



My friends,

I think often about the differences in approach to our craft that exist in the myriad of wine regions around the world. One subject that rises to the top of thought quite often is the separation of farming vines and making wine. Church and state.

My take is that the greater that divide may be the less riveting are the resulting wines. When the winemaker has less control over the management of the sourced vineyards the quality is affected. It is not a myth that the ability to produce a wine of character is based on having fruit that begs to be great wine. No winemaker is talented enough to change that paradigm.

Too often, I think, in the US, this separation of the winemaker from the vineyard is the reality. Students attending Davis, Fresno, Oregon State and other learning institutions tend to choose one path or the other. The result can be that the vineyard is operating with a plan that the winemaker is not in control of. The winemaker receives fruit at harvest that was farmed without his or her influence. They then deal with the cards played and do their best. Not the best model for success.

I am loathe to ever use French words when English suffices but they do have a word we do not have in our language to describe a person who is involved in both the vineyard and winery. That word would be "vigneron".

Our small cohesive group of Pinot noir producers in the Willamette Valley would most often fit into the integrated model where experience and knowledge exist both in the vineyard and the winery. You should be emboldened that most are using a holistic approach that governs practices on the farm and in the cellar. It's a good thing. Our success as a young producing region has been to a great degree based on this.

The Willamette Valley is a place where Pinot noir inherently wants to be great. As farmers of vines it has been our goal to learn the correct approach for each site that ensures that greatness is realized. When a great site is properly farmed, the resulting wine will have more depth of flavor, aroma and texture.

2013 had one of the earliest starts that I can recall. Development during the spring was boosted by a 10 day stretch of weather between May 2nd and May 11th that had an average high temperature of 78.2 degrees F. A real example of our incredible early development was borne out by a single vine in Abbott Claim vineyard. Mark Gould has been tracking the shoot growth by date for this vine for a number of years. On May 18th of 2011, the shoot growth (measured on a piece of vertical lath) was 4 inches. In 2012, the exact same shoot position on the same vine, on the same date, was 12 inches. In 2013, the exact same shoot position on the same vine, on the same date, was 22 inches! Wow! We were way ahead in development compared to a normal growing season and we remained ahead for the remainder of the year.

Come September, the weather became less stable and we experienced several systems that came through the region. Fortunately, we have the ability to remove rainfall so the diluting effects of any precipitation were easily corrected. Mother Nature did not rain on our parade.

It was key as well that the great work performed by vineyard managers Mark, Seth and Taylor through the entire growing season kept our fruit healthy and clean. They provided the needed raw material required to create compelling wine. Our top notch team in the cellar, with volunteers led by Father "T", protected the fruit and fermentations with exceeding care. We were completely in sync as a team, protecting the integrity of our sites. God I hate to say it but we were "vigneron"!

Please join us for a preview of the 2013 vintage November 29th and 30th from 10 to 4 each day.

Thank you all for supporting our efforts and allowing us to continue doing what we love.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ken', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Best, Ken