

# Decanter

PASSIONATE ABOUT WINE SINCE 1975

## DISCOVER THE AMERICAS

The people, the places & the great wines

+  
**287**  
wines tasted  
in this issue



### Montrachet

Our expert guide to the most sublime of whites

### 20 Puglia reds

The best Primitivos from this southern Italian region

### New this month

A *Decanter* insiders' guide to what we've been drinking

## TRENDSETTERS

of ancient vines clinging to existence between vegetable fields or in suburban developments. To preserve these vanishing parcels, he'd locate their owners and find buyers for their fruit, either for himself or for one of his many friends in the wine industry. Along the way, he co-founded the Historic Vineyard Society to register and promote vineyards that are more than 50 years old.

In this capacity, Passalacqua has quietly and humbly exerted a powerful influence in the modern North American wine scene. Many of California's most interesting new wines have tendrils that trace back to Passalacqua, who connects winemakers and vineyards, sniffs out remarkable sites and soils, and sells fruit from the 1915-planted vineyard he bought a decade ago.

Along the way, he's broadened the scope of the wine world, bringing awareness to unfashionable grapes and far-flung regions beyond the norm.

### **Sandlands, Red Table Wine, Contra Costa County, San Francisco Bay, California, USA 2018 92**

US\$34.99-\$39.99 Flatiron Wines & Spirits, Sip Fine Wine, The Wine House, Urban Wine

Bright, zippy and energetic, this joyful blend of Carignan and Mataro delivers plummy red fruit with hints of smoke, game and wild fennel. The complexity builds right into the gentle, exuberant finish. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 12.8%

## Ken Wright

### **OREGON**

Wright's story is prototypically American: in spite of a lack of pedigree and finances, he achieved his success in wine through talent, hard work, common sense, courage and access to lands with unrealised potential. What makes him a vital trendsetter in Oregon and in American Pinot Noir is that his triumphs have not only benefited his own cause, but have had a powerful impact on a nation of burgeoning winemakers and wine lovers.

Arriving in Oregon's restless climate in 1986, he found an economy where growers sold grapes by the tonne, making it near-impossible to get them to drop fruit. So he used his significant powers of persuasion to convince growers to both charge by the acre and follow his farming protocols.

Such shifts may seem trivial today, but Wright's actions helped spark the major leaps in quality and consistency that catapulted Oregon to its status as a top Pinot region. Likewise, he was among the first to bring sorting tables and dry ice into the winery in Oregon.

Just as crucially, Wright has also been a leader in promoting and mapping Oregon's terroir.



Ken Wright

Decades before every vintner seemingly began hiring geologists to map their properties, Wright was professorially lecturing and scrawling on chalkboards to explain how subduction, volcanism and ancient flooding created the distinct flavours of Oregon Pinot Noir. Connecting these flavours to the underlying geology became his passion (while popularising the mantra 'mother rock'), leading him to pave the way for American single-vineyard Pinot Noir – of which he released as many as a dozen separate wines in a vintage.

His unrelenting belief in terroir resulted in what will likely be his most durable legacy: the creation in 2005 of six sub-appellations in the northern Willamette Valley. Wright's energy and enthusiasm overcame the scepticism of fellow wine-growers (who thought the demarcation premature). But today no one questions the wisdom of the act because, as Wright has repeatedly shown, shaping the way one thinks about vineyards and earth shapes the wines themselves in a way that benefits everyone.

### **Ken Wright, Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon, USA 2019 90**

US\$23-\$34 Argonaut, Burgundy Wine Co, Hop Cask & Barrel, K&L, Meritage, Park Avenue Fine Wines, Village Corner, Yahyn Raspberry and cherry lead the way, joined by hints of vanilla and subtle aromatic spice notes. There's lovely weight in the mouth, accompanied by finely honed tannins. **Drink** 2021-2026 **Alc** 13.5% ►

