

September 12, 2002

Notes regarding 2001 Vintage from Ken Wright

The 2001 vintage has produced complex, fragrant and textural wines. Our aggressive cutting-edge techniques in the vineyard allowed all of our sites to fully ripen prior to any fall rains. The harvest of Oregon vineyards prior to eventual fall rain is the most significant test we face each year.

My first vintage in Oregon was 1986 and at that time 3 tons per acre was considered to be a low crop level. Even at this relatively low level there were too many years that early rainfall diluted what might otherwise have been stellar vintages. The result was that the Oregon wine industry was painted with the criticism of inconsistency. Those in the industry who wished to produce wine of intensity and concentration felt the criticism was valid.

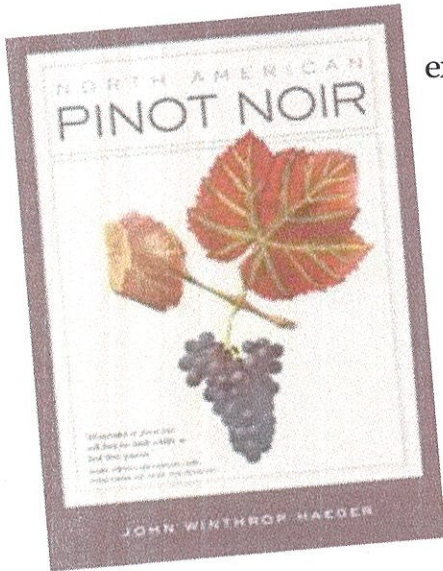
Over the last seven years producers who have the will and financial wherewithal are employing new techniques to ensure full ripening. These techniques are based on two fronts. The first is crop removal and the second is an effort to make our leaf surface the most efficient it can be in capturing light and transforming that light to sugar.

Among high quality producers the old standard of three tons per acre has dropped to 1.75 to 2.25 tons per acre. As you might imagine, cutting the production of an acre of ground in half doubles our fruit cost and reduces our potential revenue by half. It only makes economic sense if quality is increased and you achieve greater consistency from year to year by harvesting earlier and avoiding the fall rain pattern we know as "the pineapple express". We believe these reduced crop levels are making a significant difference. When comparing years of similar heat accumulation we are now harvesting 5 to 7 days earlier.

Our focus in the vineyard is to be as efficient as possible in capturing light. This starts with the creation of a well-spaced frame of shoot growth. As the new shoots grow in the spring, we remove any which are closer than a normal hand width to another shoot. This spacing ensures that there are fewer shaded leaves which are largely unproductive and a drain on the plant. As we go through the season, each vine will be addressed several times to separate, vertically position and pin the shoots in place.

The 2001 vintage is perhaps our best example yet of the value of crop reduction and canopy management. Vineyards which otherwise would have been late enough in development to have been subject to rainfall had advanced fruit maturity that allowed us to harvest at optimum ripeness prior to diluting weather systems.

Best, Ken



excerpt from North American Pinot Noir, by John Winthrop Haeger:

  
**Ken Wright Cellars**  
 Carlton, Oregon

Ken Wright is engaging and passionate about pinot noir and an indefatigable champion of its Oregonian editions. He is also almost an icon among its many producers, having created, from scratch, no less than three brands of persistently high reputation: Panther Creek, Domaine Serene, and Ken Wright Cellars. At one point when Wright was the winemaker for both Domaine Serene and Ken Wright cellars, those houses (which then cohabited) were simultaneously Robert M. Parker's choices for Oregon's two outstanding producers of pinot noir.

Wright's road to wine is no less likely than a score of others. He says he was "hooked" on pinot while waiting tables in Lexington, Kentucky, working his way through college. The restaurant's owner was determined to educate his waitstaff about wine and repeatedly broke out a few of his best bottles for systematic tastings. Struck with the discovery that Domaine de la Romanee-Conti was "infinitely more interesting than Lancer's," Wright transferred from the University of Kentucky to the viticulture program at the University of California, Davis, and embarked – albeit with no financial assets – on a career in wine. After eight years making, in his own phrase, "very average" pinot noir for wineries in California's Central Coast, he moved to Oregon, waited tables again to make ends meet, and launched Panther Creek Cellars in 1986 with just ten barrels of wine.

Within a few years, Wright was transformed from a skillful blender into a champion of vineyard-designation. By the time he founded Ken Wright Cellars in 1994, vineyard-designation had become the core of the program. In some vintages, as many as 12 individually designated pinots have been made under the Ken Wright Cellars imprimatur, entirely from purchased fruit, and from sites scattered throughout the northwestern quadrant of the Willamette Valley.

Wright pioneered the use of acreage contracts with growers to maximize his control over green harvesting decisions, pick date, and yield. In some cases, his contracts are now long-term lease agreements. In 1999 Wright was finally able to begin planting an estate vineyard, called Savoya, on Blackburn Road, east of Yamhill. Nearby on an east-west oriented ridge east of Carlton, Wright also began planting the Abbott Claim vineyard in 2001.

PARKER'S WINE BUYER'S GUIDE RATING OREGON'S BEST PRODUCERS OF PINOT NOIR	
Where a producer has been assigned a range of stars (***/****), the lower rating has been used for placement in this hierarchy.	
***** (OUTSTANDING)	
Ken Wright Cellars	
**** (EXCELLENT)	
Archery Summit	Panther Creek Cellars
Bethel Heights	Penner-Ash Wine Cellars ****/*****
Brick House	St. Innocent ****/*****
Cristom ****/*****	Domaine Serene ****/*****
Hamacher ****/*****	
*** (GOOD)	
Adelsheim ****/*****	Elk Cove Cellars
Argyle ****/*****	Evesham Wood
Brooks	Lemelson
Cameron ***/****	Rex Hill ***/****
Chehelam ***/****	Shea Wine Cellars
Domaine Drouhin ***/****	Willakenzie Estate ***/****
** (AVERAGE)	
ADEA **/****	Granville
Abacela	Griffin Creek
Amity	Hauer of the Dauen
Chateau Benoit	Henry Estate Winery
La Bete **/****	Hinman Estates / Sylvan Ridge
Chateau Bianca	King Estate
Bridgeview	Lion Valley **/****
Broadley **/****	Medici Vineyards **/****
Callahan Ridge	Montinore Vineyards
Carabella	Oak Knoll **/****
Cooper Mountain Vineyards	Ponzi **/****
Domaine Coteau	Andrew Rich **/****
Duck Pond Cellars	Sokol Blosser **/****
Dundee Springs	Starr
Edgefield	Tori Mor
Erath Vineyards **/****	Willamette Valley Vineyards
Eugene Wine Cellars	Winter's Hill
Firesteed	Witness Tree
Flynn Vineyards	Yamhill Valley Vineyards **/****
Girardet Cellars **/****	Youngberg Hill Vineyards