

tasting notes


wine views & reviews


A Beaux Frères Vertical At the Medford home of indefatigable wine collector Peter Adesman, a few rogues recently gathered for a vertical tasting of Beaux Frères Pinot Noir, a wine as notable for its quality as for the notoriety of its co-owner, Robert Parker, the world's most influential wine critic.


Among those in attendance was Michael Etzel, Beaux Frères' longtime winemaker, co-owner of the winery, and brother-in-law of Parker (*beaux frères* is French for "brothers-in-law").


As the tasting began, Etzel announced that "wines are kind of like children—you never know what they are going to grow up to be." With the estate vineyard now wearing its 17th leaf, Etzel says he is trying to "let the vineyard speak more for itself," by using winemaking techniques that are designed to make less powerful wines than in the prior vintages. He's hoping his loyal customers won't regard them as "too thin."


Walking the tightrope between elegance and power is never easy, especially with Pinot Noir, but with Etzel's hard work and his brother-in-law's awesome reputation, Beaux Frères will always draw a crowd—in every vintage.

 **2002** Cherry fruit predominates. Reminiscent of Russian River/lower latitude Pinot. Etzel says the wine is "so complex that it is hard to judge at this stage."


 **2001** Fine balance between powerfully extracted Pinot and a more delicate, aromatic, red-fruited, feminine style. Elevated acidity bodes well for additional cellaring. "The wine does not have broad shoulders," says Etzel, "but it is quite elegant."


 **2000** Somewhat closed up, both on the nose and the palate, but has a big backbone underneath rich fruit layers. Should improve significantly in 2-4 years. "This wine has never blossomed as anticipated," Etzel laments.

 **1999** A perfectly balanced wine that is just starting to show its complex flavors. Will have a huge drinking window that should go on and on. Elegant and highly extracted. A great wine.


 **1998** Over-ripe flavors, reminiscent of Port. A big wine. Etzel calls the wine "vulgar" and reminds us that he never irrigates his vineyard, "so that the individual character traits of every vintage are preserved."

1997 No aromatics and very little flavor. Out of balance, clumsy.

 **1996** Still showing nice fruit flavors. Slightly reduced. A pleasant, somewhat complex wine that shows some varietal character. Etzel calls this "the helicopter year" because he had to rent a helicopter to blow water off the fruit prior to harvest.

 **1995** Fully mature, with exotic game and leather flavors, but limited texture. Some reductive flavors. A good wine, but it won't hold much longer.

1994 Angular, monolithic. A little hot. Limited Pinot characteristics. A drinkable wine, but not as good as expected from this vintage.

 **1993** Lovely, elegant, seductive textures. Perfect balance. Rich, complex fruit and mushroom flavors, balanced by fine acidity. Fully mature but will last several more years. This was the year of the "miraculous fall," Etzel recalls, and he reminds us that while "spring weather determines the quantity, it is the fall weather that determines the quality." A great wine.

1992 The volatile acidity in this wine overwhelms the nose and the fruit flavors hiding underneath. Past its prime.

—Conde Thompson Cox

With tasting panels in both Oregon and British Columbia, **Northwest Palate** reviews Pacific Northwest wines in the following manner: Wines reviewed for each issue are submitted directly from wineries or sourced through local distributors. Our panels blind-taste each sample in flights of 3-6 wines, grouped by vintage and varietal. Approximately an hour is devoted to each flight. Wines are evaluated and discussed by the judges before winery names and prices are disclosed.

Wines are judged on aroma, flavor, balance, and finish. Flawed wines or wines devoid of varietal character are not recommended. Corked wines are re-tasted from a new bottle. Our reviews of recommended wines are published, often with food-matching suggestions.

Wine tasting and reviewing is by nature subjective, but in each issue, we offer judgments by the same tasters, thereby affording our readership consistency of opinion. The Portland panel consists of Cameron Nagel, editor and publisher of **Northwest Palate**, and Larry Halkinrude, wine buyer for Elephant's Delicatessen in Portland. Our British Columbia panel consists of Vancouverites Harry Hertscheg, manager of the Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival; Anita Boomer, an advertising manager at the University of British Columbia; food and wine journalist Robin Mines; and accomplished amateur taster John Drost.

tastingkey

Wines exhibiting complexity, varietal focus, and excellent structure (balanced fruit and acid in white wines; balanced fruit, acid, and tannins in reds) are rated **Exceptional**. Wines that are well-balanced and exhibit varietal focus and persistent flavors are **Highly Recommended**. Well-made wines displaying good varietal character and balance are **Recommended**.

 Exceptional

 Highly Recommended

 Recommended