soft supporting tannins. Spot-on concentration (not too much, once again) makes for gorgeous drinking; Pinot truly at ease with its place. 2024-31. | **93**

AR | Medium-ruby in color and starting to show a degree of evolution in the glass. This is quite subtle in its aromatics, coming at you quite shyly with gentle floral notes and a background hint of oak spice, but no less authentically Pinot Noir for all that; and when you taste, it continues

to grow on you, albeit still subtle, but with a good, authentic berry-fruit middle supported by a firmish structure combining elements of oak, tannin, and fresh acidity in a well-made, appealing, unostentatious whole. 2024-29. | **90**
DW | Ripe blackcurrant coulis—richly, deeply scented; the palate is plush, deep-filled, with a slightly obtrusive oakiness (as much in the tannin as the flavor); it's a richer style, perhaps a little too forceful for the Pinot top drawer, but the subtle sage and cherry-ish acidity lift the finish appealingly. 2024-30. | **90**

Abbott Claim Abbott Claim Vineyard Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Yamhill-Carlton 2021 | **91**
 (13% ABV)

AJ | Dark, translucent black-red. Fresh and attractive, in the higher register, but relatively simple set against the best of its sub-AVA peers. Ample sweet-fruited charm. Just a touch sinewy, dry, and grassy at the finish, but rewarding, arrow-head Pinot through the mid-palate core, once again in the higher register: pure, bright, sustained, curranty, and pungent. 2024-28. | **90**
AR | A youthful mid-ruby in color. This shows an appealing berry-fruit Pinot in aroma, not especially expressive, but Pinot nonetheless; and the berry-fruit quality that follows though when you taste it is just caught a little short and hollowed out by the somewhat drying tannins that follow in its wake; leaving you with a pleasant if not charming representation of Pinot Noir. 2024-27. | **89**

DW | Coffee grains and cassis; sleek, dark, panther-like feel to the tannins and lots of coiled energy in the lipsmacking dark-berry and currant fruit: classy, stylish, lithe, long. 2024-30. | **93**

Evesham Wood Vineyard Le Puits Sec (Organic) Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (13% ABV) | **91**

AJ | Dark black-red. An almost lemony energy here, behind the black fruits: engaging. Herbal notes, too: complex and fine. Very tight and acidic (early pick? site?). If you like zest in your Pinot, find it here. 2024-29. | **89**

AR | A youthful mid-ruby in color, this is still a tad elemental in its aromatic profile, like a bud waiting to flower, but the signs are positive; and when you taste, there's some youthfully fresh loganberry-like fruit here; the acidity brings freshness and delicacy, not to mention a nice savoriness and tannic grip that make it a good food wine. Understated and subtle, a good wine for squirreling away a few bottles. 2024-30. | **90**
DW | The initial impression is of a punnet of just-picked strawberries, with that slightly high-toned, earthy, almost gamey, wet-straw tang as well as all the juicy, sweet fruitiness; the texture, too, all softly juicy fruit; summery, warm, and gently perfumed—entirely engaging and evocative. 2024-30. | **93**

Goodfellow Family Cellars Durant Vineyard Heritage No.17 Willamette Valley Dundee Hills 2021 (13% ABV) | **91**

AJ | Very light and translucent; our lightest

wine so far (nearing mid-point). Lifted and graceful aromas of strawberry and woodruff (springtime, woodland, vanilla-like). Beguiling. Fresh and zesty: daringly restrained on the palate. Have we got quite enough resonance out of the vineyard here? For me, not quite. Finishes a little firmly and abruptly, though you can't fault the freshness. Classy wine, for all that. Mouthwatering redcurrant flavors; fine length and vinosity. A debate about what place means is always worth having. 2024-29. | **91**

AR | Mid-ruby, just starting to show some evolution in color. Some herb and mint in the aroma before the cherry kicks in; this is pleasantly medium-bodied in style, with some juicy cherry fruit in the middle, just a tad underpowered in fruit, with pleasing acidity and little structure, suggesting a wine for early to medium-term drinking; nothing at all wrong with it, but you might just want more fruit, more flavor. 2024-26. | **89**

DW | Lucid, light, airy, with plentiful feathery melt-on-impact tannins—youthful raspberry fruit and mineral acidity; bergamot-pithiness on the finish; just perhaps missing some essential spark or extra something. 2024-30. | **91**

00 Wines Hyland Willamette Valley McMinnville 2021 (13.2% ABV) | **90**

AJ | Dark black-red. Super Pinot classicism here: the perfect wine for any blind-tasting exam. Locked on to that raspberry-with-beetroot undertow like a limpet. And sweet and charming withal: super aromatics. This is exactly what you get on the palate: a great bowling hoop of pure, purissimo Pinot fruit, wheeling it over your tongue. Little to detain; little not to delight. This is Pinot. 2024-28. | **90**

AR | Medium-ruby in color. This is showing some somewhat premature gamey notes in the aroma, while tasting the wine brings an immediate sweetness of cherry fruit, with oak in the background playing no obvious part, while the tannins come in rather sooner than you might have liked, rendering the enterprise quite savory and dry overall, and just a tad underpowered on the fruit side. 2024-26. | **88**

DW | A slick pool of macerated cherry, bergamot, sage, and thyme; plump, mouthwateringly succulent, but fleet-footed and refreshingly bitter-tangy; long, fruit-filled finish, with snap and savor; a really complete, immediately appealing but ageworthy Pinot Noir, full of character. 2024-30. | **93**

YOUTHFULLY FRESH LOGANBERRY-LIKE FRUIT; THE ACIDITY BRINGS FRESHNESS AND DELICACY; A NICE SAVORINESS AND TANNIC GRIP THAT MAKE IT A GOOD FOOD WINE

Cristom Mr Jefferson Cuvée Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2022 (13.5% ABV)

AJ | Dark black-red. Ample, sweet warmth and tender charm. Rounded and enticing. Sappy, vivid, and energetic, with more acidic strike and energy (and brisker tannins) than I expected from the nose. This is an excitingly multi-dimensional wine that actually needs a year or two to settle down (unusual here, when most are so lovely from the get-go). Grand purity and drive: an exciting, zesty, sappy, thrusting prospect, though much less primary and sweet than its peers. An even higher score beckons if it acquires more aromatic finesse. 2024-30. | **92**

AR | This is medium-ruby in color and starting to show some evolution in the glass despite its young age. It's a tad muted in aroma, and the fruit, while still youthful, is just a little on the rustic side, with some bitter tannins and marked, salty acidity scooping out the mid-palate and creating a slight hollow where you would hope that the fruit would be. 2024-26. | **87**

DW | Very pure Oregon Pinot nose—you'd be happy to get this in a blind-tasting exam; lovely fruit ripeness, just-off-the-bush ripe; immaculate and flowing with youthful, fruity energy through to the entirely refreshing, sappy-tangy, cherry-and-raspberry-filled, long finish. 2024-30. | **92**

Bethel Heights Vineyard Aeolian Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2022 (13.4% ABV)

AJ | Dark black-red; translucent scarlet. Less richly expressed fruit than the best of its peers (though we only have four 2022s). Sweet, grainy, and enticing Pinot nonetheless, with some Cologne-spice finishing finesse. Juicy, pure, fragrant Pinot, with lots of those Cologne spices and dried fruit peels. Beautiful wine built on a winning fruit core. It has a bit less grunt and push than [the Cristom Mr Jefferson Cuvée 2022], but the aesthetics here at this early stage are hard to beat: aromatic arabesques, lacy textures, seduction from the off. 2024-30. | **93**

AR | Mid-ruby, a tad wan in color or maybe it's just pinot but it is quite evolved for its apparent youth, there's some pleasant cherry fragrance, reprised in the fruit to which is pleasantly juicy and ripe, nicely underpinned by a nip of refreshing acidity without any over oak and finishing on a dry, mouthwateringly savory note that demands food. 2024-27. | **89**

DW | Slightly stewed and jammy fruit, and a touch candied and sweet on the palate, leavened by some sparks of red-cherry acidity; straightforwardly easy-drinking, if not quite with the detail and energy of others in this flight. 2024-30. | **89**

Martin Woods Winery Jessie James Vineyard Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (13.5% ABV) | **90**

AJ | Dark but clear, bright and limpid scarlet-red. Soft, zesty, and lively: spot-on. All the delicacy and tenderness of lovely Pinot on fruited show. Effortlessly on message in graceful style. That's exactly what you'll find on the palate, too:

ALLURINGLY DARK, HERB-SEASONED NOSE, WITH A KIRSCH RICHNESS; LOTS OF RED- AND BLACK-BERRY FRUIT GIVEN A PULSE BY RED PLUM AND TANGY BERGAMOT; SILKY AND ENGAGING

delicacy, grace, and precision, in softly structured style, with a sweet, mouth-freshening finish. 2024-30. | 92

AR | Youthful mid-ruby in color. There's a pleasing, red-berry fruit fragrance and a hint of vanilla oak, with a pleasantly ripe, juicy berry fruit quality to this wine, without any excessively overt oak influence, bringing a balance and freshness that makes it an enjoyably approachable dry red. 2024-25. | 89

DW | Floral (rose-petal) and ripe raspberry notes alongside a pinewood, resinous character, peppery spice, and a faint wisp of smoke. Dry tannins on the longish, bittersweet finish—it's just a tad raw, slightly wild perhaps, but distinctive and not without charm. 2024-32. | 90

Ponzi Vineyards Reserve Pinot Noir Estate Grown Willamette Valley The Laurelwood District AVA 2019 (14% ABV) | 90

AJ | Dark, dense black-red, not quite opaque but not far off. A little bit high-toned, and something a little dry and varnished in the aromas, too—but also a tobacco mellowness and a plant-sweetness. An intriguing nose... let's give it a little more air. Still a fair description ten minutes later. Rather sinewy and with some ghost leaf in the fruit; the oak a little too forceful. Ample and drinkable, nonetheless. 2024-29. | 87

AR | Medium-ruby and now starting to evolve to garnet at the rim of the glass. This shouts marked aromatics of cherry, light oak, and a suggestion of mint; taken aback at first, I liked how expressively the aromas shot out of the glass, while the fruit, also expressive, is less shouty, more restrained, with an appealing strawberry flavor underpinned by a minty note and buoyed by a firm-textured fruit quality in which the supporting elements are well-integrated. 2024-30. | 90

DW | Alluringly dark, herb-seasoned nose (dried herbes de Provence), with a kirsch richness; lots of red- and black-berry fruit given a pulse by red plum and tangy bergamot; silky of tannin and a long and engaging, complex, bittersweet finish. The most serious of the Laurelwood District flight, but retaining some levity: nothing pompous or ponderous here! 2024-32. | 93

Patricia Green Cellars Estate Vineyard Old Vine Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Ribbon Ridge 2021 (13.5% ABV) | 90

AJ | Dark black-red. Sweet and warm: a big spray

of raspberry. Open-pored and welcoming; not quite jammy, but certainly sweet; very Oregon, actually, for me, in its evocation of a languid autumn full of mists and fine rains and warm afternoons and rolling hills and the time to tell tales. These are the things I think of when I smell wines like this. Plenty of ripeness here, and some texture, too; if [the Brick House Evelyn's Pinot Noir 2021] suggested higher altitude, here we are protected and low. Sunny and warm. Lush and open: delicious. Enjoy the ripe raspberry and plum, and there's enough shaping tannin and bonded acidity to keep you coming back for more. 2024-30. | 92

AR | A healthy, youthful ruby in color, this is pleasingly fresh if quite broad in aroma, but showing fruit over oak and a hint of herb; it's nicely full-flavored, with seamless red-berry fruit and sub-threshold oak nicely put together, pleasing berry fruit, nicely underlining acidity, no overt oak—a wine with the right things in the right place that's almost self-deprecatingly introvert, yet at the same time, with balance and drinkability, very likeable. 2024-28. | 90

DW | Some thickly sweet fruit and oak on the nose and somewhat bristling and foursquare: this is no agile dancer, although the quality of tangy, orange-pithy bittersweetness and a complex earthiness brings life and interest to the finish; just at an awkward stage, perhaps? 2024-32. | 88

Domaine Drouhin Oregon Laurene Willamette Valley Dundee Hills 2021 (14.1% ABV) | 90

AJ | Clear, dark black-red. Zippy raspberry with quiet root spice: lots of fruit appeal here. Excellent. Rhubarb, too, and apricot. Exciting, fruit-fest flavors, as the nose suggested; plump and mouthfilling. Lovely intrinsic sweetness to those fruits, and they have purity and length, too. Just a little more structuring tannin and vinous sinew would be welcome. One of those bounding, exuberant Labrador wines that would be even better if it could just calm down a little. So much to enjoy, though! 2024-30. | 90

AR | Medium-ruby in color, with a healthy, youthful hue, this is still quite youthful in its aromatic profile, showing a degree of berry-fruit fragrance, underscored by fresh herbal notes, too; there's some attractive, mid-palate cherry-sweet ripeness of fruit, a hint of herb, too, and as you turn the wine around in the mouth, that sweetness gradually turns to savory as the double-whammy of fresh acidity and ever-slightly chewy tannin do their job of putting the fruit into the context of drinking with food; something that this wine is clearly made for. 2024-29. | 93

DW | Plentiful cherry and plum in fairly luscious style, blanketed with sweet vanilla oak and rather forceful alcohol on the nose and, as the wine progresses, a spirity finish. 2024-30. | 87

Adelsheim Laurel Leaf Vineyard Willamette Valley Laurelwood 2021 (13% ABV) | 90

AJ | The clearest and lightest of its peers: a deep scarlet. Another wine whose relatively subdued fruit seems shadowed by oak at this stage—

perhaps a shame. A banana note also, adding sweetness to the cherry. The palate is just a little dry-fruited, but it has considerable grace and elegance—and restraint. Part of that dryness are the tannins but I'd still much rather have them than not. Redcurrant fruits, here, which makes a welcome change to all the cherry and raspberry. Very digestible. 2024-29. | 90

AR | This is relatively pale in color, but no more so than you might expect of a youthful Pinot Noir. The aromas show a combination of nicely integrated oak and dark-berry fruit in the right proportion, even if the oak-vanilla is a tad prominent at this point in time; and when you taste, the same proportions are nicely measured in the flavors of juicy-textured cherry, affirmed in a positive sense by background oak-spice and underlined by a nice structure of freshness and tannin, bringing it to savory conclusion. 2024-30. | 91

DW | Some earthy tones here: beetroot and pomegranate as well as cherry and red plum and bergamot—this is recognizably Pinot in flavor and also in feel, with an agile suppleness and fleshiness to a bright, juicy, slightly candied, medium-length finish. Again, very pleasantly accessible, if not built for the long haul. 2024-28. | 88

Trisaetum Estates Reserve Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Ribbon Ridge 2021 (13.3% ABV) | 90

AJ | Dark black-red, though not quite the darkest of the Ribbon Ridge run (second-darkest). Gosh: toffee. Very different from its peers. The big sweet. Ditto ten minutes later. Juicy, lively, sweet-fruited, balanced with soft, accommodating acidity and a little tentative tannin. Much more serious on the palate, thus, than the nose suggested; it drinks well. But not the subtlest wine on the table. 2024-28. | 88

AR | A vivid, deep ruby. The aromas of this youthful Pinot Noir are distinct and powerful and could only be Pinot Noir, with fresh mulberries and an underlying floral note; it's a wine that's very different—uniquely Oregon, dare one say—as it just couldn't be Burgundy... or maybe it could; either way, there's a lot going on in flavor terms, with plenty of ripe mulberry-sweet fruit cut by that typically incisive mulberry-like acidity; that brings a freshness and backbone to a firm-structured red in which the tannins are slightly drying on the finish. 2024-30. | 91

DW | Cherry bakewell—almonds and marzipan and cherry jam; intense but none the worse for it; there's a certain lipsmacking chewiness and lively acid tang to hold and frame the fruit through the quite long, and pleasingly sappy, finish. 2024-32. | 90

Hundred Suns Wine Old Eight Cut Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Willamette Valley 2021 (13.9% ABV) | 89

AJ | Exuberantly deep and dark scarlet, shading to black-scarlet at the core. Sweet and superficially enticing, but a touch vegetal (sweetcorn). Clears a little with air, and the cherry starts to sing... and then ten minutes later, it is very attractively perfumed and full of cherry

chic. Pour splashily or decant and you'll find much to enjoy. Principally fruit, with little tannin and the acidity zipped up beneath the fruit-sugar charm—but it really sings. A round orb of songbird Pinot. Deftly delicious. 2024-28. | **89**

AR | This is youthfully vivid in color, and although a tad shy in aroma, there's a feeling of dark-berry fruit, such as dark cherry and loganberry, lurking in the background, the oak, which is unobtrusive, perhaps holding it back a little; the fruit is distinctively Pinot Noir, with an attractive spectrum of red-berry flavors nicely supported by a juiciness of texture and soft yet integrated acidity, all creating a seamless whole that makes for a wine that's approachable now but will benefit from another two to four years of aging in bottle. 2024-28. | **90**

DW | Easygoing succulence of ripe, sweet cherry and plum, very bright, finger-staining freshness of fruit, with fine, ripe-fruit tannins and a juicy fruit-borne finish: a charming Oregonian "village" wine. 2024-28. | **89**

Ponzi Vineyards Abetina Willamette Valley The Laurelwood District AVA 2021 (13.5% ABV) | **89**

AJ | Dark black-red. Firmly oaky, and a little too much in truth, in that it muscles out the wine beneath. But a quality assemblage, for all that... so give it a year or two. You see the fruit much more clearly on the palate, and it's broad, mouthcoating, with violet as well as raspberry; medium length but very satisfying. This palate bodes well for excellent development ahead, and the wine's concentration, poise, and class mark it out. Certainly a point or two more once that oak has settled down into the wine. 2024-32. | **91**

AR | Medium-ruby in color and just starting to show some evolution, with light garnet at the rim of the glass. This is quite overtly oaky when you smell it, the oak more in savory than in sweet mode, asking questions; happily, the oak is better integrated when you taste, dissolving nicely into a wine whose distinctive berry-fruit Pinot Noir identity is initially satisfying but then takes you in the direction of some rarer, chewy, dry tannins toward the finish; time and food can both serve to mitigate that slight harshness, and I'm sure that in the right circumstances, they will. 2024-28. | **90**

DW | Sweet, cherry-cola oak to the fore, which sits a little heavily on some immaculate red fruit: lovely, unforced acidity, but it's not hanging together entirely comfortably at the moment. 2024-30. | **87**

JK Carriere Wines Gemini Vineyard Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Chehalem Mountains 2021 (12.5% ABV) | **89**

AJ | One of the two deepest of the Chehalem contingent: deep black-scarlet. Lacks a little aromatic focus and precision: gruffly fruity, with little charm—but delivers. Some cereal grain and raisin. On the palate, too, the ripeness seems to have got away here, and the end result has some baked flavors and textural rigidity, as well as that telltale cereal-grain note on the aromatics. 2024-29. | **87**

AR | This is vivid and deep-colored. Still a tad shy in aroma, but showing potential; and after the aroma, the fruit is quite concentrated and firmly extracted, medium-bodied, with initially some sweetly ripe berry-fruit flavors, turning quite quickly toward a savory character in which the acidity and the drying tannins start to dominate even before the fruit is allowed really to express itself; it may be that this will become more enjoyable with time, but it's a bit of a struggle at the moment. 2024-28. | **88**

DW | An energetic push-and-pull of salty-savory, almost bloody and sweetly-berried tones, plus a classic Pinot forest-floor character, plentiful youthful, ripe tannins, and an echoing, salty finish. Lightly structured yet concentrated; full of intrigue. 2024-30. | **93**

McKinlay Vineyards Estate Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Willamette Valley 2021 (13% ABV) | **89**

AJ | Deep, dark red-scarlet, but more translucent than its other four straight Willamette peers. Enticing, fresh-air and rain-shower cherry fruits take the lead, with something a little tarrier behind. Attractive. Pure, mid-length, with slightly more secondary and "grown-up" fruit than those other straight Willamettes. Has a little bit of lean and green in there somewhere, which adds to the general air of authenticity and Europhilia. Plenty of Bourgogne Rouge is not as good as this—and in a flight of Bourgogne Rouge, I'm not at all sure that it would be spotted as alien. Delicious mealtime Pinot. 2024-29. | **90**

DAVID WILLIAMS'S VERDICT

As was the case for many European wine lovers of my generation, Oregon was the source of the first non-Burgundian Pinot Noirs to really impress me—wines good enough to dispel any lingering French claims that the variety was incapable of traveling successfully, and which offered real "pinosity" in a mode that was distinctive rather than merely imitative.

For good or ill, first impressions, in wine as in life, are hard to shake, and those initial examples shaped a view that has only been reinforced by my interactions with Oregon Pinot in the years since—which is to say I very much looked forward to this tasting as a chance to sample what I was sure was going to be a selection of sensitively made, high-quality Pinot Noirs.

I wasn't disappointed. This tasting was a showcase for a quality I've always treasured in Oregon Pinot, a quality that I also found in abundance in wines featured in the sister tasting of the state's Chardonnays conducted by WFW last year, and which I described, in my summary at the time, as "an easy, natural balance." If anything, however, the Oregonian achievement with Pinot in this respect is even more impressive, if only because of the relative

scarcity, on a global level, of convincing Pinot wines: while excellent Chardonnay is being made all over the world (and has been for some time), comparably fine Pinot, it seems to me, is still, for all the progress made from Central Otago to Yarra and the Santa Rita Hills, much less evenly distributed.

In general, Oregonian Pinot producers have been much more successful at finding a consistent ripeness sweet spot than their peers elsewhere in the New World: certainly, this tasting had none of the switching between extremes of soupy extraction and reedy thinness I've found in recent tastings of Californian Pinot Noir (as good as the best wines are). There was a consistency in this run of alluringly fleshy but fluent wines which owes as much to winemaking disposition and self-confidence as it does to climate, and which was also a hallmark of the Chardonnay tasting. But while, with Chardonnay, that consistency may have come at the expense of the truly thrilling (and the truly hamfisted) here (perhaps inevitably with fickle Pinot) the highs were higher (and the lows lower), with some genuinely outstanding, site-specific wines that are a match for Pinot anywhere.

TOP WINES

Lingua Franca Wines The Plow Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2019 **95**

Lingua Franca Wines Tongue'n Cheek Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **95**

Evening Land Vineyards La Source Seven Springs Estate Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2019 **94**

Walter Scott Sojau Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **94**

OO Wines Hyland McMinnville Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

Abbott Claim Vineyard Pinot Noir Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

The Beaux Frères Vineyard Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

Bethel Heights Vineyard Estate Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2022 **93**

Brick House Evelyn's Pinot Noir Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

JK Carriere Wines Gemini Vineyard Pinot Noir Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

Evening Land Vineyards Summum Seven Springs Estate Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2022 **93**

Evesham Wood Vineyard Le Puits Sec Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

Ponzi Vineyards Reserve Pinot Noir Estate Grown The Laurelwood District Willamette Valley 2019 **93**

Walter Scott Koosah Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

OO Wines Shea Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley 2021 **93**

TERRIFIC AROMATIC WORK HERE. HARD NOT TO KEEP COMING BACK TO THIS ONCE YOU'VE SMELLED IT. OUTSTANDING WINE. DEEP, TRENCHANT PINOT, BUT FINE PURITY OF FRUIT

AR | A youthful medium-ruby hue, this is pretty shy in aroma; you feel that there's some berry fruit lurking there but you want it to give you more to bring you in rather than hold you at bay, which this is doing: Pinot Noir does, however, come through when you taste, softly rounded in texture and quite juicy and approachable, even if the tannins are a little dry on the finish and the middle is not quite as filled out as hoped. 2024-26. | **88**

DW | Expressive and deceptively simple, at first sniff and on first taste, this is light but rounded and pretty, with darting, fine acidity and sappy tannins; refreshing and prettily red-fruited on the finish, and with no little charm, if just lacking a little presence and flesh on the mid-palate. 2024-28. | **89**

Mills Wine Company Quintrelle Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Ribbon Ridge 2021 (13.5% ABV) | **89**

AJ | Dark black-red though still translucent. Warm, full, though with much less focus than its peers; and countryside notes, too. But why not? It's agreeable, satisfying, and intriguing, and nothing says that "everything must be fruity"; quite the contrary. That "full landscape" spectrum in the wine only grows aromatically with more time in the glass. The palate reflects the nose. It is very different to its peers, and technical obsessives might find fault with a few discreetly funky notes—though I should stress that this is complexing for me. It evokes the meadow and the copse as much as the vineyard and the orchard. A fascinating reading of its place. 2024-29. | **90**

AR | Medium-ruby and now just starting to show some evolution in the glass. This is fresh and pleasingly floral in aroma, with background red-berry, herb, and savory notes; there's an appealing cherry-sweet fruitiness when you taste, allied to a firmness that, unusually, links more to the acidity than to the tannins; the oak is well-integrated, bringing a pleasing roundness of texture, even if the savory, drying elements slightly detract from what might otherwise have been a more charming red. 2024-27. | **89**

DW | Extravagantly cherried nose, primary in tone, bordering on banana; on the palate, the fruit is kirsch-like, macerated, the tannins sinewy, the alcohol just a touch spirit, with that sweet banana-like tone coming through on the finish. A wine of strong personality that isn't quite holding together today for me. 2024-32. | **88**

OO Wines Chehalem Mountain Willamette Valley Chehalem Mountains 2021 (13.3% ABV) | **89**

AJ | Translucent, dark black-red. This is a little bit grassy and light, without the compensations of cherry fruit. A jonquil, spring-bulb nose. The palate is very much as the aromas sketched out. It is a mouthful of springtime, but I'd like just a little bit more summer. Good wine (and to be fair, there is some light primeur raspberry, too) but we are in auspicious company. 2024-29. | **90**

AR | Mid-ruby in color. This is certainly distinct in its aroma, like strawberry cheesecake, i.e. elements of strawberry on the one hand and cheesecake on the other; the medium-bodied strawberry fruit here is nicely textured and juicy, showing no overt signs of oak, while the acid and tannin twins do their job of keeping the fruit in check and balancing it nicely. The finish is a little on the dry side, but nothing that wouldn't be absorbed by a piece of fatty fish or meat. 2024-28. | **90**

DW | Cherries and creamy lactic tones—cherry yoghurt—with the essential tang in place, but the oak is to the fore, and some slightly clunky, dry tannin massing on the finish. 2024-30. | **87**

Hope Well Wine Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (13.8% ABV) | **89**

AJ | Dark black-red. Round, warm, sweet, and nuanced, with honey and mimosa notes qualifying the gorgeously sweet cherry fruits. Terrific aromatic work here. Hard not to keep coming back to this once you've smelled it. This is an outstanding wine. Relatively deep, trenchant Pinot, but fine purity of fruit, some tannic support, a concentrated, sweet core, and a long, searching finish. Stylistically assured and lots for drinkers to discover, with a few years left in its boots. 2024-32. | **92**

AR | A youthful ruby in color. This is pleasantly aromatic, with a decent, juicy core of dark-berry fruit and firm acidity, with no overt oak but the fruit expression is limited to the extent that it's closer to a generic dry red than an enjoyable Pinot Noir. 2024-24. | **85**

DW | Intriguing and attractive spiced tones here: something subtly herbal, too, dried rather than fresh; the spice is sweet, fresh-ground red paprika-like, the fruit nicely sappy dark berry; the tannins are a little dry and grippy, and the finish dries a little, too, but that spiced fruit is compelling. 2024-32. | **90**

Evesham Wood Vineyard Haden Fig Cancilla Vineyard (Organic) Will. Valley (Cancilla Vineyard) 2021 (13.5% ABV) | **89**

AJ | Dark, dense black-red; very nearly opaque. This is a little closed and reductive as first sniffed; will return in ten minutes. Sure enough, the fruit has emerged, chunkily enough, and with some savory and hedgerow complexities—clearly worth decanting this. Mouthfilling on the palate, quite aquiline, with ample forward energy that's the legacy of its brisk cherry fruits; fine yet firm tannins take it up another notch or two. Serious stuff and well worth a look. 2024-30. | **89**

AR | The medium-ruby color is quite vivid and there's a light floral fragrance linked to red berry in the aromatic profile; the fruit flavors are in the dark-berry and loganberry spectrum, supported by sub-threshold oak and a well-managed, sinewy structure of youthful tannins and juicy, and in no way acerbic, fresh acidity; rendering this wine well-balanced and still-youthful, yet to fully blossom with time in bottle. 2024-29. | **89**

DW | Briary, ripe fruit—almost Grenache-like in its sweet-berry plumpness; the tannins barely perceptible, but there's good energy and flow, in an expressive and accessible style with just a touch of sweetness on the finish. 2024-26. | **88**

OO Wines Richard Hermann Cuvée Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (14.4% ABV) | **89**

AJ | Dark, lively black-red. Sweet and warm, with ultra-classy oak bubbling the ripe fruit forward and sending celestial, toasty vanilla down through the cherry: You just gotta love it. I challenge anyone to sniff this and not sip... Warm, full, ample, and... yes, the same oak is bubbling through the fruit. A fast white car with sumptuous upholstery: pure-pleasure Pinot, given a whole lotta love in the winery. Perhaps I'd think about more emphasis on the fruit itself, and less on the oak, for the future, but customers are going to love this wine. I'd take a look in three or four years, when it has calmed down a little. 2024-30. | **91**

AR | This is dense and vivid in color, almost surprisingly deep for Pinot Noir; there's a nice, unhidden complexity to the aroma, a hint of subtle oak, some dark-berry fruit, all in refreshing lockstep; and when you taste the fruit, there's a nice surprise; intense and concentrated dark-berry fruit, such as loganberry, tayberry, encased in a firm, structured grip of refreshing acidity and fine tannins, the oak bringing more of a texture than flavor element to the wine, whose savory finish underlines the fact that it is youthfully elemental, with time to go. 2024-32. | **92**

DW | Raw toasty, grainy, mocha oak and overripe fruit; very prominent alcohol; a rare misstep in this tasting, reaching back to flaws from another turn-of-the-Millennium era. 2024-30. | **83**

Penner-Ash Wine Cellars Penner-Ash Willamette Valley 2021 (14.1% ABV) | **88**

AJ | Bright, deep, dark scarlet-red. Sweet and lifted black-cherry fruits: subtle, enticing, classy. Oak a feature but not occluding anything. Tangy, bright, and sweet-fruited, though with a little less bass behind than the nose suggested we might find. The sweetness mitigates in the mouth and there's an agreeable vegetal pull, lending the wine a vinous drive. 2024-28. | **87**

AR | A pleasant medium-ruby in color. This shows some instantly appealing fresh-berry notes in the aromas, with a light herbal underlay; to taste, it's appealing, fresh, and quite vivid, showing juicy strawberry flavors underscored by a clean, incisive blade of freshness and supported by well-handled tannins that bring a dimension of grip and structure, if not for the long haul, at least over the medium term; a wine I would enjoy drinking. 2024-28. | **91**

DW | An attractive splash of sweet fruit in ripe-cherry mode opens into a fleshy palate of similarly sweet fruit; alcohol swells the palate but burns the finish a touch, which is abidingly sweet. 2024-28. | **87**

Sequitur Sundog Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Ribbon Ridge 2021 (13.2% ABV) | **88**

AJ | The darkest of the Ribbon Ridge wines: opaque black-red, and from visuals alone you might guess Malbec. Much more Pinot on the nose, with its lively, sweet black-cherry curves. Come on in! Super full-on here, but you know what? I'm enjoying this surf of cherry washing over my tongue and swinging my tonsils about. Super-cherry, super-charged. Another less-than-subtle wine but great fun. 2024-30. | **90**

AR | This has quite considerable depth of vivid, youthful color, which translates in the aromas into a super-ripe, dark-berry fruit aroma, and while it's clearly very ripe, it is not, for all that, jammy, and that lack of jamminess is confirmed on taste by a linear streak of underlying acidity that mitigates the initial impression of super-ripeness; if it were a Burgundy, it would most likely be called super-modern for its ripeness and extraction levels, and perhaps even marked down as such, whereas I think drinkers of this style outside Burgundy are more forgiving, even if I find it a tad blocky and one-dimensional. 2024-28. | **88**

DW | Dark ripeness: glossy fruits of the forest seasoned with cooked orange peel and dried herbs; darkly juicy and compelling, very attractive and plentiful fresh acidity and a saline quality; then a resonant, darkly fruited but clear, ringing finish. 2024-30. | **87**

Antikythera Antikythera Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (13% ABV) | **88**

AJ | Dark black-red, but with lots of full red and less scarlet than many... This is an interesting variant. Lots of warmth and meaty fullness building the fruit here, which in any case is much less fragrant-cherry and raspberry than its peers. The result is very satisfying, almost secondary, using the oak very well, almost like an old-style Nuits. You might almost use the word "hearty" here. Let's see what the palate is like... Very full, glowing, softly fruity and resonant. Almost devoid of tannin, alas, and the acids are super-soft. The result is a lovely kick-back, rose-glow, easy-ball Pinot, friendly as you want. But for me, it's inadequately gastronomic—you need a bit more edge and structure for that. Nonetheless, a super-interesting wine. 2024-28. | **90**

AR | Medium-dark ruby and showing some evolution in color. This is Pinot alright, but with a distinct herbal tinge to the aromatics; and when you taste, the first impressions are more savory and salty than fruity, and so it's quite demanding and very much in need of food; this initial impression is confirmed by the salty, drying finish. 2024-26. | **88**

DW | Soft on entry, and just a tad soupy and unfocused in its fruit character, which has the quality of overripe strawberries with a similar absence of lift and energy. 2024-30. | **85**

Adelsheim Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 2021 (13% ABV; screwcap) | **87**

AJ | Deep cherry-scarlet. Warm, softly meaty fruits and sweet earth. Attractive. It grows resinous with air—minty rather than meaty after five minutes or so. Pure, clean, and crunchy fruit: down-the-line delivery. Fresh and vibrant to the end. 2024-28. | **87**

AR | Vivid ruby hue. Youthful, fresh aromas, still a little on the shy side, even if it's clear that Pinot Noir is involved; and the same goes for the fruit quality on tasting, the texture surprisingly soft and already approachable; I say surprisingly—some might say suspiciously, given the relative youth of the wine and perhaps not quite as much freshness or acidity as might be hoped. 2024-26. | **87**

DW | Slim and slinky in feel, and primary in fruit character, this has a scant handful of dusty, fine tannins—it's not entirely frictionless—and an easy, accessible drinkability; relatively simple, but a superior *vin de soif*. 2024-28. | **88**

Goodfellow Family Cellars Whistling Ridge Heritage No.19 Willamette Valley Ribbon Ridge 2021 (13% ABV) | **87**

AJ | Light and translucent, bright scarlet. Sweet, with some oak as well as the soft cherry; drier and more aerial than some. Bright, crisp, and sinewy. Fruit-hounds might be disappointed here, but if you love Savigny, Beaune, or Pernand, you have come to the right place with this slender, graceful, darting wine, in which both acids and tannins do all the shaping and battery-pack the wine. Aesthetically daring (unless it is straight a reflection of a high/cool site), but it works well for me. 2024-30. | **91**

AR | This is medium-ruby and showing some evolution in the garnet at the rim of the glass. There's a pleasant fragrance here, and when you taste the wine, a quite marked acidity and slightly drying tannin seem to take over quite soon, before the red fruits have really been allowed to express themselves; above all, that throat-catching, drying finish just scoops out the fruit from a potentially good wine. 2024-26. | **87**

DW | A touch of savory oak and a tad green in the tannin department; there is raspberry *coulis* and cherry but the feel is dry and a little forced and extracted, this is a little effortful in the company. 2024-32. | **84**

Evening Land Vineyards La Source Seven Springs Estate Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2019 (13% ABV) | **86**

AJ | Bottle 1: Dark black-red. Warm... very warm: a touch of tar. Smoke taint? Almost. A pronounced aromatic character to this wine. Bottle 2: Very similar to bottle one. So, unfortunately, aromatically unenticing. Ditto on the palate: very tarry and, frankly, spoiled, for me. 2024-24. | **79**

AR | Youthful medium-ruby. There's a pleasing, aromatic, berry-fruit quality, and some strawberry fruit, too, but it's rather dry and over the (Amity) hill. 2024-24. | **85**

DW | Tight and contained at the moment, this has an attractive roots and botanicals earthiness and bittersweet tang, white pepper, too; beyond that are bergamot and pomegranate and strawberry, as well as forest floor and an almost-Syrah-like spicy meatiness; a tumbleweed mass of fine tannin; tangy fruit and an umami finish. Wild and fascinating and with plenty to come. 2024-32. | **94**

Domaine Drouhin Oregon Rose Rock Zephyrine Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (15.1% ABV) | **86**

AJ | Bottle 1: Dark black-red. This is not a great success aromatically, and since we have another bottle I'm going to ask for it. Bottle 2: This just seems (as did the first bottle) a little dry and undemonstrative alongside its peers. There are some citrus-peel perfumes but the main fruit interest isn't evident. Concentrated on the palate, but relatively simple in constitution, with a kind of lime-sundae sweetness than I am at a loss to account for. I don't see a lot of purity or vineyard trace here. 2024-27. | **85**

AR | Youthful mid-ruby. This lacks a little aroma and energy on the palate, enveloped as it is by rather rustic tannin and marked acidity, unfortunately just with a low fruit core. 2024-23. | **83**

DW | Plump, ripe, and full: a curious note of the tangy, herbal sweetness of cola-bottle gummy sweets, that sense of fruit gum lingering on the finish, which has a slight smoky-ashy tint, too. Just a little confectioned and disjointed. 2024-32. | **87**

Lavinea Elton Vineyard Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Eola-Amity Hills 2021 (13.3% ABV) | **84**

AJ | Clear, glowing scarlet. Another wild card... this somehow contrives to smell of basil and pesto. Not unpleasant... indeed, it may well be the perfect Pinot for *trofie al pesto alla genovese*; but you couldn't quite call it a classic. Honestly, this is not a great success on the palate; this has the same pesto character and is rather mechanical and coarse on the palate. Sorry. 2024-24. | **82**

AR | Medium-ruby in color. There's a sausagey/salami-like, savory oak aroma to this wine, which follows through when you taste; overall, savory (probably bretty, to be honest), and without any of the fruit fragrance or charm you should associate with Pinot Noir. The acidity here is off the scale. 2024-24. | **82**

DW | Spiced blackberry and cassis fruit and graphite, with a hint of sweet oak; there's a lot of grainy tannin and lipsmacking cherryish acidity; almost Cab Franc-like in its upright acid-and-tannin structure, with some coffee-ish oak notes abiding on the finish, which is more acid and oak than fruit. 2024-32. | **88**

The following wine was deemed by all three tasters to be corked: JK Carriere Wines Vespidae Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2021. ■