

Ep 187: The history of Oregon Wines with Doug Wregg (Part 2)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, and welcome back to part two with Doug Wregg, Director of Buyer at Les Caves de Pyrene, who through bringing in natural, organic, biodynamic wines for the last 30 years into the UK has made him a real authority in this field.

Now today, we're talking about the wines of Oregon. So, a wine region nestled in the Pacific Northwest, lying between California to the south, and then Washington to the North. In fact several of Oregon's AVAs, so American Viticultural Area, straddle both Oregon and Washington.

So, Walla Walla and Columbia Valley, there you can find some great Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, and then there's the cooler Columbia Gorge where you can find more Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. But Oregon, in general, is renowned for its diverse and exceptional wines, particularly famous for its world-class Pinot Noir, followed by Pinot Gris and then Chardonnay.

And that is because two thirds of the wines come from its most famous AVA, Willamette Valley. And then there are 11 AVAs to discover within this region. Several will be touched on today. But you have South Oregon's Umpqua Valley and Rogue Valley to check out.

But Oregon is a region of really varied microclimates and soils, and there's even the Snake River Valley AVA, which is very desert-like, and that straddles Idaho, and apparently is making some pretty good Syrah and Viognier. But one of the biggest reasons why we are talking about Oregon today is their huge commitment to sustainable and organic farming practices.

So, Doug is going to be taking us on a journey of Oregon's history and how it has grown up through the years. We will be tasting a Pinot Noir and a Chardonnay, both, can I say, blew me away. I think the Chardonnay may be in my list of favourite Chardonnays ever.

Now check out the show notes to see where you can purchase them. Equally, you will find the link to the transcript there so you can follow along. And all that leaves me to say is a big thank you to my sponsor of this season, Wickhams Wine. There's a link also in the show notes.

Do pop across to their site because if you're in the UK and it's your first time there, just use the code "EATSLEEP10" at checkout for 10% off your first order. Right. Pour yourself a glass of tasty wine and enjoy the episode.

Janina Doyle 00:03:22 Now, I asked you, what kind of wine region do you really enjoy talking about at the moment? And you mentioned, to me, Oregon. Tell me, what is it about Oregon that has you excited now that people should know about?

Doug Wregg 00:04:39 Well, talking about natural wine and Georgian wine or whatever, then we go to the opposite end. Then we come to modern wine, and Oregon is, in effect, it's a sort of 50-60 year old wine culture.

And it's really interesting to see, with New Zealand as well I suppose, like, they don't have hundreds of years of wine growing and winemaking to fall back on. So, how does that wine culture develop and in what direction it develops and how is it perceived in other countries?

So, yeah, I visited a few times and sort of fell in love with Oregon as a place, or at least the sort of wine growing area of Oregon and the people as well, who are just so fantastic. They're not like professionals necessarily, but they have such interesting background stories and they apply their philosophy of wine to their winemaking.

It's not sort of like sometimes people say, like customers say to us, oh, have you got a Californian wine, by which they mean Chardonnay or Cabernet Sauvignon or something like that. And then like, I don't think they have a really clear idea of what an Oregon wine is. And I think in Oregon, it's almost such a steep learning curve that I think the progress I've seen in the last even 15-20 years, even the last five years probably has been huge. So, I'm always intrigued to feel the energy of a new wine region.

Janina Doyle 00:05:04 I mean, I was looking at Oregon recently, okay, you're going to talk about it, let me go and have a quick look again. And I was surprised by actually how many AVA's there are. And I was like, there's about 23 now. And realistically, if people are starting to get to know Oregon, they're going to know about the Willamette Valley because 2/3 of the producers, they're there. This is a load and loads of the AVAs are within that.

But there was a few that I hadn't even heard about that only a few years ago have become an AVA and you then realise, my God, there's so much energy, there's so much movement and development and understanding of their own terroir, their soils for them to be creating these much smaller AVAs within a much bigger AVA. You talked to me about earlier, there is an interesting history of Oregon. So, it really is literally about what, 50 years old since the 1960s. That's when Pinot finally got planted.

Doug Wregg 00:06:01 Yeah. Well, I suppose you have to really go back. I suppose the first vines actually in Oregon were planted in 1847, and not a lot of people know this, by a guy called Henderson Luelling. He brought them over or they came over in this sort of covered wagons with thousands of cuttings of fruit and nuts and trees on the so-called Oregon Trail from Missouri to Oregon.

They were first planted, I think, in a place called Milwaukee in Oregon. And then, this guy and various other people sold root stock to farmers up and down the whole length of the West Coast. These were the mother plants for, you can call it a wine industry, because it was very much not a wine industry, but it's pretty small.

Then I think between roughly the 1850s, 1860s and 1919, there was a lot of German immigration. Families came and settled in the steep river valleys in the state. So, in the Applegate and Umpqua valleys, there were the Britt family, Von Pessi's family, Doerner families, and in Willamette Valley, Reuter and the Wirtz families. They put down their roots and they planted vines and they thought this is prime vineyard land. They really believed that Oregon would be the next wine land. That was their origin.

In 1904, the guy Frank Reuter, who was in the Willamette Valley, won a silver medal for his Riesling at the World Fair in St. Louis, Missouri.

Janina Doyle 00:07:29 1904?

Doug Wregg 00:07:30 1904. And then what happened?

Janina Doyle 00:07:32 Well, we had prohibition. Yes.

Doug Wregg 00:07:34 So, all the vineyards were ripped out, or just lay fallow. Prohibition was from 1920 to 1933, I think. And the commercial wine industry completely vanished. So, that's two generations of grape growers and winemakers lost into that period.

No new vineyards were planted between 1919 and 1961 when a guy called Richard Sommer planted a wide assortment of grape varieties in the Umpqua Valley. This is south of the Willamette Valley. He planted mostly Riesling. Maybe Riesling is the origin grape there. And Cabernet Sauvignon with small parcels of Gewurztraminer, Syrah, Carignan, Pinot Noir, and Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, of course.

And so the first planting of Pinot Noir in Oregon was in fact accredited to Richard Sommer. And he's famous for that, but of course that really belittles his grand achievements, which he could say he's the first or the forefather of modern Oregon wine. His first wine was a Riesling in 1963.

So then, roughly at the same time, Charles Coury and David Lett, you would say that they were the three wine pioneers in terms of the impact they've had on the rest of the Oregon wine industry. And then other families known often as founder families, we deal with one. Sokol Blosser, the Ponzis, the Erath's, the Adelsheims, the Fullers, they're all in the Willamette Valley, and then there was various ones in the Umpqua.

But in 1970, there was just one vinifera winery in the whole of Oregon, just one, and less than 100 acres of vines planted to vinifera varieties. By 2010, already 418 wineries with 20,000 acres in 848 vineyards. Now, over a thousand wineries and well over a thousand vineyards. And of course, winemaking and wine tourism is a vast commercial thing for Oregon.

So, that's the background. But a few people, but even in the mid-70s, there was nothing really until famously in 1979, David Lett, who I referred to earlier, he entered his 1975 Eyrie vineyards, that was the name of the vineyard, Reserve Pinot Noir. And he took 10th place in a blind tasting at an event in Paris called the Wine Olympics...

Janina Doyle 00:09:58 I love the name!

Doug Wregg 00:10:02 ... By a French magazine. Yeah, Gault-Millau. And it sent shockwaves around the wine world, either real or contrived, we don't know. Especially in Burgundy, who are fiercely defensive, as were the Bordelais. But Pinot Noir, it's sacred to Burgundy, isn't it? Of course.

So, Robert Drouhin of Maison Domaine Drouhin famously demanded a rematch. And this is like the stuff that history has built on these little stories. And out of the wine tastings and blind tastings, the same 75 Eyrie Vineyards' Pinot Noir came second to 1959 Drouhin Chambolle Musigny. And once the world got back to Oregon, that basically this wine had conquered the world, more or less, then people really got behind Pinot Noir as a grape variety in a way that sort of dictated the next 20 or 30 years of wine growing and the notion that Oregon equals Pinot Noir and falsely, Oregon equals Burgundy.

And the fact that it came from the Dundee Hills put the perception that Dundee Hills was the centre of Pinot Noir territory. But one little aside, which I think is really funny, is the wine that came first and the second worldwide was Tyrrell's Pinot Noir from Australia. And that could have been the moment that Australia became like Pinot capital, but wasn't.

What in fact happened was the Drouhin family decided to plant their first vineyard outside of Burgundy in the heart of the Dundee Hills and won awards for their Oregonian Pinot Noir. And really, the rest is history. And then people came from all over the world. So, you had the original founder families, but then you had a lot of investment from France, basically.

Janina Doyle 00:11:43 It's absolutely fascinating, though, how quickly this whole wine region has exploded. And if I'm right, you've mentioned the founders, the names that came and said, what, we're going to plant.

This is not an ideal grape growing region. The summers are cold and they're wet. And apparently, from when I was looking into this, a lot of the advice from UC Davis in California was saying to everyone, don't plant any grapes here. This is a really, really bad region to plant grapes. And thankfully it is. It's like so many regions, even in England. Don't plant grapes, just stick to apples. It's too cool.

Doug Wregg 00:12:22 Charles Coury and David Lett, I think they went to UC Davis. But then what they did was they travelled across Europe and they tasted wine and brought back their favourite cuttings. We call it suitcase cuttings.

So, Charles Coury brought back a clone of Pinot from Alsace, which is now called the Coury clone. Goodness knows where the origin is. We think it's Alsace anyway. Switzerland, the Vadensville clone of Pinot Noir.

But then Charles Coury also planted a vineyard with 30 different grape varieties of which Gewurztraminer, Semillon, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, these were really important. Then of course you still have the heritage of Riesling and whatever.

But if you look at the total plantings now, 59% of all plantings in Oregon are Pinot Noir, which is incredible. And much of that, of course, is in the Willamette. Then the next grape down is Pinot Gris at around 14. Then Chardonnay, only seven. And Chardonnay has been bolstered by the fact that

everyone's mad about sparkling wines there. Oregonians love champagne, but they love a mix as well. Then Syrah. Then Cabernet Sauvignon. 1% Riesling.

Janina Doyle 00:13:34 1%?

Doug Wregg 00:13:35 For me, I've tasted a lot of Riesling from Oregon. I think it's only 1% of production. Like, why would it be? And altogether, 100 different grape varieties are grown now across all of Oregon, basically.

And there are a lot of nurseries letting out things. There's a lot of grafting on top of rootstock as well. You'll find like Mencia, for example, Gruner Veltliner, Albariño. The thing is, when I first went to Oregon, we got the usual guff about, oh, this is an incredibly cool climate region. It's so difficult. And they said, oh yeah, you've got Champagne as the coolest, then Oregon, then Burgundy, then whatever.

And I thought, I'm standing outside, it's like 110 degrees. And then I said, when was the last normal vintage you had? Like a typical cool. "Oh, this was 2010." I said like, that was eight years ago. It was like every vintage is hot, whatever. And they said, "Yeah, basically."

And then, literally one vintage in the last 20 has been like a normal, long growing season. Because the whole thing was you were able to harvest Pinot Noir into October. No, they're terrified if they don't pick in August or beginning of September. So, everything has changed and there's no way this is like a cool climate.

And just because they grow Pinot Noir doesn't mean it's a cool climate. It means they have to think really clearly about what they're going to do. Remember, most vineyards in Oregon are really low altitude, like 150 metres, 200 metres is pretty high.

Do they plant higher up? They're so worried about ripening Pinot. Whereas I don't think this is a problem. I don't necessarily want super ripe Pinot, but they want their Pinot to come in at proper full ripeness, 14-14.5%. It's a long way away from Burgundy, but Burgundy is suffering exactly the same problems. It's so hot year after year that Pinot, which is a very fragile grape after all, needs to be respected. You need to sort of like tone it down.

It's not about maceration. It's not like a white wine, where if you get that sort of ripeness, you can play. The white grape variety is your palate, whereas the red grape variety, it's too delicate, especially Pinot Noir, which needs certain weather conditions. I think you need to be in the vineyard constantly, so nurturing the vines, then it's much more problematic than it used to be.

Janina Doyle 00:15:59 Well, that is just echoed across many of the vineyards of the world now, isn't it? So, you've touched on Pinot Noir. Of course, we have to now taste a Pinot Noir. Tough times for me.

I have, you sent me the Beckham estate. Anyone who likes David Beckham, maybe this is a good gift as well. Just on a side note, nothing to do with him, I assume. And this is the Creta Pinot Noir vintage 2021.

So, this comes from the Willamette Valley, but it's within the Willamette Valley. Again, another newer AVA, which probably I can't pronounce. Am I going to kill it? Chehalem Mountain?

Doug Wregg 00:16:40 Chehalem. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:16:41 Chehalem.

Doug Wregg 00:16:43 Chehalem Mountains AVA. And this is from a vineyard on Parrett Mountain. It's called P-A-R-R-E-T-T, not Parrot. But I chose this for 1001 reasons, basically. One is it seeks into the whole idea of making wine in clay pots. And I think this is unique.

This is a vessel called a Novum, which was pioneered by the guy who made the wine. So, Andrew Beckham is a ceramicist, and taught pottery, local high school, loved wine and decided to work stages and wineries and do vintages, and decided to plant around his house, like vineyards, to Pinot Noir, to Trousseau, to Aligote, to Sauvignon.

And farm them regeneratively, biodynamically, but he was already making clay pots of all shapes and sizes, including qvevri Georgian style, including Tinajas and including his own pioneered Novum, which he now exports all over the world.

Janina Doyle 00:17:48 Interesting.

Doug Wregg 00:17:49 Making wine to put in his own clay pots. And he's one of the most respected potters in the whole of the wine world and people come to him for advice and buy his particular vessels. What I love about this is Pinot Noir in alliance with clay. And if you have a clay pot, your fermentations last much longer, much cooler, much slower, much more even. And you get this beautiful extension of flavour.

Also by using clay and not by using new wood, which a lot of producers will use. There's no punch downs and pump overs. It's so easy and seamless and fine and fresh and elegant, delicate as well. When pinot is like this, I really love it because I don't like this quite cakey, black fruit extraction. For me, it's gone over.

I love the red fruits and I love the acidity to describe a line underneath it. I think when you get long, cool fermentations, you get this thing. They're ambient fermentations, not like there's no temperature control in the cellar. It's just the clay, the way it acts as an insulation and the way there's this sort of biodynamic motion within the vessel. And then, nothing really added. It's a natural wine, but it's a great introduction to Pinot.

Janina Doyle 00:19:13 I love this wine and I love native yeast, sun-filtered. This is a natural wine, ageing in these clay pots. And in your head when people go, natural wine, it's so funky. There is actually not a single touch of anything. Only fresh, fresh fruits. And the most fine tannins.

It's an absolutely beautiful expression of Pinot. I love Les Caves de Pyrene because that's what you focus on natural wines, minimal intervention, but so many natural wines are funky because perhaps somebody's trying to follow the trend. It hasn't been stored properly. It's just not a very good example. There are loads of them out there.

And then people have just this idea. And me too, I don't like funky wines. I don't like my wine to taste like cider and so many do. But when I know that you've brought them in, you're so good at choosing people who just want to showcase the vibrancy and their terroir. And I think if you have

really, really good fruit and experience, the wine continues to taste like wine and people should not be scared that it happens to be natural wine because I wouldn't know with this bottle at all.

Doug Wregg 00:20:26 I think the better you farm, the better the wine tastes as well. That's always my precept for natural wine is that you can make it zero sulphur or whatever, but it doesn't mean it's a good wine.

If you have beautiful grapes, you farm well and you're very responsive in the winemaking and a lot of tasting, a lot of feeling, the way the wine wants to do and where to go, then you've got it, basically. But I would never say a wine is good because it's natural. Wine can be interesting because it's natural but ultimately, I think most winemakers, and this is perhaps the biggest fallacy, is that a lot of critics think that natural winemakers are just obsessed with the title, obsessed with belonging to a group.

But actually, no, they want to make delicious wine. And their mentors, like Andrew's mentor is Elisabetta Foradori. Well, what a great mentor, just delicious wine. Wine you want to drink. Wines that give enormous pleasure, wines that have finesse and freshness and elegance and all those sort of like nice abstract qualities.

I don't think people necessarily want to make vinegar. It's not a commercially good idea, but it's also if you don't want to drink your own wine, why would you make it? So, I think it really has to start from that thing. And of course, there are people who jumped on the bandwagon and say, look, I can make a natural wine. But that's not really the point. It's like, does it stack up as a wine?

Janina Doyle 00:21:50 Everybody listening, if in doubt, just check to see if the wine is with Les Caves de Pyrene and then you know. It's been Doug approved. Doug approved means not yuck. These are these lovely wild strawberry notes, a little bit of kind of tea leaves.

So, lovely fruits, but much more mellow. And also that's going slightly towards the earthiness without it being too savoury because I still think it's much more on the fruit spectrum. For me, actually, I haven't drunk Oregon for a very, very long time because actually Oregon, when I first started in the wine industry nearly 15 years ago, actually was a little bit cheaper and now it's skyrocketing because I mean, they're really doing fantastic jobs and it's now become cult status-y even.

And when I was tasting Oregon before, I used to always feel like the Pinots had this lovely like parma violet floral note going through them. That was just something I noticed. But yet I don't think that is true now. I think these are slightly rounder. This is still a medium body wine. Do you feel like you can categorise the style of Pinot from Oregon? Keep in mind, actually, it's quite a large area compared to other places in the world. What are your thoughts there?

Doug Wregg 00:23:54 Not really, because there are a lot of different terroirs in Oregon. So, here we're on volcanic, jory and some additional soil. The volcanic soils, They didn't come from the erupting volcanoes in the Cascade Mountains. They came from big lava flows that created sort of basalt layers over marine sedimentary.

That gives a certain sort of sanguine quality to Dundee Hills wines, particularly, which is full of that sort of soil. Here, it's a little less so, but you get into other places, the Eola-Amity, you get these more windblown soils and suddenly you get freshness and more lighter styles, etc.

It's incredible. Like in Burgundy, two neighbouring vineyards will have two different profiles. The same in Oregon. There is one slightly cooler part of Oregon as well. It's in the Willamette and it's called the Van Duzer Corridor, which has now got its own AVA.

Janina Doyle 00:23:52 Of course, it does.

Doug Wregg 00:23:54 Yeah, it's just tiny. But basically, it's a gap in the coastal range, which allows cold Pacific air to blow in. And anywhere in the corridor there is a noticeably cool climate. Whereas a lot of Oregon vineyards were planted originally to face away from the ocean and more towards the centre – more towards the east and north. This is where all the hot air is coming from.

So, increasingly with global warming, we're seeing a lot of hot weather events coming from the deserts of eastern Oregon and further east than that. I think that's not ideal for Pinot Noir, basically. Maybe it's people like David Lett and other people, who are moving away from the slightly classical style of winemaking, which is de-stem, lots of pump overs and punch downs to get extraction to more whole clusters.

Even if it's not 100%, it's 20, 30, 40%. That gives this lovely stemmy freshness, longer, slower fermentations. The move away from 100% new oak, unbelievable for Pinot. But people were really up at that level. Certainly 40, 50, 60. And more towards 20% or even new oak.

That was a bit revolutionary that people would not extract and not hit the wine with heavily charged barrels. But if you think, the main audience for Oregon wines is California and Canada, and they just love big wines there. They are big, bold, powerful wines.

Pinot Noir was just something people saw 'Sideways' or whatever. It's a great advertising gimmick, but that's not what Oregon is about. Oregon was about an incredible variety of terroir, reflection of really healthy, pristine fruit from organic and biodynamic farming. Oregon is an epicentre of biodynamics, probably in all the states where Demeter was founded. Demeter USA in 1931 or 32. It's got the LIVE schemes, it's got so many organic schemes.

It's so much about small winemakers, small family wineries, incredibly limited production. Three, four thousand cases is where it's at. Yeah, there are a couple of bigger wineries, but it's nothing like California and nothing like many other more industrial wine making countries. Land and labour costs are really high. Minimum wage is really high in Oregon.

There's a lot of cost factors, but they're quite proud about it. The average price for Willamette Pinot Noir is \$50. That's way more than any Californian Pinot Noir on average or a New Zealand Pinot Noir. So, it sort of pitched itself and it's not going to go back the other way.

The only direction it might go is away from Pinot a bit and to discover that actually with climate change, white grape varieties are definitely the way to go and some great grapes as well.

Janina Doyle 00:26:55 Interesting. I want to touch on two things you've talked about there. So, one being about experimenting, going away from Pinot Noir. In Portland, what I find fascinating, what I would love to do is visit at some point, and flying into Portland makes a lot of sense.

And there's become over the last 10-15 years, this real massive urban winery scene. A lot of the wineries from Willamette Valley, which is obviously just south, have even brought their tasting rooms there. So, there's a real culture now for it. I guess, for experimentation, a lot of energy, food and wine. Have you spent time in Portland?

Doug Wregg 00:27:31 Yeah, yeah. And there are some small urban wineries there. But obviously when you get to the wine country, as it's called, the Dundee Hills, then big tasting rooms. And you have a big tasting room, you're getting loads of weddings and functions. You make every bloody grape variety you can. It's for tasting rooms. It's not really for export.

So, yeah, your bread and butter is your pinot noir and your sparkling, but then you might make 15 other different bits and bobs. Yeah, Portland, I don't find it that wine-y city. I mean, yes, there are some urban wineries, but actually, if you go and eat and drink in Portland, you notice that everybody loves Grower Champagne. It's an obsession.

And I think a lot of winemakers now in Oregon are making a sort of sparkling wine from Pinot and Chardonnay. They love Italian wines and they love Barolo and whatever. So, you go into any classy restaurant, this is what you see on the list. Yes, of course they support local growers, but the sort of urban wine phenomenon, which yeah, there's two or three fantastic, whatever.

And it's just because they're sharing a warehouse space with artists and other people. It's a big thing in California as well. It's when you have no money to make wine, you just perch in some little space. And increasingly, because of the cost of everything, there's so much contract crush facilities and so on and so forth.

But I think even the people who work in urban wineries, you think, oh, where's the origin there? Where's the vineyards? But they all work with organic and biodynamic producers and they're all really keen to talk about the vineyard where the grapes are sourced from and they're feeling for the wine.

So, one urban winery I know, they just specialise in Riesling. Another one just specialises in Loire grape varieties like Cabernet Franc and Melon and Cabernet Sauvignon. And it's like, wow, these are not what I thought Oregon was about, but actually it shows the potential of what it could be.

Janina Doyle 00:29:36 Super, super interesting. Well, you've just touched on the fact that I was going to ask you the second thing, which is how green it is. As a sommelier back in the past, back in the day when I was selling Oregon wine, I would always touch on, 'oh, I feel like this is one of the greenest wine regions of the world.' Because no matter what winery I was buying from, they always had some salmon safe accreditation. They had livestock on their properties.

There seems to be such a proudness and such a beautiful focus that everyone's doing things as sustainably as possible. I know the world is paying more attention day by day, but Oregon seems to have been doing this for a really long time and nailing it.

Doug Wregg 00:30:24 Yeah, since 1973, there was a law passed which limited residential building and agricultural zones. And that raised the value of farmland hugely and encouraged vineyards to be planted.

And now, there's the LIVE, which is Low Input Viticulture & Enology program. 47% of Oregon's vineyards are now certified sustainable, which is incredible. I don't know how many are biodynamic certified, but there's got to be at least 50.

That's incredible concentration. I think probably only Alsace, I can think of any place in the world, which has that, and maybe Austria, has a concentration of organic and biodynamic status. But written in almost to the law of how you work is biodiversity energy reduction, water management, recycling, workers' health, safety, and improvement in the environment for the local communities, this is pretty well enshrined in Oregon law.

And that's the first thing they talk about if you ever go to it. I went to Pinot camp. Yeah, people from all over the world come and mess around for three or four days and get to know a bit about Oregon. But they drum this home that Oregon like set itself up to make the best wine it possibly could with the least environmental impact. In fact, to make these things environmentally positive to farm that way.

And really to think about every single aspect, like totally green wineries, 100% solar powered, 100% recycling, 100% using wastewater, and so on and so forth. You mentioned the Salmon program as well. You need that integrated philosophy. You asked me at the beginning, why Oregon? That's why Oregon.

I love this friendly wine community and they're always thinking about the environment. It's like, yeah, we make wine, but we make wine within this quite rigid program of laws and it's the right thing to do. We don't resent the fact that we have to work in this way. And how can we do it better as well?

Janina Doyle 00:32:22 Love that. Well, I want to get onto Chardonnay now, and maybe also talking about, you've mentioned another AVA, a small AVA, Dundee Hills. It has quite a lot of history. So, you've sent me a bottle of Kelley Fox wines 2022. And this comes from a pretty old vineyard in terms of when it was planted. This is the Durant vineyard, Chardonnay, and their Lark Block. So, tell me why you chose this wine.

Doug Wregg 00:32:43 Well, I mean, I love Kelley personally. She's a friend. I think she's been a mentor for me. When I first visited Oregon, it was really to see her and we had a long rambling conversation about Pinot Noir and how I was perpetually disappointed by my favourite grape and I hated it.

She's like, well, I like Pinot Noir, la la la. And the way she talked about it was so intriguing. I felt like I've got to taste her wines because she's like a real poet about these things and she's quite a spiritual person as well and really in tune with nature.

And so, I went and tasted the wines and fell in love with them. I thought she really understands. She really understands that wine is a natural product in the sense that not about 'no sulphur' or anything like that, nothing to do that but about it comes from nature and the more you're in touch with the

vines, every single vine, the more you understand the vineyard, the more you make something or you allow something to be made or to happen that is totally reflective of that vineyard.

And she is so in love with the particular vineyards that she works with. She works with several people who have the same philosophy as her in terms of farming. So, Durant is this particular vineyard. And I think she loves the Dundee Hills. She says it's got volcanic energy and it was formed through these lava flows from hundreds of millions of years ago.

Anyway, when I first met her, all she made was Pinot Noir, basically. Her iterations of Pinot Noir were phenomenally different. I mean, again, one was almost rosé-coloured and almost sanguine and earthy and one was a bit darker and more driven, a bit like a Volnay versus a Pommard.

She would never say her wines are Burgundian, but there was a sort of Burgundian differentiation in styles, you could say, how different plots behave differently because of the soils and the age of the vines and whatever.

After the dreadful year that was 2020, when there were forest fires and huge smoke damage, she had to transition. She had to do something as did so many wine producers who may specialise in Pinot.

So, she started looking at alternatives and then she started working with other grape varieties. I suppose her other favourite grape variety was Chardonnay because what she loves to drink is Grower Champagne, Blanc de Blancs and Chablis. And Burgundy, whatever. But she likes a really fine, austere style of wine. She loves austerity in her red wines, but she loves austerity in white wine as well.

Janina Doyle 00:35:37 Interesting. You're saying that because for me, the lean style of this wine, even with some texture, but it's lean, it is linear, and there's a minerality. So, she's really honing in on exactly her palate and what she likes.

Doug Wregg 00:35:52 And because I'm not a winemaker, I don't know how that comes out, but it really comes out in all the wines. I feel like she is behind the wine, even though she would say she's not actually the maker of the wine, but I chose this one because, A, it's a vintage, which I think is a fabulous vintage, 22.

Now the previous vintage we had of that, 21, much warmer, where it felt warmer. And it was much Mersault-like that it had that slightly more verging towards the tropical sort of peachy style. And this one is - I'm not a Mersault fan but I love Puligny-Montrachet.

This is this linear thing, that fantastic tension and then almost like this chalky minerality underpinning it and then just a little lift of citrus. But not about the fruit, it's about the suggestion. There's real depth there.

Remember, so many Oregon grape vines are on original root stock. So, yes, relatively old vines. She treats this, it's all unusually, it's all in cement. Well, she calls them amphora, like uterine shaped amphora. And again, it's a very relaxing sort of medium to ferment and to raise a wine in. We're so used to Chardonnay tasting of oak whether it's the super imposition or whether it's the thing that's constantly in there.

It's like what's Chardonnay without oak? Well, this is Chardonnay without oak. It's Chardonnay, naked Chardonnay, basically. I just love it because it reminds me why I used to love Chardonnay and I fell in love and out of love with it because I didn't like oak bombs and a new world style, heavy, this takes me to other places. I mean, this is like purity. And I guess, I like wines to aspire to almost minimalism. Beautiful minimalism for me is the highest art form in wine. It's just when it's just stripped back to energy, almost dynamism, yeah, purity.

Janina Doyle 00:37:55 What I like sometimes about certain wines, we've hit on the words kind of mineral, chalky, linear. You said purity. It's so, so true. But then you actually feel like you don't need to describe it any more. There's this energy, this has this direction in your palate, but you're like, well, okay, yeah, there is like a little lemony underpinning peach note, but it's irrelevant.

It's the energy, this kind of direction of the wine. And I really get the cleanliness, the minerality and the purity of this wine. It's just really, really gorgeous. And again, absolutely magical wine. Wouldn't know it's natural, quote-unquote.

Ironically, there's not a single fault. I don't think there's any, we were talking about imperfections that actually can be quite enjoyable in the previous episode with, say, natural winemaking. No, this is so clean. This is just magical and light and bright and pure.

Doug Wregg 00:38:24 I thought a bit with Beckham as well. There's some wines which Kelley would use this word weightless. They're transparent and weightless. And the lack of showiness is what makes them truly beautiful.

Whereas we start off with some orange wines in the previous episode. These are peachy and punchy and you can take a bath in them. These weightless wines are like fine showers. They spray over your tongue and you just sense the energy, but you tend not to linger on them because they're so direct in a way and not at all obvious. But then Galileo said, "Wine is sunlight held together by water." With wines like this, I feel that's what they are.

Janina Doyle 00:39:40 I think that is a beautiful summary. I think Oregon, perhaps a lot of people think, California gets all the attention. Then people talk about the Merlots, the Syrahs from Washington, which is just above Oregon, but Oregon is its own wine region.

Obviously, there are a few AVAs as well that cross between Oregon and Washington just to confuse us. And that's why there's actually some phenomenal Syrahs and Cabernet Sauvignon from Oregon. But typically, I think if anybody wants to start exploring, there's loads to explore in Oregon.

Willamette Valley and the AVA's within is probably, I think, a good place to start. You're going to find that more. I love the kind of focus that people are going for. These wines are stunning. Oh, what pricing roughly?

Doug Wregg 00:40:32 These are quite grown up wine.

Janina Doyle 00:40:35 We're in Oregon, everyone. Oregon's not cheap.

Doug Wregg 00:40:41 Yeah. Oregon prices but also Oregon production. I mean, tiny production on some of these things. I think the Kelley is going to be around £45 to 50-ish and the Beckham would be around sort of that price as well. Maybe a bit less.

Janina Doyle 00:40:55 And that is fine because these are not wines that should just be opened up randomly just because you want a glass of wine. Actually, this is on a Sunday with somebody you love when you're in a good mood and you've got the patience and time just to open them up and enjoy the bottle slowly. Totally.

Doug Wregg 00:41:10 I was invited by a local wine shop where I live and they said, "Can you show five wines on a Saturday to people who just come into the shop?" And I said, "Yeah, sure. What would you like me to show?" And it was depressingly five boring, cheap wines. It was what people buy because it will hit that price point. That's what they want to spend. And I said, "Can I take a wine from my friend, Kelley?"

I know it's three times the price of the other wines. Anyway, I opened the bottles. We only sell one wine. That was her wine. Because when you taste the difference, literally in capital letters. Taste the difference. It's like, this is a whole experience of a vineyard. This takes you to places.

I mean, we didn't really talk about terroir, but I love wines that just take me to other places. It's like, it's cheaper than travelling. And you don't have to queue in airports.

Janina Doyle 00:42:06 A very, very valid point. Absolutely. Honestly, I think sometimes for anybody listening going, oh my God, these are really pricey wines. They are. And that's maybe also why a typical wine consumer doesn't really understand Oregon very well at all. But we should be drinking slightly less, but we should be drinking better.

And I always say, you'd buy, go to the theatre, you'd go to the football and you drop £50 to £100 to gosh, £150 now on a ticket if you are going to see somebody like Beyonce, whatever it is. So, it's like actually £50 between two people, £25 each, to have a moment, discuss, learn, pull up the computer as well, see where it is, find out what's special about the soil.

Doug Wregg 00:42:48 Yeah, it's a story. And also, if you spend more on wine, it doesn't mean it's better, but you focus a bit more on it.

Janina Doyle 00:42:56 Which is useful.

Doug Wregg 00:42:58 Yeah. And then, if an experience leads to an epiphany or a bit of revelation about wine, that's something that you remember for the rest of your life. So, most wine is disposable because we drink with food or get boozed up. And then there's these wines, it's like, well, okay, now I've learned something. You can't put a price on that, honestly.

I would much rather drink less and drink better than use wine as fuel. Because if you think about what goes into some of the bottles that we've tried today, it's a lot of work. Not just one year. It's 18 months to two years. It's all that farming and process, but it's also thousands of years of geography and geology and gastronomy and farming culture and everything.

Janina Doyle 00:43:46 Oh, stop it. You're getting me so energised because that's the whole point of wine, isn't it? And if we can drink as well, a wine made by somebody who's caring about the land, that's thinking about how they take care of it for future generations, they're handling it so beautifully. Their whole energy and their own focus is going into that wine. And it will be different

this year compared to next. And it's this natural product that will evolve in the bottle and it's travelled all over the world to get to us.

And we just paid £25 to £50 for the bottle. And we now get to sit down and think about everything that you just said and all the things that went into it and all the care and all the love and all the energy and see how that feels on our palate. What magic? What wizardry is this?

Doug Wregg 00:44:29 Yes, that's why we're in the business.

Janina Doyle 00:44:32 Absolutely. And hopefully, everyone listening now, you're either going to become in the business because you're very, very welcome. There's space for you. Or you're at least going to start enjoying wine even more and grabbing some extra special bottles.

Doug, thank you. Thank you, because your passion shines through. And it's just really nice just to listen to some stories, learn a few bits and bobs as well, whilst I of course drink along. And I hope those of you listening are also drinking along as well. Thank you and I'll speak to you very, very soon.

Doug Wregg 00:45:01 Yeah, pleasure. Bye.

Janina Doyle 00:45:02 Thank you.

Doug Wregg 00:45:02 Take care.

Janina Doyle 00:45:08 Well, I hope you're now thinking about getting your hands on a bottle of Oregon wine. However, I'm ready to tell you what is coming next week. I'm talking with Tom Surgey, one of the well-known wine presenters who's often working with the three wine men. So Oz Clarke, Olly Smith and Tim Atkin.

He has recently been in Portugal and is about to release a wine book. So, we will be starting conversations next week, talking about the Bairrada wine region. Now, finishing off as always with a wine quote, I introduce you, if you haven't heard of her already, to Isabelle Legeron who is a master of wine but also the founder of the RAW Wine Fair. And she said:

“Natural wine is like a photograph that hasn't been retouched. It captures the vintage, the terroir and the climate. It is the most authentic expression of a vineyard.”

Well, let me know what you think of natural wine. Do you have an opinion or do you take it wine by wine? If every wine tasted like the two I've had today, there would not be any argument. Now, as always, big requests to like, subscribe and leave a review, if possible, on your podcast app that you're listening to. And share this episode far and wide with all your wine-loving friends. Share the wine love. Now wishing you an inspiring week ahead and until next Monday wine friends, cheers to you!