



Harvest Letter 2018

10.20.2018

Dear friends and lovers of Oregon Pinot noir,

Two years ago, I made my first sales trip to China. My expectation was that I would be explaining where Oregon was in this world and introducing all I met to Pinot noir from our region.

To my surprise almost all I encountered not only knew where the Willamette Valley was....they pronounced it correctly. On many occasions I got two thumbs up as they said "great Pinot noir". I was floored by the level of knowledge of the Chinese wine community. How many times has the story been repeated of how people in China would order first growth Bordeaux and mix it with 7up? Ordering the best available wine but not appreciating it. I saw nothing of the kind in my travels.

As I flew back to the states I kept thinking about how the name WILLAMETTE VALLEY has become such a significant worldwide asset to our industry.

This has happened through the incredible efforts of so many. Those who came before me, those who came at the time I did and those who have come since. We have been a passionate group. A group that placed the love of Pinot noir above all else. A group that sought to produce Pinot noir that made you melt.

Knowing that collegiality would lead to lessons learned we have been incredibly open, not only to each other but to the world of Pinot noir producers. It was Oregon that created the first international meeting of Pinot noir minds at the Steamboat Fishing Lodge on the North Umpqua river in 1979. It was Oregon that created the first international celebration of Pinot noir for the public and trade in 1987 at Linfield College. And it was Oregon that created the first "Pinot Camp" for national trade members of the US in 1999.

All of that sharing has led to a very rapid pace of understanding our place.....how to farm our vineyards for the greatest quality and how to honor that quality by becoming supportive yet invisible in the winemaking process.

After my return from China I convened a meeting of several dozen people who have been influential in creating the AVA (American Viticultural Area) structure of Oregon as well as labeling laws. The reason I wished for this meeting was to let the group know of my concern that we may not be doing enough to protect the good name "Willamette Valley". A number of producers, including myself, stopped using Willamette Valley on some or all of their labels once the sub AVA's were approved in the mid 2000's. Many were so excited about the successful sub AVA effort that the Willamette Valley was now in the rearview mirror. We have been giving away this significant asset that took decades to create.

Two initiatives have developed from this meeting. The first, *conjunctive labeling*, is to require that when a sub AVA name (I wrote the Yamhill-Carlton AVA as an example) is used for wine

from within the Willamette Valley the text "Willamette Valley" must also appear somewhere on the bottle. It would not need to appear next to the sub AVA text. It could be anywhere as long as it was visible.

No one in China knows where the Eola Amity Hills AVA is but they absolutely know where the Willamette Valley is. We need to continue to own this significant asset. We need to continue to put our stake in the ground of the Willamette Valley and own it.

The second initiative is what we are calling *exclusive varietal content*. In essence, this means that if a varietal is named on the label the wine must be 100% that varietal. This would apply only to Willamette Valley wine. Pinot noir and Chardonnay were the first two considered but there is an active committee looking at the inclusion of other varieties.

There are currently only two regions in the world that have this requirement. Albariño, produced in Rias Baixas of Spain, must be 100% varietal. All Alsatian wine must be 100% of the varietal named on the label. The Willamette Valley would be the third region in the world to have this standard and the first in the United States.

The current federal standard for minimum percentage of the named variety is 75%. In other words, one could add 25% of any other variety without naming it on the label. The State of Oregon standard, established by David Adelsheim in 1977, has a requirement of 90%.

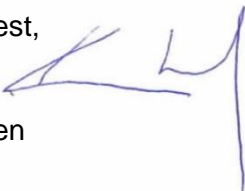
To establish the 100% standard for Oregon would be the ultimate statement of authenticity. It would be complete truth in labeling. It is my hope that both of these initiatives are realized in this coming year and that Oregon once again plays a leading role in taking the quality of American wine forward.

Though I have been making wine professionally since 1978, first in Monterey, California and then here in Oregon with my first owned venture Panther Creek Cellars, 2018 marks the 25th vintage for the Ken Wright Cellars brand. We have come a long way since 1994 when it was just two of us, Dale on the road selling and me minding the store. We are now a staff of 22 which blows my mind. It has been great growth with amazing people that we have handpicked for their high character, creativity and passion for this business. We all hope that you will make us one of your stops over the Thanksgiving holiday so that we can thank you face to face for making this incredible journey possible.

2018 continues a string of very warm and very dry vintages. Our vines were very happy for the half inch drink of water they received mid-September. Rather than a setback in the pace of ripening this rain event got the vines motors running again. We saw all sites physiologically push to balanced maturity which is what happens when Mother Nature provides the perfect scenario. Though we are down 20% in production of Pinot noir what we have in our house is deep, dreamy and gorgeous. Love is a wonderful thing.

Please join us on the 23rd & 24th of November between 11am and 5pm for our annual winery open house barrel tasting.

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ken', written over a horizontal line.

Ken