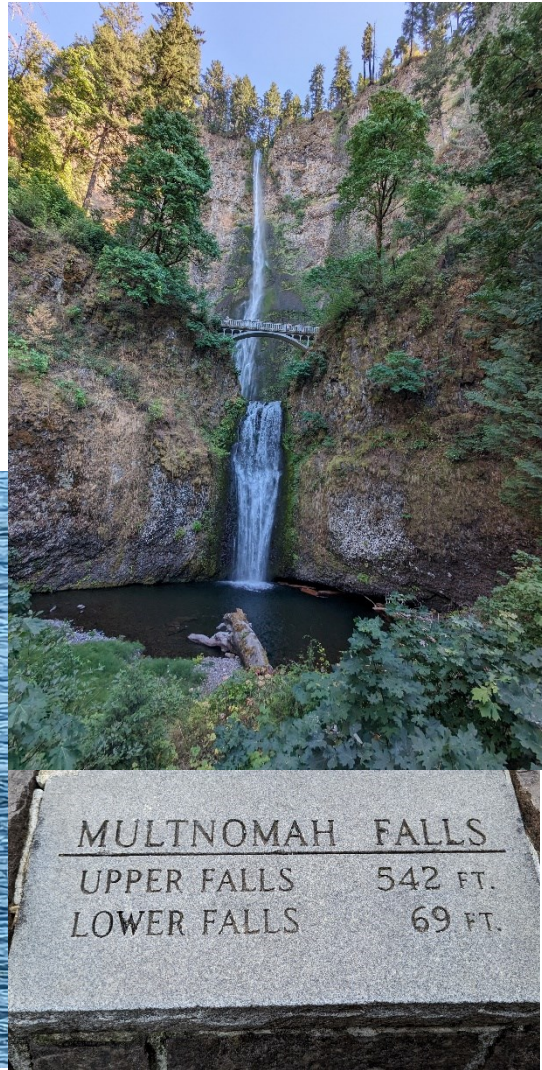


## Willamette Valley Wine Tasting Trip

In September Beth and I made our first trip to Oregon and had a wonderful week of wine tasting in the Willamette Valley. We started with a couple of days in Portland where we walked different parts of the city, enjoyed the City Market that happens every Saturday along the river, took a great half day small group tour down the Columbia River Gorge and saw 4 lovely waterfalls, and ate in several very enjoyable restaurants. It was also the weekend for the Dragon Boat races and we could watch them out the window of our room at the Portland Marriott which also had a great view of Mt. Hood.



One of the first things we learned was that anyone who pronounced the name of the state as Ore-A-Gone immediately identified themselves as a tourist. It is two syllables only, neither primary: Ore-Gone. Along with that we got the easy way to properly pronounce the name of the river and the valley that it runs down "It's Willamette – Damn It!"

The Willamette Valley is very similar in many ways to the Burgundy region of France and many of the owners and winemakers here had spent some time working in Burgundy before coming to Oregon. Two of the estates we visited are owned by top Burgundy estates. Like Burgundy, the primary grapes grown here are Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. You will see that reflected when I talk about the different wines that we tasted at each place we visited. Like Burgundy, most of the vineyards in the Willamette Valley are making Old World style wines that are very age worthy and well deserving of prices in the \$50-125 range. These wines are significantly different from the New World style wines made in Oregon's southern neighbor, California. We fell in love with Pinot Noir when we did a barge cruise through Burgundy for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1996 and we very much prefer the Old World style of wines.

In the other attachment I have a list of all the wines I will talk about in this post with their list price at the winery. Many of those wines can be found at a discount both at large retailers and on-line but all the



## Willamette Valley Wine Tasting Trip

prices I will reference are the list prices at the winery. I will also talk about some of the other very good wines that we tasted that were not Pinot Noir or Chardonnay, but if you decide to go to the Willamette Valley to taste wines, you should be planning on enjoying a lot of very good Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Note: We are one of several thousand people who own a few hundred shares of Preferred Stock in Willamette Valley Vineyards (WVV) which gives us status there as “Owners”. This gives us significant discounts on their wines and many great benefits when we visit their different facilities in the area. As Owners we are not totally unbiased in our appreciation of their wines and in how we were treated when we stayed in one of the two Owner’s Suites on their primary facility in Turner, outside of Salem.



Our serious wine tasting started with lunch at the WVV Vancouver Tasting Room and Restaurant which is on the Washington side of the Columbia River and looks out over the river. We ate on the patio and were greeted with a taste of Tualatin Estate Chardonnay as Owners. I ordered a glass of it to accompany my lunch while Beth had a glass of the Whole Cluster Pinot Noir with her Mushroom Burger. It was a lovely lunch and a great start to our wine tasting.

One of the Owner’s Benefits we get is that once a year we, and up to four guests, can do a custom wine blending experience. WVV has two facilities that do this but with very different wines. We had made a reservation to do this the afternoon of our second day at the WVV HQ where they have six barrels of Pinot Noir wine, each made from a different clone of that grape as shown in the top picture to the right. I was really interested in seeing what each of the different clones brought to the wine and how the blending process can produce such different wines, all using Pinot Noir grapes. But the week before our trip we learned that that the Pinot Noir blending room had to be shut down for the month of September to overhaul and update the blending system. The Vancouver Tasting Room and Restaurant where we had lunch has the other blending system, shown in the lower picture with Beth demonstrating. They have barrels of wine from five different grapes, none of them Pinot Noir. WVV owns



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estates in the state of Washington, in the Walla Walla region, and in very southern Oregon, right on the California border in the Griffin Creek valley. From those vineyards they have the Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah, and Malbec wines used in this blending experience.

One of the FANTASTIC benefits of the Owner status at WVV is that I have a Wine Concierge assigned to me, McKenzie Wolf-Webb, to make sure I get the most value from WVV. She put in a great deal of time helping me plan this trip and adjusting when my sister had to drop out because of an injury. She got us lined up for the blending experience in Vancouver. And she made sure we were not charged for it. A big part of the reason we enjoyed this trip and are looking forward to doing it again is McKenzie.

We got to taste samples of each of the five wines and then Beth and I got to each decide three different blends that we wanted to try by specifying a percentage of each wine. We could have any mix of the five wines in different percentages. In June Beth and I had our best wine trip ever in Bordeaux for a week where we tasted over 80 different wines, from both Left and Right bank chateaux. Bordeaux is justifiably famous for the blends they make, primarily from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc. When we talked to several of the winemakers there, they shared some serious concern that their Merlot vines were at the maximum temperature that they can handle and with global warming, the temperatures would likely continue to go up each year. In terms of volume, Merlot is the #1 grape grown in Bordeaux and has been a key part of what has made Bordeaux wines so highly rated for hundreds of years. Several of the winemakers told us that they had some small plots of Malbec, which originated in Bordeaux but had fallen almost completely out of favor over the years. They were experimenting if Malbec could replace Merlot and keep the same quality of wine and wonderful taste that they have created using Merlot. I used two of my blends and Beth used the last of hers to combine different percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Malbec to see how they came together. We were pretty happy with the final blend that Beth did and, if we had the option, we would have bought a couple of bottles of that blend, but Washington liquor laws did not allow that. We could only taste them there. It was just a simple experiment, but I am feeling much better that Bordeaux wines might not be a major victim of global warming and Malbec has real potential as an alternative to Merlot.

We drove from there about 90 minutes down to the WVV HQ. McKenzie met us as we arrived and took us to our Owner's Suite where she had two bottles of wine for us to enjoy there, a selection of breakfast dishes for each day we were there, two Ridel wine glasses for us to take home with us, and a parking spot just for our suite. We also got a \$150 credit on our account that we could use for food or wine. Once we unpacked, we met McKenzie in the Estate Tasting Room where we talked about the plans for the next few days and tasted the latest addition to their wine offerings, a delicious Gruner Veltliner dry white wine, our first taste of Pinot Blanc, and the Elton Pinot Noir which was the wine that convinced us to become Owners. She then took a wine bag with four other bottles in it and took us on a tour of the wine making facility, and I have pictures of two of the different stops. It was a private tour for just Beth and I with stops to taste the Estate





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Rose, the Bernau Block Pinot Noir which was the vines just below the balcony of our suite, the Tualatin Estate White Pinot Noir, and the Elton Self Rooted Pinot Noir which was even a little bit better than the Elton that was my #1 WVV wine. Several of these wines do not appear in the attachment because they are not on the winery price list, only available to Owners by special order through their Concierge.



We had a Pinot Noir Rose at five of the seven Estates we visited on this trip and every one of them was very good. But my favorite Pinot Noir Rose is not one of the ones that we tasted this trip and it has a list price of only \$29 so it has a lower price than any of the five that we tasted. It is the WVV Whole Cluster Rose where they take some of the juice off after a short period of maceration. Unfortunately for most of the people reading this post, it is not available to order on the WVV Website. I call or email McKenzie and she puts an order in for me and she lets me know when that year's inventory is getting low in case I want to stock up before the next vintage is bottled and made available. Again, all five of the Roses that we tasted were very good and four of them were under \$35. We bought two bottles of the WillaKenzie Rose. But I did want to put a plug in for my favorite Pinot Noir Rose.



We went back up to the tasting room and McKenzie got us menus from the kitchen and we ordered dinner for the two of us which was delivered down to our Suite where we enjoyed it out on our patio with a bottle of Pinot Gris, another of my big favorites at WVV, which was one of the two bottles that McKenzie had in our room when we arrived. Watching the sunset from our patio was the end of a very delightful day.



When we originally planned with McKenzie for Monday, the second day of the trip, we were going to drive an hour up to the Domaine Willamette facility that opened earlier this year where the focus is on sparkling wines to have lunch there and a tasting of the sparkling wines from WVV. Then we had planned to come back for the Pinot Noir blending experience that got cancelled and replaced with the blending in Vancouver. When we were enjoying the first wines with McKenzie the prior day, she told us that the decision had just been made to close the kitchen and tasting room at Domaine Willamette for weekdays for the rest of the year. But she had worked something out and would meet us there at 11:00 on our second day. And she suggested that since we were focused on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay on the first day there, in place of the Pinot Noir blending she would set up a Griffin Creek tasing for us of the wines from their grapes that afternoon back in Turner.

When we got to Domaine Willamette there was only one other car in the parking lot. McKenzie met us at the door and she had the key and had opened it just for us. And she had brought up a Charcuterie platter from Turner for us since the kitchen there was closed. We had the entire facility to ourselves and

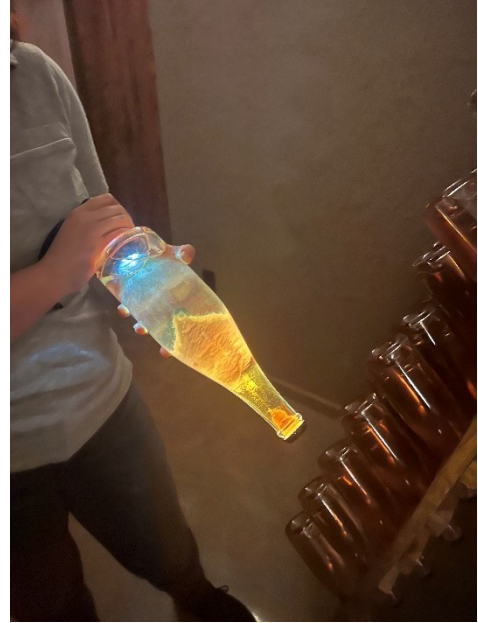
## Willamette Valley Wine Tasting Trip



had a great tour of the cellar and the bottles of sparkling wines resting for two years before the sediment is disgorged and the bottle topped off and corked for sale. During the tour we tasted the Domaine Willamette Brut which is a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, the Blanc de Blanc which is 100% Chardonnay, and the Bernau Estate Pinot Noir. We then sat out in the spectacular sitting area with streams and fountains running through it looking down the hill over the vineyards there while we enjoyed our charcuterie and a bottle of the Maison Bleu Syrah with it. McKenzie let us relax there until the wine had worn off and we were comfortable driving back. Many of the tastings we had were in lovely scenic locations but I could sit for hours at the Domaine Willamette outside tables.

Our Griffin Creek tasing was in the Owners Room off the Estate Tasting Room which is only for Owners, and was delightful. We tasted the Griffin Creek Merlot, Tempranillo, Syrah, and Malbec. I asked about what the blend was of those for the Griffin, the premier wine from that estate. We got both the answer on what was the blend for that year and a taste of the Griffin. McKenzie helped us order another dinner that we enjoyed on our patio with a bottle of the Estate Pinot Noir. We really enjoyed breakfast each morning and dinner each evening on our patio and the picture is me enjoying breakfast.

We thoroughly enjoyed the two days exploring WVV wines and locations and everything that McKenzie did to make us want to come back again. As Owners we did not have to pay for any of the tastings that we did at WVV. Beth and I are very jealous of the Owners who live in Oregon and can make frequent use of the 10 different facilities that WVV has in that area with another one coming next year. Flying cross country means we unfortunately must plan and budget for a return trip. We highly recommend visiting WVV and also considering a small investment to get the Owner privileges the next time they do a Preferred Stock Offering.





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Our last two days were spent visiting other estates, three each day. We knew we could not safely taste that many wines and drive ourselves around so using a recommendation from a friend, we booked a car and driver for both days through Insiders Wine Tours. For just two of us it was expensive, but it let us thoroughly enjoy visiting the wineries. We were fortunate that the owner of Insider Wine Tours, Natalie, drove us and she added a lot of color and history during the drive. We stayed at WVV the third night and then in a Portland hotel the last night to catch a morning flight home and that meant that it was an hour drive back to WVV that night. When we do it again, we will stay two nights at WVV and then stay in the McMinnville area the next night to minimize the commute. Natalie said she would be happy to make some recommendations for us when we plan that trip. I knew the estates I wanted to visit so I made my own reservations there for all six. Natalie had reservations for two great places for lunch where she dropped us off. Next trip I plan to get her inputs on some other estates to visit. If you are not very familiar with the estates in the Willamette Valley, Natalie can plan a whole itinerary for you and make all the reservations - <https://insiderswinetours.com/>.

Our first day after WVV was to the three Jackson Family Estates in the Valley. Best known for their Kendall Jackson estate in California, the Jackson family owns 42 vineyards including a Right Bank Grande Cru Classe in St. Emilion in Bordeaux. They provide investment in those estates and oversight, but they let the winemakers create the best wines they can from their terroir. We had enjoyed a great virtual wine tasting for the Penner Ash and Gran Moraine estates and a wine dinner with the winemaker from WillaKenzie so we a little familiarity with the three Jackson Family Estates in the Willamette Valley. All of them would refund the price of \$40 per person for their tasting if we joined their club but each one had a different policy if we did not join their club for how much wine we had to buy to get a credit for the price of the tasting.



Natalie picked us up at WVV at 10:00 and we were at WillaKenzie for their initial tasting at 11:00. Just one other twosome was there so we got plenty of attention. We started with a Rose of Pinot Noir. We asked and were told that if we purchased \$100 of wine per person, we would get a credit on our credit card for the \$80 we had paid for the tasting. For the two of us to get that credit we would buy a total of \$200 of wine. My arithmetic told me that I had already paid \$80 and if I paid

an additional \$120 I would be getting \$200 worth of wines that I really liked, and I could pay for them to be shipped to me. That seemed like a pretty good idea to me. We then had their 2017 Estate Pinot Noir, the 2017 Kiana Pinot Noir, the 2016 Allette Pinot Noir, the 2019 Clairiere Pinot Noir, and 2018 Emery Pinot Noir. We had a very good conversation with the woman doing the tasting and she brought us out a

## Willamette Valley Wine Tasting Trip

taste of their 2020 Estate Chardonnay and their top wine, the 2015 Triple Black Slopes Pinot Noir. There was no additional charge for this. At almost every tasting we did, if we were having an intelligent conversation about the wines, they would bring out 1 or 2 additional really nice wines for us to taste on top of the standard list for the tasting. These were only tastes but for that many different wines they added up, and by the end of this first tasting I was very happy to have a driver and not be getting behind the wheel and driving Beth and I. We purchased two bottles of the Rose, one of the 2017 Aliette, and one of the 2015 Triple Black Slopes which added up to \$210 before tax and shipping.

We had some great sandwiches at the Blind Pig restaurant in Carlton and then Natalie brought us to Gran Moraine for our second tasting. This was the only one that was inside, the other two were out on the lawn overlooking the vineyards. At Gran Moraine we started with their delightful Brut Rose and followed it with their 2022 Rose of Pinot Noir. We then had their 2020 Yamhill-Carlton Chardonnay, the wine that totally blew me away at the virtual wine tasting we had done with them a year before. Beth and I have not been Chardonnay fans but this one is aged 16 months in French oak barrels and is decanted before pouring. That is how very good red wines are made, not what I think about for a Chardonnay. This wine is fully equivalent to a very good White Burgundy. We then had the Zena Crown Vineyard 2019 The Sum Pinot Noir and then the 2019 Upland Pinot Noir. When we said that the Zena Crown was our favorite, he poured us a taste of the 2019 Zena Crown Slopes. From our earlier exposure I had Gran Moraine as my first choice among the three and I chose to join their wine club where I will get 4 bottles every three months at a 10% discount off the list price and that earned me the credit of \$80 for the tasting.



Our final tasting for the day was at Penner-Ash and the view from their lawn was spectacular! We started with their Oregon Viognier, a grape that I have been lukewarm about. We very much enjoyed this one and bought a bottle to take back to the Suite to accompany our dinner that night. We then tasted four of their lovely Pinot Noir's: 2018 Shea Vineyard, 2018 Palmer Creek Vineyard, 2018 Hyland Vineyard, and the 2018 Estate Vineyard. We enjoyed them all and the Palmer Creek was our first choice. When we were deciding what to buy to hit the \$250 threshold to get a credit for the tasting, they let us compare the 2018 Shea and the 2019 Shea and we liked the younger 2019 better and added that to our order. I asked why they did not have any Chardonnay on their list of Current Selections and was told they only make one Chardonnay and that one is in very



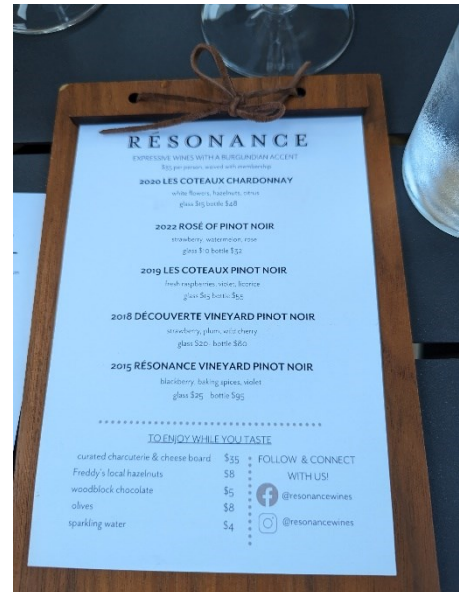
## Willamette Valley Wine Tasting Trip

small quantities, the Pas De Nom Chardonnay and it is more expensive than any of their other wines. They poured us a taste and we were very impressed. I never thought I would pay \$85 for a Chardonnay but I added that to our order. We got a special treat as we got to meet the winemaker at Penner-Ash and she is Natalie's wife. The two of them are together in this picture.



We decided to get some Thai take-out from Salem, a 15-minute ride, and enjoyed that along the Viognier from Penner-Ash for dinner that night on our patio. The next morning we drove back to Portland and checked into the Residence Inn. That gave us a short drive the next morning to the Portland Airport to return the rental car and catch our flight home. Natalie picked us up at 10:00 at the Residence Inn for our last three estate visits.

Our first two visits were to estates that had been purchased by two big names in Burgundy France. We were very interested in seeing their approach to Pinot Noir and if we would have a chance to compare their Oregon wines with one of their French wines. The first estate we visited was Resonance, which is owned by Louis Jadot, one of our favorite Burgundy houses. I don't know if it was a just a bad day for the person who did our tasting or a bad day for Resonance but they did not have any record of our reservation when I got there and I had to pay for it again. When I got back home I send them copies of both charges and they promptly cancelled the second charge. Even though we were there when it opened, there were several other groups there and we had very little opportunity to talk with the person leading our tasting. They only had their Oregon wines on the list for the tasting and when I asked about their French wines, I could buy a glass but they were not part of the tasting. This was the only place we visited that was locked into the standard list and did not offer any additional wines to us. And the only way to get comped for the \$35 each for the tasting was to join their club and we did not do that. While it was not the most fun visit we had, their wines are very good. We started with their 2020 Les Coreaux Chardonnay and then their 2022 Rose of Pinot Noir and then three of their red Pinot Noirs: 2019 Les Coreaux Pinot Noir, 2018 Decouverte Vineyard Pinot Noir, and 2015 Resonance Pinot Noir. On our next trip back, I will look for an alternative place to visit. Their outside seating area was lovely and their wines were good, but a little pricy, but we just did not enjoy the tasting very much. If others have been there and really enjoyed it, please respond with a comment so people get more information to help them decide if they want to visit here.





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Natalie dropped us at the Trellis Café in Dundee and we had another very good lunch there. Iced tea both days as we were getting plenty of alcohol at the tastings.

We then visited Domaine Drouhin, which is owned by Maison Joseph Drouhin in Burgundy. We got a very nice welcome and the staff was concerned that our table was not ready for about 10 minutes when we got there and let us know a couple of times that they would have it as soon as possible. When we sat down we were given a list of the wines for the tasting and they had personalized it "The Stewart Party" so we were feeling a lot more welcome than we had in our first tasting. They had 7 wines on the list and we enjoyed talking with the person leading our tasting, Bailey, about tasting both an Oregon and a French Chardonnay and an Oregon and a French Pinot Noir. She then got us two additional glasses and poured both at the same time so we could take sips of each and compare them. This is exactly what I was looking for in going to an Oregon estate owned by a major Burgundy house. We started with the 2022 Domaine Drouhin Oregon Edition Rose and then compared the 2021 Domaine Drouhin Oregon Chardonnay Arthur with the 2020 Joseph Drouhin Montagny Premier Cru. Both were very good, and we like the Montagny one a little better and it was \$2 less expensive. It comes from the Cote Chalonnaise region just south to the Cote d'Or which is where all the famous Burgundy wines come from. We then compared the 2021 Domaine Drouhin Oregon Pinot Noir Origine 34 with the 2019 Joseph Drouhin Morey-Saint-Denis and again the French wine was our favorite, but it should have been since it was \$18 more than the Oregon Pinot. We then had the 2021 Domaine Drouhin Pinot Noir Laurene and the 2021 Drouhin Oregon Roserock Zephirine Pinot Noir. When we told Bailey that we were surprised at how good the Chardonnays were at \$40 she said she had another wine she wanted us to taste and brought us the 2021 Joseph Drouhin Macon-Lugny Les Crays which is a region in the very southern part of Burgundy, next to Beaujolais. We really liked it and then she told us it was only \$30 a bottle!



We asked Bailey about buying wine to get a credit for the tasting and we thought she said that if we each bought two bottles then that would give us the credit. We bought two bottles of each of the French Chardonnays and were really happy that for \$140, plus tax and shipping, we were getting both of us comped for the \$80 we paid for the tasting. The French wines could not be shipped to Maryland so we

## Willamette Valley Wine Tasting Trip

had them shipped to our son's house in VA. When the credit came through a few days later, it was only for one person. I sent a note to them asking why it was not for both of us and got a response that the two bottles had to be from two different categories and the second category was the more expensive wines. I responded that this had not been made clear to us and they apologized and gave us the second credit. I have only good things to say about visiting Domaine Drouhin and their wines.

Our last visit was a very special one. We had been to six of the big names in the Willamette Valley and tasted some great wines. A woman I worked with about 20 years ago, Teal Walker, her husband and a wine maker they teamed up with made their first Willamette Valley wine in 2016 and in 2017 purchased the property and expanded the plantings. They named this new estate Audeant (aw-DEE-ant). I had stayed in touch with another person from that company and he told me she was making some really good wine and gave me her email address. I reached out to her, got some information about her wine and bought a couple bottles of that first vintage, the 2016 Audeant Pinot Noir. It was really good, and when she put a bundle of four different wines on the website, I bought that and decided when we went to the Willamette Valley, we would be visiting Teal and learning more about what she is doing. The schedule worked out that we could make that our final stop and it was a great way to end the trip. It is a very small estate who just made about 400 cases their first year and will do about 1,200 cases this year. That is significant growth but still very small compared to the 250,000 cases being made by WVV this year. They were bringing the fruit in to be processed that day so she had us over to her house to taste some wines. Because it was her house and we immediately got into catching up for the last 20 years, we did not take any pictures of the 6 bottles she shared with us. We started with their 2021 Audeant Rose which is on the skins for 5-8 days and then barrel aged for 10-12 months. We then had the 2020 Seven Springs Chardonnay which was excellent. We then had that 2016 Audeant Pinot Noir and it just keeps getting better as it ages. I had two bottles left in our cellar and for Beth's birthday, which was just a few days after our visit with Teal, I gave her one of the bottles with her name on it as a joke present. She can have it any time she wanted, including keeping it all to herself if she wants. Of course, Beth can take any bottle she wants from our cellar but and putting her name on the bottle just made it a reminder of this great trip for Beth. This 2016 was in the top three of all the wines we had on this trip.



Because I did not take any pictures, I think the fourth bottle Teal poured was the 2019 Audeant Pinot Noir. We then had the 2021 Luminous Hills Vineyard Pinot Noir and finished with the first year of what is their top wine, 2021 Foothills Pinot Noir. Because we have been friends for years and had been invited over to her house, there was no cost to us for tasting these lovely wines. Teal gave us the bottle of 2016 we had been tasting to take back to our hotel and enjoy finishing it that evening. We did buy 1 bottle of



## **Willamette Valley Wine Tasting Trip**

the 2016 Audeant, 2 bottles of the 2021 Luminous Hills Pinot Noir, and 1 bottle of the Foothills Pinot Noir and had them shipped to us.

I strongly encourage you to check out their website,, and look at all the awards they have won in the last few years. They only do tastings on a few days of the week but you should work your schedule to go there if you are in the Willamette Valley. A number of the reviews from major publications say this is a vineyard to watch. They are making Pinot Noir the way that I fell in love with it, age worthy with tannins that mature to silky roundness that adds to the flavor instead of getting in the way of it. This very small estate is making wines that can fully compete in any contest with the best of the Willamette Valley and have won prizes against Pinot Noir from around the world.

We very much enjoyed this trip and are looking at managing our budget to go back to the Willamette Valley. Since we are now on a fixed income budget, if the stock market would show some green numbers in place of the stream of red numbers we have seen for the last few months, that will be easier to do.

One of the great things about wine is that there are many different wines to suit all kinds of tastes, and no one needs to apologize for liking one wine more than another. I have been a big fan of French Pinot Noir for 28 years, wines that become more interesting and complex each year as they age. For my Old World style tastes, I think Oregon is making the very best wine in the US. If you are a lover of the New World style of wines with their big mouthfuls of fruit forward Cabernet and oaky Chardonnays, I respect your wholehearted disagreement with me. But this is my blog where Oregon is declared the #1 winemaker in this country.