

2017 VINTAGE REPORT

The 2019 Willamette Valley Wine Auction features wines of the 2017 vintage. It's a vintage that has vintners excited. The year brought a unique combination of growing conditions that put winemakers in a good position to harness quality. Across Willamette Valley, the wines of 2017 deliver plenty of flavor complexity with approachable tannin while avoiding heaviness.

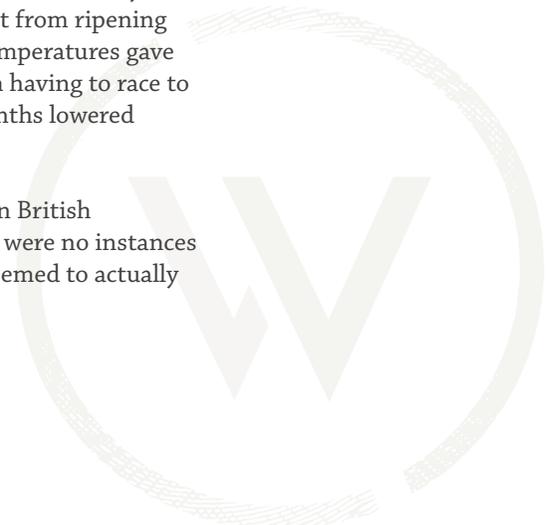
What were the growing conditions?

After several warm years with early harvests, vintners were happy to see the 2017 vintage return to a more classic schedule. Harvest happily began in late September. Though 2017 included some heat spikes in August, they occurred well before ripening, allowing time for the vines to benefit from the balance of more normal temperatures over the month following. Overall, it was a welcome return to the weather of a more classic Willamette Valley vintage.

At the same time, the previous warmer vintages well prepared vintners for smart farming through the heat spikes. The experience of recent vintages with warmer temperatures meant winemakers had the insight of experience in the vineyard to maintain healthy vine balance regardless of weather. Once the heat passed, 2017 turned into what winemakers are calling a classic vintage. Cool temperatures at harvest also meant greater flexibility for winemakers on picking decisions, which meant greater freshness across a range of styles.

Cool and wet winter weather through winter got the growing season in 2017 started with a bit of a delay. Budbreak and bloom happened far later than the three previous vintages, which each had warmer weather in spring by comparison. Near-record rains through winter gave the vines abundant reservoirs to catch up and stay healthy during the heat of summer. The warmer summer temperatures of 2017 ensured grapes achieved ripeness with plenty of flavor and approachable tannin. Generous yields and cool temperatures at harvest helped maintain freshness in the wines. Abundant yields meant that even during the warmest parts of summer, the vines kept from ripening too quickly, staying instead in healthy balance. The cooler harvest temperatures gave winemakers the chance to carefully choose when to pick, rather than having to race to stay ahead of the weather. Dry weather throughout the summer months lowered disease pressure, resulting in pristine fruit.

The summer of 2017 included the surprise of smoke from wildfires in British Columbia hovering in the skies of Willamette Valley. However, there were no instances of smoke impact anywhere in Willamette Valley. Instead, the haze seemed to actually help protect the vines from excess sun exposure.



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All together, the conditions have winemakers from throughout the Valley describing 2017 as “classic Willamette Valley.” The result is energetic wines with plenty of flavor across a range of styles.

What do winemakers have to say about the 2017 wines?

For the first time, the Willamette Valley Wine Auction is able to feature wines from the newly official Van Duzer Corridor AVA.

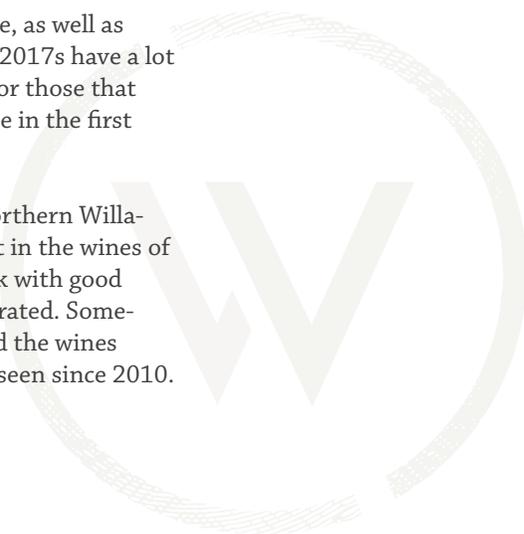
There, winemaker Florent Merlier of Van Duzer Vineyards found optimal spring conditions and summer temperatures in the heart of the new AVA. As he explains, wines from the area display “phenolically mature fruit, and ultimately, wines with balanced acidity and intense aromatic expression.” The cooler harvest temperatures meant a more relaxed approach could be brought to picking decisions. As a result, “grapes were picked by hand at peak maturity.”

Making the wines for both 00 (Double-zero) winery, and RR wines, Wynne Peterson-Nedry has been able to work with vineyards in some of the outer lying areas of the Willamette Valley, as well as its established AVAs. She described 2017 throughout the region as a more classic vintage than the warmer conditions of recent years. “The acids are great, the balance is near perfect, and the tannins in the Pinot are present but not overwhelming. The wines have very good structure, but overall the potential to age is good based on the concentration of acidity. The fruit is beautiful and concentrated but not too ripe. I love the 2017 wines, and can’t wait to see how they age with a couple more years. Even now, they are bright, fruit-forward, and lingering.”

Winemakers in Willamette Valley often work with vineyards from multiple areas, and can thus offer unique insight on wines across the region.

Shane Moore makes wine for Gran Moraine from Northern Willamette, as well as Zena Crown from the Central parts of the Valley. As he explains, “The 2017s have a lot of electricity and great poise. They are in my estimation great Pinots for those that love Pinot. The 2017s remind me of why I fell in love with Oregon wine in the first place. It is a truly stellar vintage.”

For Bergström wines, Josh Bergström works with vineyards across Northern Willamette, as well as in the Eola-Amity Hills. He saw exciting development in the wines of 2017 as they aged before bottling. “Wines were coming out of the tank with good color and aromas and nice body without being too ripe or too concentrated. Something magical happened during and after malolactic fermentation, and the wines blossomed into one of the most explosive, aromatic vintages we have seen since 2010.”





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The wines during blending during blending were succulent, juicy, floral, and so freshly fruited. I honestly cannot wait to drink them.”

How Did the Nested AVAs of Willamette Valley Perform?

McMinnville AVA

Scott Neal of Coeur de Terre explains, “the elevation in the McMinnville AVA is important and has a huge effect in the vineyards due to the weather that comes over the Coast Range. In our lower elevations, the surrounding foothills shield us from direct wind. As you move up the slopes, the winds have a more direct effect on the ripening of the fruit.” The result is that “our grapes tend to ripen a little slower than our neighbors to the east, and this is one of the differentiating factors of the AVA and what makes its wines unique.”

In the 2017 vintage he found wines with “nice fresh fruit character, depth and vitality. Our wines tend towards darker fruit tones, but I would say that 2017 has shown a brighter character than we’ve seen otherwise. Wine quality is very good, and should have the opportunity to blossom, and age elegantly over time.”

Yamhill-Carlton AVA

“I think 2017 was a great vintage for many sites but particularly for the marine sedimentary soils of Yamhill-Carlton AVA,” says Adam Campbell of Elk Cove. “We also made some really nice wines from our Jory and Laurelwood soil vineyards in other areas of Willamette Valley, but 2017 was a special year for sites like Mount Richmond and La Boheme in the Yamhill-Carlton.”

He continues, “Now that my 2017 Pinot noirs have been in bottle for a few months, I am really getting a sense of what the vintage is all about. It is really living up to expectations as a vintage with immense freshness and intensity of fruit. There are sweet, dark berry fruit notes for sure and also the added layer of spicy complexity you can only get from cooler temperatures. The smaller berries of 2017 allowed us to be super gentle on extraction in the cellar, and it is a great vintage for fermenting with whole clusters! These 2017s will age well, and be here to enjoy for the long haul.”

Ribbon Ridge AVA

In the Ribbon Ridge AVA, Harry Peterson-Nedry of RR said, “Our site benefits from higher elevation, and older vines, meaning we can harvest later without water issues and with the intangible qualities of mature vines. I think the harvest timing of 2017 being normal for the region is a big plus for the vintage quality. It was also a good year





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for our industry's ongoing education on how to adapt to a warmer climate to make each vintage more and more sophisticated, age-worthy, and complex. The wines of 2017 show elegance."

Working with several vineyards of Ribbon Ridge, Wynne Peterson-Nedry agrees. "The vintage quality in Ribbon Ridge was amazing overall. A lot of nice, tight clusters with small berries helped contribute to a more concentrated wine and lovely structure with balanced acidity. Fermentations were clean, easy and steady," allowing greater ease of quality in the resulting wines.

Chehalem Mountains AVA

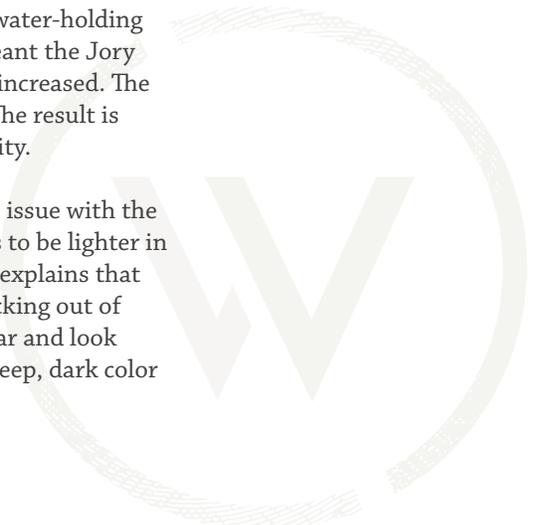
Scott Shull of Raptor Ridge found the wines from their Chehalem Mountains site quite pretty overall. "I'm surprised by how lithe and aromatic wines of this vintage are considering the warmth of the summer months. One might anticipate more massive and brooding wines," he says. "But the wines are delivering balance, freshness and complexity. After a few years of bottle age, I think they will reveal additional complexity and tertiary flavors."

Jim Prosser of J.K. Carriere also appreciated the advantages of the Chehalem Mountains. "I am glad that I own and buy from vineyards at higher elevations both for slightly cooler temperatures and fewer ripening hours during the day. We may have had some heat but the wines are not hot, and we have good acidity," he says. Like Peterson-Nedry, he also appreciates the chance to hone farming and winemaking every year. "Wine quality is high for 2017. We have been able to stair-step-up quality slightly every year. Part of that is vintage, and part of that is better anticipating and executing our response to warmer vintages both in the vineyard and the winery."

Dundee Hills AVA

In the Dundee Hills, warmer temperatures were well balanced by the water-holding capacity of the basalt-based Jory soils of the area. The winter rains meant the Jory soils of the Dundee Hills stayed cooler even as ambient temperatures increased. The soils also helped maintain good vine balance even with a larger crop. The result is wines that show good depth of character, freshness, and approachability.

At Sokol Blosser winery, Alex Sokol Blosser found that "color is not an issue with the 2017 wines. Since it was a larger crop I would have expected the wines to be lighter in color and flavor, but we were able to get everything nice and ripe." He explains that the final wines have good structure without any one characteristic sticking out of balance. He continues, "I am very happy with what we have in the cellar and look forward to the 2017 Pinot noirs! The wines are very good, with nice, deep, dark color



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and good flavor.”

Eola-Amity Hills AVA

The naturally cooler temperatures of the Eola-Amity Hills AVA helped maintain freshness and a healthy canopy during the warmer summer months of the 2017 vintage. As the weather cooled towards harvest, vines were able to relax even more and deliver great concentration to the fruit while carrying good acidity all the way through into the cellar.

Ken Pahlow of Walter Scott Wines says, “The cooler weather during harvest is one of the most important parts of the vintage in my mind. It allowed for a slower ripening before picking that means the wines are more taut and crunchy. Quality is high in our view. The Pinot noirs are well structured and alcohols are moderate. Overall quality is pretty special. The wines are very classy. They are fresh, and elegant, and as a general rule they are also nicely precise.”

