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The Cutting Edge

10 emerging Oregon producers

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The past couple of years have seen a number of promising new labels emerge in Oregon. Some started with their own estate vineyards, aiming to put into the bottle the essence of their sites. Evening Land is the highest-profile newcomer in that mold, leasing a vineyard that has been around since the early 1980s. Maysara, de Lancellotti, Alexana and Cardwell Hill planted their vines more recently. Other startups are buying from independent growers. Ransom, Capitello and Retour, for example, like to blend characteristics from different sites for complexity and dependability. One new venture, called Quady North, focuses on Viognier and Syrah in the southern part of the state.

ALEXANA

Texas cardiologist Madaiah Revana, who also has a Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard in Napa Valley, owns 54 acres of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris vines in the Dundee Hills. Lynn Penner-Ash makes the wines in a refreshing, elegant style that stamps this property as something special.

91 Pinot Noir Dundee Hills Revana Vineyard 2007 \$38 1,200 cases

90 Pinot Gris Dundee Hills Revana Vineyard 2006 \$32 142 cases

CAPITELLO

Many young New Zealanders come to work in Oregon vineyards and wineries to gain experience they can take back home. Kiwi Ray Walsh is an exception. He went to work at King Estate in 1993, eventually rose to winemaker, and in 2003 set up his own winery, in Eugene. A pleasant surprise is the high quality of the sparkling wine.

91 Brut Oregon NV \$28 460 cases

90 Pinot Gris Willamette Valley 2007 \$18 742 cases

90 Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2006 \$35 320 cases

CARDWELL HILL

Owners Dan and Nancy Chapel planted their vineyard in Benton County, near Corvallis, well off the beaten path for top-rank Pinot Noir. But darned if their 36-acre site doesn't produce a generous, harmonious style, with distinctive flavors on a refined frame. It took a few vintages for them to find their footing, but the wine now rates among the best values in Oregon.

90 Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2007 \$23 3,496 cases

91 Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2006 \$23 1,139 cases

DE LANCELOTI

Paul and Kendall de Lancellotti have used biodynamic principles to farm their 16-acre vineyard on Calkins Lane in the Chehalem Mountains AVA since they planted it in 2001. They share the production with Bergström Wines (Kendall is Josh Bergström's sister), which bottles an outstanding single-vineyard Pinot Noir from the site. In making this wine, Bergström aims for a bit more intensity and flesh than he wants in his own bottling.

91 Pinot Noir Chehalem Mountains Estate 2007 \$65 250 cases

91 Pinot Noir Chehalem Mountains Estate 2006 \$65 150 cases

EVENING LAND

Hollywood producer Mark Tarlov, with several big-name sommeliers as minority partners, scored a long-term lease with an option to buy on the Seven Springs Vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA and brought in Burgundy star Dominique Lafon as consulting winemaker. The initial results are spectacular, including a game-changing Chardonnay for Oregon and several of the best Pinot Noirs in the troublesome 2007 vintage.

94 Chardonnay Eola-Amity Hills Seven Springs Vineyard Summum 2007 \$150 115 cases

93 Chardonnay Eola-Amity Hills Seven Springs Vineyard La Source 2007 \$90 129 cases

92 Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Seven Springs Vineyard 2007 \$48 1,519 cases

Expression 44°

Premier Pacific Vineyards, which develops vineyards in California, Oregon and Washington, sells most of its grapes. Clients in Oregon include Beaux Frères, Bergström and Owen Roe. But owner William Hill assigns a few acres to his own wine brand, Expression 44°. The number refers to the latitude in Oregon's Eola-Amity Hills AVA, where the producing vineyards are located. (There's also Expression 39° in Sonoma and Expression 34° in Santa Rita Hills.) Richard Sowalski, who had been making the William Hill wines, long ago sold to Gallo, is the winemaker. The Oregon wines show class and impressive depth.

92 Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Zena Crown Vineyard 2006 \$75 50 cases

91 Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Willakia Vineyard 2006 \$48 826 cases

MAYSARA

Civil engineer Moe Momtazi and his wife, Flora, purchased a 532-acre abandoned wheat farm in the McMinnville AVA in 1997, started planting, and now have more than 200 acres under vine on several steep hillsides. Since the 2007 vintage, when daughter Tahmiene Momtazi took over winemaking, the bottlings have taken a step up in quality. The wine names and labels reflect the family's Persian heritage.

90 Pinot Noir McMinnville Jamsheed 2007 \$25 4,000 cases

90 Pinot Noir McMinnville Mitra 2006 \$85 150 cases

90 Pinot Noir McMinnville Estate Cuvée 2007 \$32 1,000 cases

QUADY NORTH

Herb Quady, son of California dessert-wine specialist Andrew Quady, moved to southern Oregon in 2004 to make the wines at Troon Vineyard, in Applegate Valley. The following year the Quady family bought 100 acres and by 2006 had planted 15 acres of Syrah, Cabernet Franc and Viognier. The first wines, from purchased fruit, show outstanding quality.

90 Syrah Rogue Valley 4-2, A 2006 \$25 211 cases

90 Viognier Applegate Valley Steelhead Run Vineyard \$19 130 cases

RANSOM

Tad Seestedt discovered Oregon Pinot Noir while living in upstate New York studying architecture. When that career didn't pan out, he headed to Oregon, worked for a while at Argyle and Amity, and now has two brands: Ransom and Jigsaw (the latter for lower-priced wines). He buys grapes from high-elevation vineyards within 30 miles of his warehouse winery while he plants a vineyard in the McMinnville AVA.

90 Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Selection \$34 800 cases

RETOUR

Lindsay Woodard, who grew up in McMinnville, buys grapes from all six Willamette Valley AVAs to make a consistent blend that expresses the region instead of a single site, and the results have been impressive. Winemaker Eric Hamacher managed to make a silky wine with finesse in the overripe 2006 vintage, and a wine of purity and intensity in the rain-plagued 2007. Plans are to increase production to 2,000 cases by 2010.

91 Retour Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2007 \$65 900 cases

92 Retour Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2006 \$65 600 cases