

DESTINATION WILLAMETTE VALLEY

words & wine selections by CERTIFIED SOMMELIER CATHERINE STEFANI

The West is home to some of the world's most beautiful and innovative wine regions. A favorite? The Willamette Valley in Oregon. A wine lover's paradise, the Willamette Valley offers some of the most breathtaking landscapes and most desirable vineyard sites in the world, many farmed and cared for organically, and some biodynamically. There is a palpable sense of community and pride in Oregon—its winemakers are innovative and share ideas for the common goal to make Oregon wine better by caring for the land and letting the land care for itself. And they have succeeded. This is a region to be reckoned with on the world stage in terms of quality and the people who call this place home. Just 45 minutes from downtown Portland, this accessible wine region can be a great weekend getaway.

Vintage always plays a role in Oregon Pinot Noir. Often wonder why Pinot Noir is more expensive than its other red wine counterparts? It's a good question. Pinot Noir is simply a challenging grape to grow, thin-skinned, delicate, and fickle in the vineyard and winery, and prefers cool climates. The proper dedication and understanding to grow Pinot Noir results in a final elixir that can span from simply "lovely" to truly "ethereal." For centuries tastemakers consistently pointed to France's Burgundy region as the only home to Pinot Noir, but it now finds respectable company in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Multiple wine makers from France have found this part of the world in Oregon to be extremely similar to the terroir of Burgundy in geography and climate. It is therefore not a surprise that stylistically Oregon Pinot Noirs definitely tilt just a bit to their "old-world" counterparts.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PAULETTE PHILIPOT



WINE SELECTS:

2012 Rex Hill Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, \$28.00

2013 A to Z Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, \$18.00

2013 Penner-Ash "Estate Vineyard" Pinot Noir, \$68.00

2012 Penner-Ash Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, \$34.00

2012 Quintet Cellars Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, \$45.00

2013 Brick House Wines "Select" Pinot Noir, \$36.00 (not pictured)

FOUR RENEGADES WINEMAKERS MAKING WAVES IN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY



A to Z Wine Works & Rex Hill Vineyards

Sam Tannahill—along with his three partners, including his wife, also a respected winemaker—began A to Z Wine Works in 2002. Their success, built on many years in the Willamette Valley, quickly exploded into a global brand. **Now the largest winemaker in Oregon, they clearly found a niche in the market for well-priced American Pinot Noir. Wine Spectator calls their wine the best Pinot Noir under \$20. That's a feat—making Pinot affordable and laudable.**

In 2007, Tannahill and partners added Rex Hill Wine Cellars to their portfolio. A family-owned and -operated winery since 1982, Rex Hill Wine Cellars offers memorable trips to their tasting room. Be sure to make a reservation online before going because the Rex Hill experience is in demand. They offer a “seated tasting” twice daily where guests are treated to a Rex Hill wine and cheese pairing for eight in what was previously an old barn (the old fruit and nut drying facility on the property) that has been transformed into a sexy modern tasting room.

Rex Hill Tasting Room
30835 N Hwy 99 W
Newberg, OR
atozwineworks.com
rexhill.com



Penner-Ash Wine Cellars

Lynn Penner-Ash, Oregon's first female winemaker, holds an enology degree from U.C. Davis and has blazed her own trail up to this emerging wine region since 1988. Her first head winemaking position was at Rex Hill in Dundee Hills. After 10 successful years at Rex Hill, Lynn and her husband Ron Ash went all-in on their own small Pinot Noir project called Penner-Ash Wine Cellars. They currently source fruit from top vineyard sites in the Willamette Valley. Lynn's personal vineyard, farmed under the LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology) Certified program, is the 15-acre Estate Vineyard where the winery and tasting room are located. In 2007, a challenging vintage in the Willamette Valley because of rain and an unusually cool growing season, Lynn Penner-Ash made a splash in the wine world with her first ultra-premium Pinot Noir called Pas de Nom, currently their most expensive Pinot Noir (\$115). This tiny production is a blend of the best barrels in the cellar, proving what is indeed possible in an imperfect growing season. Join the Penner-Ash Wine Club and you are invited to participate during the harvest and then sit down for a private lunch with owners Lynn and Ron. **Penner-Ash Tasting Room**
15771 NE Ribbon Ridge Rd
Newberg, OR
pennerash.com

“YOUNG PINOT NOIR IS PRETTY, BUT OLD PINOT NOIR IS BEAUTIFUL.”

- Sam Tannahill, Rex Hill

Quintet Cellars

Newcomer Quintet has had some rave reviews including a score of 91 from Wine Spectator. Owner Ed Barr humbly credits his good fortune to securing grapes from a premier vineyard in the Ribbon Ridge AVA. Quintet, definitely a wine to watch—but even more importantly, a wine to drink!—owes much of its success to consulting winemaker Kelly Kidneigh, an ex-actress from Los Angeles who made a career change 18 years ago. Wine drinkers rejoice! A passion for wine moved her to the Willamette Valley and various assistant winemaking jobs eventually landed her at Oregon State University to pursue and complete a Winemaking & Food Science degree. Kelly has since become a successful winemaker in the Willamette Valley and is part of a young “power couple,” married to successful viticulturist, Stirling Fox. She has found her wheelhouse working out of a winemaking “Co-Op” (not custom crush), the only one of its kind. Not only does she make her own wine, Mad Violets, but she and her husband grow almost all of their own fruits, vegetables, and raise their own animals. Creating a sustainable world around them keeps their lives simple and clean.

quintetcellars.com
winemakersstudio.com

Brick House Wines

Oregon native and owner of Brick House Wines, Doug Tunnell, spent the first part of his career traveling the world as a correspondent for CBS News. **Now, he is the pioneer of biodynamic farming in the Willamette Valley. His entire 40-acre estate vineyard is farmed biodynamically by the “Demeter” standards—a certification beyond organic that very few hold.** The investment was worth it as he believes keeping all synthetic chemicals and residue out of the soils and off the vines produces a clean and pristine wine. **Schedule a tasting and a tour: brickhousewines.com**



ABOVE: Doug Tunnell showing Catherine Stefani the different blocks around the vineyard. BELOW: The Quintet Team, Maria Healy, Robert Rosenstock, Mari Castillo, winemaker Kelly Kidneigh, Ed Barr, and Sue Barrett.

