

## Reserve Pinot Noir Club™ Focus on Belle Pente Vineyard & Winery

Belle Pente is picking grapes as I type, according to Jill O'Donnell, and I'm going out there tomorrow (Tuesday) to photograph the harvest. Look here: [www.avalonwine.com/Belle-Pente-Winery.htm](http://www.avalonwine.com/Belle-Pente-Winery.htm) for the latest news and more info on the winery. JY

By Cole Danehower



Brian and Jill O'Donnell's goal is straight forward: "We're trying to make the best limited production, family-domaine scale wines in Oregon," explains Brian. "We don't want to be big, we like being small.

We're almost at our capacity, and now we're going to focus like crazy on quality."

The O'Donnells' inspiration is clearly Old World-down to the ambiance implicit in their name. "Since everyone who has ever visited our place comments on how beautiful it is, the 'Belle' part was easy," explains Brian. "We discovered 'Pente' during a visit to Alsace, where we found the word was often used to describe the steep slopes of some of the Grand Cru vineyards. Since parts of our hillside are quite steep, it seemed like a natural fit."

Brian started as a home winemaker in the 1970s, and by the end of the 1980s had decided to elevate his craft from hobby to vocation. In the early 1990s Brian had a job opportunity in the Portland area, and after visiting the Willamette Valley wine country and tasting the wines "we said 'This is it!'"

Brian and Jill purchased the land that was to become Belle Pente Wine Cellars in 1992. "From a vineyard standpoint, we felt it had great potential," recalls Brian. "The elevation was right, ranging from 200 to 500-ft, with all WillaKenzie soils and great sun exposure-some of the best in the area."

In 1994 Brian and Jill planted the first part of Belle Pente's estate vineyard with Pinot noir, Gamay noir, Pinot blanc, Pinot gris, and Chardonnay.

"I believe that what will distinguish Belle Pente is the quality of our site," says Brian. "This site is very special. In 1997 and 1998 we made small quantities of wine from the estate vineyards and they were superb." The Belle Pente Estate Vineyard reached marketable production levels with the 2000 vintage.

Belle Pente's first harvest was in 1996, but until recently the bulk of the wine Brian has been making has come from purchased fruit, primarily from Murto, Wahle, and Maresh vineyards.

The winery's capacity is about 4,000 cases, which is just where Brian wants to be-"We don't want to be big," he says flatly.

**Belle Pente Continues on page 5**

## NW Big Reds Club™ Focus on Cuneo Cellars and Abeja

This month Avalon's NW Big Reds Club members get four bottles of wine- three from Cuneo Cellars, and one from the new winery, Abeja.

Continuing our policy of sending our members a generous amount of wine, we went ahead and included this excellent Cabernet Sauvignon from John Abbott, the winemaker who made such rich, hearty wines for Cuneo Ridge Vineyard before branching off on his own. The wine is quite limited- if we waited till October to send it, there would not be any for reorders, if you liked it. So here it is this month.



Ann and Carl, Avalon's store managers, have this to say about the Abeja Cabernet Sauvignon: "The Abeja Cabernet Sauvignon has the aromas of a fire burning out in a hay field getting ready for marshmallows followed by juicy cherry notes. The flavors are rich with blackberries, dark chocolate, leather, smoke and spice. The finish is long with a cinnamon vanilla touch on the end.

I had this wine with Wild Chinook Salmon and it held up beautifully to the Salmon. This wine complemented the fish perfectly. Simply a delicious Cabernet from Washington. Don't pass this one up!!

It's so exciting to try the new wines, long planned for, from the talented John Abbott. Eighty five percent of Abeja's production will be Cabernet Sauvignon, and it appears it will all be from Estate fruit.

The grapes are from Abeja's Heather Hill Vineyard, 17 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon just east of Seven Hills Vineyard at the south end of the Walla Walla appellation.

Pronounced 'ah-bay-ha,' the word is simple, lyrical, and lovely, and is Spanish for "bee". Its origin honors the immeasurable contributions of Latino workers to the NW wine industry. The bee also represents Abeja's respect for the land and their desire to work in tandem with nature.

Please go to [www.avalonwine.com/abeja.htm](http://www.avalonwine.com/abeja.htm) for more info and photos of the winery.

The Cuneo wines have been a long time coming for Avalon- we first tasted Gino Cuneo's wines back in 1997, and wished he made enough to sell, to us for many years.

He's collaborated with some fans of his wines who have become investors, has a beautiful new winery, and is making enough wine that we can make the winery one of our featured selections.



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### Reserve Pinot Noir Club™

Focus on Belle Pente!  
Belle Pente Reserve 00 \$40  
Belle Pente Murto 00 \$30  
Belle Pente Wahle 00 \$30

This winery is one of our favorites, and we dedicate the September Club to exploring the wines of these talented winemakers.

### Northwest Big Reds Club™

Abeja  
Cabernet Sauv 01 \$32  
Cuneo  
Two Rivers 00 \$19  
Cuneo Canas Feast  
Del Rio 00 \$34  
Cuneo Canas Feast  
Red Mountain 00 \$34

The three Cuneo wines are sent in September to be tasted in a group. One is from Oregon fruit, one is from Washington fruit, and one is a blend of fruit from the two sources. You can make your own custom blends and taste them against Gino's blend- a fun time will be had by all!

### New Discoveries Club™

Focus on Andrew Rich  
Andrew Rich  
Tabula Rasa Red 00 \$16  
Andrew Rich  
Cabernet Sauvignon 00 \$28  
One of our favorite winemakers, Andrew's wines are consistently well priced and well made.

### Sweet and Dessert Wine Club™

Kiona '02 Red Mountain  
Chenin blanc Ice Wine  
\$22.49  
Kiona '01 Red Mountain  
Late Harvest Muscat \$15.99

Known for its Big Reds, this winery also makes great dessert wines.

## CUNEO "YOU BE THE WINEMAKER" BLENDING TASTING FOR CLUB MEMBERS

The art of "blending" - that's what we are exploring this month with the Cuneo Cellars wines.

Most wines are made by blending— and there are many ways to blend:

- You can blend the same wine from the same vineyard site, aged in different conditions.

For example, you can blend together a wine that has been partially aged in old, used barrels that don't add much flavor to the wine, with the same wine aged in new barrels that impart a lot of tannins and oak flavors;

- You can blend different wines, made from the same grape varietal but from different vineyards.

Winemakers will "taste through" their barrels of wine, Pinot noir for example, trying young wine from different sites. The best may be bottled as Single Vineyard or even Single Barrel wines, while the rest is blended into "cuvees" of young wine from several or even many vineyards.

An example is Patricia Green Cellars wines, where she makes single vineyard wines from such vineyards as Shea and Balcombe. She also makes a blend called her "Oregon" Pinot noir. It is a blend of Pinot noir from several different sites and barrel types— interestingly, Patty and Jim often state that the blended "Oregon" wine is the wine on which they spend the most time and energy on. A blended wine is not necessarily of lesser quality than a single vineyard wine.

- You can blend different varietals.

A classic example of this kind of blending is the combination of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. The Cab-Merlot blend can be a lowly table wine, or a lofty "Meritage". Meritage and Bordeaux-style blends usually have additional varietals such as Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, or Malbec added for complexity.

### The Wines

#### Cuneo Cellars Two Rivers Bordeaux Blend 00

A Northwestern expression of Bordeaux- a blend of fruit from Southern Oregon's Del Rio Vineyard and Washington's Red Mountain Ciel du Cheval Vineyard. Fascinating stuff- a warm, round, complete wine with plush stuffing and a strong backbone of rips, rich tannins. Wonderfully spicy, with a delectable hint of - could it be mahogany? in the mix. The concept of blending Cab, Cab Franc, Malbec, and Petit Verdot from So OR and WA is fascinating- this is something new, interesting, and will be widely imitated, we predict. -jy

#### Cuneo Cellars Canas Feast Bordeaux Blend Del Rio 00

A classic Bordeaux blend made from Southern OR fruit from Del Rio Vineyards. In contrast to Cuneo's "Two Rivers" wines, this blend is pure Southern Oregon. The nose has buttery cinnamon, nutmeg, and rich fruit, the flavor is succulent, an immediacy of gushing berry and plum flavors, tinged with licorice, anise, saddle leather, and cassis liqueur. Long, long ripe finish. Yumm. -jy

#### Cuneo Cellars Canas Feast Bordeaux Blend Red Mountain 00

A classic Bordeaux blend made from Washington State fruit from Red Mountain's Ciel du Cheval vineyard. In contrast to Cuneo's "Two Rivers" wines, this blend is pure Washington. Dark, intensely ripely tannic, the nose has crisp red and black fruit and a hint of minerals. Flavors are tightly wound black plum and black cherry, leather, and hints of cassis and black berry. Finish is huge, tight, and well balanced. Lay down for 2-4 years, or decant for a few hours before drinking. -jy

### On to the Cuneo Blending Experiment!

Gino Cuneo is Italian, and he has focused on big robust, hearty red wines since starting his winery. He sources fruit from Southern Oregon and the Red Mountain region of Washington, near Walla Walla.

Gino has created a Bordeaux style blend of grapes from both areas that he calls "Two Rivers"- named for the Columbia and Rogue rivers in the Washington and Oregon regions he sources.

We've sent you three bottles of wine:

#### 1- From Southern Oregon's Del Rio:

Cuneo Cellars Canas Feast Bordeaux Blend Del Rio 00:

#### 2. From Washington State's Ciel du Cheval:

Cuneo Cellars Canas Feast Bordeaux Blend Red Mountain 00

#### 3. A Blend of fruit from both vineyards above, OR and WA:

Cuneo Cellars Two Rivers Bordeaux Blend 00

### Now, prepare for the tasting:

- Prepare at least FOUR glasses, labeled 1- through 4—the first 3 will be used for the three wines above, and additional glasses will be for creating your own blends.
- Open all 3 bottles and let them breathe for an hour or so.
- Pour the three wines into the first three glasses, **label the glasses!**
- Taste the OR wine, take notes,  
then taste the WA wine, take notes,  
and then try the blend of the two— and take notes.

Check out the way that Gino blended the three wines – the softer, plusher wine from Southern Oregon; the bigger, more tannic, stronger WA wine from Red Mountain; and the blend of the two regions. Is the blend a better wine, taking the best of both areas? Is it a lesser wine, losing the terroir of either area? What do you think?

### Now comes the Fun!

- Now that you have examined the Cuneo wines, it's time to be the winemaker. Try blending your own "Two Rivers" wine— use varying proportions of the OR and WA wines to try to recreate the "Two Rivers" style.
- Keep in mind that we are working with blends— ideally this tasting would use wines made from a single varietal, but what the heck, it's still fun.
- After you've made your own blends, try each others' creations— do you like yours better? Or is Gino growing in your esteem, as you attempt to hit the "sweet spot" where a blend tastes really good (hint— there is an art to blending, and winemakers go through a fair number of argle gargle icky blends before they find their best effort).

Let me know how it goes? - - - - - Jean



## New Discoveries Club

### Focus on Andrew Rich

At right, "Romeo" -  
Andrew's Vizsla



### Tabula Rasa Red 00 \$16

53% Cabernet Sauvignon;  
47% Cabernet Franc  
Columbia Valley, Washington

From the winemaker:  
The millennial vintage was my sixth in Oregon, yet it was only the third time I produced a red wine under the Tabula Rasa label. Well, as they say, third time's a charm. And this wine is charming, more quarterback than linebacker, with excellent people skills, so to speak.

All of the fruit was sourced from Alder Ridge Vineyard, in Alderdale, Washington, right on the Columbia River about an hour east of Maryhill Museum. Block 1, at the very top of the hill, was the source for the Cabernet Franc. It's a very windy site, and consequently the berries were small and thick-skinned, leading to intense fruit flavors. Though the block slopes a bit to the north, the clusters have no trouble getting fully ripe, and the wine exhibits none of the stemmy, bell pepper notes that are sometimes found in Cab Franc from cooler regions. The same could be said for the Cabernet Sauvignon, grown on a south-facing slope (Block 12), where the diminishing rays of the October sun allowed flavors—and not just sugars—to develop completely.

Both lots were fermented separately in stainless steel with daily pumping over or punching down of the cap. Fermentation temperatures were allowed to peak at 86 degrees, to maximize fruit. After about two weeks, the wine was racked to French oak barrels, almost all of which were twice filled. (Only about 2 percent were new.) The wines were racked once during aging and spent a total of 22 months in barrel before being blended. Bottling took place in September 2002 without fining or filtration; 573 cases were produced.

After eight months of bottle age, the 2000 Tabula Rasa has begun to develop tertiary aromas, appealing earthy or leathery notes that complement the more primary aromas of blackberry and black currant jam, along with an alluring spiciness. On the palate the wine is warm and ripe, very full-flavored without excess heaviness. Low acidity and ripe tannins provide a soft, round, moderately long finish. I suggest drinking this wine now and over the next three years with just about any grilled meats or, when cold weather returns, with hearty stews and non-tomato-based pasta dishes.

### Andrew Rich Cabernet Sauvignon 00 \$28

**90 points in Wine Spectator:** "Very firm in texture, a brawny Cabernet swarming with tannins around a solid core of dark berry and currant flavor, which echoes through the chewiness on the finish. Best after 2004. 165 cases made" H.S.

Andrew made only 150 cases of this wine. It is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2/3 Klipsun Vineyard fruit and 1/3 Alder Ridge vineyards fruit. This is a \$40 Cab at a bargain price, Klipsun's fruit is some of the best in Washington, and Andrew comes through with his usual talented performance as winemaker. Ageable, big and masculine in style, yet with complexity and rich fruit flavors. Yumm!

## Dessert Wine Club

### Focus on Kiona

Most people think of Big Red Wines at great prices when they think of Kiona, but the winery also makes some super dessert wines. These always sell out quickly, especially as holiday gifts, so let us know if you need some soon. Wine Club members get priority on ordering.

### Kiona '02 Red Mountain Chenin blanc Ice Wine \$22.49

WPNW Review of 2001 vintage(Spring 2001):  
A fascinating dessert wine with remarkably concentrated apple characteristics. Some burnt caramel flavors meld with the big acids and fruit flavors. **Won gold at the Central Washington State Fair.**

### Kiona '01 Red Mountain Late Harvest Muscat \$15.99

Wine Press NW Rating "Outstanding" --  
Peach aromas with vanilla and spice leading to delicate flavors of citrus and a faint touch of golden raisins. Residual sugar is 11 percent.

## About Kiona

Founded by Scott's father, John Williams and his partner Jim Holmes in the mid-1970s, Kiona's strength is in the vineyard. Luscious, intense fruit grows on Red Mountain, Washington state's newest appellation where Kiona Vineyards is located. It is also the home of Klipsun Vineyards, Hedges Cellars and Vineyards, Ciel de Cheval and Taptail Vineyards. These vineyards, including Kiona, sell fruit to some of the most prestigious winemakers in Washington and Oregon.

Kiona's spotlight came when the 1999 Cabernet Sauvignon was rated 92 points from Wine Spectator. Then in December it was named one of the Top 100 Wines of the Year by Wine Spectator Magazine. However, Scott Williams says in the past 10 years, some of Kiona's wines have scored high, or come highly recommended by wine critics and magazines.

"We've been around and had our share of good scores," Williams said. "But the winery reflects my personality and I'm pretty low key. We let the wine do our talking for us, and we're pretty happy about it right now."

In addition to the Cabernet, Kiona's ice wines have done very well in recent years. The winery produced only about 150 cases of the '01 Chenin Blanc Ice Wine, so quantities are limited.

Williams said the climate on Red Mountain produces a traditional style of ice wine.

"There aren't that many climates where you can produce ice wines," Williams said. "We have our Chenin Blanc growing in a cold spot at the vineyard, where the grapes freeze on the vine."

"The ice wine is very viscous and concentrated. The flavor and sugar is concentrated. It has a mouth feel like a liquor, with a long, full finish."

The ice wines are so intense that Williams recommends pairing the wine with something simple, like a tart apple, cheese or something light and airy. He warned that rich desserts would not showcase the concentration of the wine.

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Approximately half the production is Pinot noir, 30 percent Pinot gris, and 10 percent each Chardonnay and Riesling.

Brian's approach to his Pinot noir is clearly Burgundy-inspired: "We don't do a whole lot; we basically let them make themselves." While this is certainly true, like any good winemaker, Brian makes many different decisions that affect the final style and quality of his wines.

For instance, his Pinot noir grapes are picked early in the morning so they arrive at the winery cool. The fruit is carefully sorted to remove any rot and mildew, and is 100% destemmed. Long cold soaking, long low temperature fermentations using native yeast, and pressing at dryness directly into barrel, are examples of how Brian tries to preserve the character of the fruit.



Jill and Brian at the 2003 IPNC

Belle Pente's Pinot noirs generally come in two styles, a Willamette Valley blend and single-vineyard Reserves (including Wahle, Murto, and in 2000, Estate). The Willamette Valley spends a year in oak, 25 percent of which is new. The Reserve spends longer, 18 months, and has a higher proportion of new oak-between 30 and 40 percent.

"We want to make Pinot noir wines that have great length and texture, but a little bit lighter in style and not heavily extracted," says Brian of his stylistic approach. "We're not looking for wines that will keep 20 years. We want our wines to be approachable upon release, and hit their peak within a 5-7 year window, depending upon the vintage."

One aspect that sets Belle Pente apart from the "Pinot pack" is their enthusiasm and focus on white wines.

"A lot of people ask why we make so many white wines," chuckles Brian-"because it's fun!" Besides, adds Jill, "It's not as if you can just start growing another red grape here that is as wonderful as Pinot noir; yet there are a lot of great white varieties that make excellent wines here."

Belle Pente makes Chardonnay, Pinot gris, and Riesling, as well as a new rosé. "With our whites," says Brian, "we're looking to squeeze all the intensity we can; we want them to be big and rich, but with good acidity. Alsace is the stylistic model for our white wines."

For their Chardonnay, Brian approaches things differently than the Pinot noir. "I find the white wines require more intervention," he says. "Stylistically, we're looking for fairly big, rich, and ripe fruit-the best of California-style and Burgundy-style."

To help achieve that, Brian barrel ferments his Chardonnay and inoculates with selected yeast; "I've had too many white wines get funky with indigenous yeasts," he comments.

Belle Pente's Estate vineyard contains mixed Dijon Clone vines, though it is too early to know just what the final character of the grapes will be. Brian plans to blend some Clone 108, as he did in 1998, to add a little bigger body to the wine.

Brian is excited about Pinot gris and Riesling, in particular. "I'm really bullish on Pinot gris. We barely knew what it was when we came here, but we made a few carboys in somebody's garage in Portland and became a fan of the varietal overnight."

Brian wants his Pinot gris to be in an Alsace style, with as much bigness, ripeness, and richness as he can get while still maintaining good acidity. Belle Pente's Pinot gris fruit comes primarily from two vineyards. Brian likes the combination of flavors he gets from the tropical character of Wahle Vineyard fruit complemented by the spiciness from Whistling Ridge Vineyard.

"We'll take what the vintage gives us in terms of dryness or sweetness, and we'll try to get as much ripeness and richness as we can," says Brian.

Belle Pente's Riesling is made in small quantities from 15-year old vines. "I love to make it, I love to drink it, and I love to sell it," enthuses Brian. "Riesling is a noble grape, and Oregon has a lot of it planted, but much of it goes into \$6 supermarket wines-We're trying to make a serious Oregon Riesling; completely dry, high acidity, good flavor."

In fact, that could be Belle Pente's byword: serious. With a distinctive and varied white wine program, an Estate Pinot noir vineyard only beginning to exhibit its character, and a focus on quality, Brian and Jill O'Donnell clearly take their winemaking mission seriously.

## The Wines

### Murto Pinot noir 2000

From the winery: "Our fifth consecutive reserve wine from this outstanding older vineyard (established in 1978) in the Red Hills of Dundee. In addition to the fresh earthiness and red fruit aromas & flavors typical to this area, Murto has a unique exotic spiciness (sandalwood, Asian five-spice, and Christmas spices) that distinguishes it from its neighbors. The 2000 version is "classic" Murto with all of these characteristics seamlessly integrated. This wine will appeal to old fans of this vineyard, and is certain to attract a few new ones as well. Enjoy it now, or lay it down for several years. "



### Wahle Pinot noir 2000

From the winery: "Our third consecutive bottling from this old Yamhill-Carlton District vineyard planted in 1974. The vineyard is situated on south sloping willakenzie soils at an ideal elevation of 450'. Pinot Noir from this vineyard tends to be herbal and floral (especially lavender), with deep black fruit flavors and aromas (especially ripe blueberry), and a silky texture. This 2000 version is a wonderfully pure expression of these attributes. Enjoy now or cellar for 4-6 years. "

### Reserve Estate Pinot noir 2000

From the winery: "In past years we have yielded a mere barrel per year of Estate Reserve Pinot Noir (from the original 1994 planting). In 2000, with the addition of several new blocks, we made a whopping 8 barrels! The wine was featured at the Int'l Pinot Noir Celebration this summer, and was recently recommended in Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: "...expansive, yet structured character. Loads of black cherries and juicy blackberries are intermingled with hints of licorice in its firm personality as well as in its long finish. Anticipated maturity: 2003-2008". This is the biggest, boldest, most intense Pinot Noir in our line-up, and we recommend holding it for at least another year or two. "

He also is not shy about leaving a barely perceptible amount of residual sugar, and having a relatively high alcohol content. "The wines have enough acidity for the sugar to bring out the fruit, and the alcohol gives the wines more body and greater length," he says.

The Chardonnay typically stays in barrel for a full year. The barrels are 50 percent French and 50 percent Oregon oak. "The reserve will have more new oak and be a richer, fuller, more Californian style," says Brian. "Our regular Chardonnay tends to be a little leaner, more of a Mâcon style."