

## *A Nichols Worth of Wine*

August/September 2009

### *“Cote d’ Or -egon”*

A return to Portland, Oregon after a lapse of thirty-plus years was quite an awakening. The city has grown to where it is now, well, a big city. When I first visited and lived here for a short time with visions of a career as a chiropractor, it had a small town feel. Back then I think the biggest building was maybe ten stories. Today, skyscrapers bend to brilliant blue skies.

Back “then” I didn’t drink much wine, my student budget barely covered canned soup and morning coffee. Today the city has as many wine bars as Starbucks stores. It has become a very wine centric city, and with good reason. Just outside and southwest of the city’s suburbs lies the bucolic Willamette Valley. Having just come up to Oregon after a few weeks in California’s Napa and Sonoma Valley, I easily drew parallels, albeit from decades past.



Willamette’s wine region is hauntingly similar to what California’s “rural” Sonoma County was not so long ago. Rolling verdant hills alternate between newly planted vineyards and cow pastures and orchards. Today Oregon boasts more than 400 bonded wineries, a significant jump in the last decade. Wine historians would appreciate Willamette’s viticultural scene; it is eons beyond what California vineyards and winemaking were in their infancy.

### *At the foot of Penner Ash Vineyards*

I travelled to Oregon to pay homage to the country’s (some believe the world’s) leading producers of pinot noir (and chardonnay) and came away thinking that the time may not be far off when oenophiles begin to refer to the best burgundian wines as “*Oregonian*” in style!

Granted I only spent three days here, visiting as many vineyards, but the goal was to experience the best the region had to offer. Willamette Valley is “*Burgundy*” country. If they grow cabernet here I didn’t see any, but boy do they grow pinot noir and chardonnay! The Dundee Hills and Chehalem appellations are America’s answer to Burgundy’s famed *Cote d’ Or*.



*Domaine Serene*

Domaine Serene, Bergstrom, and Penner Ash, with no slight intended to the many other outstanding and dedicated Willamette producers (Drouhin, etc), are unquestionably *Grand Cru* estates.

This is America's "*Cote d'Or -egon!*" These wineries are matching the right rootstock to the right soil and paying painstaking care in the vineyards to produce world-class wines. Burgundy fans will find striking similarities in these "Oregonian" wines and the top chateaux and domaine's of France's *golden slopes*.

I can already hear the protestations of pinot-phile's from the golden state to the south; listen, there are great pinots being made in the Monterey Peninsula, Russian River, Mendocino and Santa Barbara. But truly "*burgundian?*" California pinots can be charming, delicious and delightful and I drink my share, though I do find many too extracted for my taste and bearing little resemblance to France's Burgundy wines. After tasting through the current lineup of pinot's from Bergstrom and Penner-Ash, it wouldn't be at all surprising to see them "best" the best of some of France's *Grand Cru* Burgundy's as Domaine Serene did back in 2004. That's when Domaine Serene, in a blind tasting, topped Burgundy's Domaine de la Romanée Conti - regarded by many as the world's finest wine, taking first second and third place with three wines from each vintner!

Sort of a *Judgement of Portland*.



*With Josh Bergstrom*

For more information on these outstanding producers and to order their wines, click on the links.  
<http://www.domaineserene.com>   <http://www.pennerash.com>   <http://www.bergstromwines.com>

Cheers, and remember...  
*Eat, drink and be merry!*

*Bruce*