

CHEHALEM

S U M M E R 2 0 0 3



BASIL CHILDERS

RIESLING: KINDA CRAZY

or, Who Can Resist Those Little Freckles

By Harry Peterson-Nedry

Call me crazy—looking at white wines when there's pinot noir fever in Oregon—grafting and planting riesling when everyone else is pulling it out—planning to increase fine dry riesling production five-fold over the next five years.

Chehalem is engaged in a Don Quixote-like attempt to resuscitate riesling in our great cool climate, as a variety that is underappreciated and yet as elegantly reflective of site and climate, as pinot noir is as a red.

OUR PLANS are to plant riesling vines on Ribbon Ridge in the next two years, having grafted Corral Creek and Ridgecrest chardonnay vines to riesling this spring, supplementing grafted Stoller vines which bore for the first time in 2002. Even before Ribbon Ridge plantings, we will show a five-fold increase to 5.5 acres from the original Corral Creek's 1.1 acres. We are seeking more complexity by planting varied sites.

Our current goal is to excite people, to raise riesling once again to the serious level it was born to. With Oregon's industry paralleling consumers' tendencies, we will try to reverse a riesling production that saw 22% of grapes grown twenty years ago become 5% today. We will commit time and energy to that excitement. Plus 1000 cases of wine to guarantee we can reach most consumers.

The task is not easy, since riesling is not only *not* red, but it is a variety most people have had early in wine appreciation and skimmed over because of misguided instruction and the unfortunate dexterity of riesling to make a range of styles, including vapid, cheap and sweet. And, after all, serious wine is red, expensive and bone dry, right? Most venerated wine sages insist riesling is not only *a* noble white variety, it is *the* noble white variety.

Riesling is a dancer, the female athlete, a Mia Hamm. It is the lithely elegant Audrey Hepburn or firmly aristocratic Katherine Hepburn, so recently even more elevated, borne of strength, glazed with a patina of softness and charm. And, like (CONTINUES NEXT PAGE)

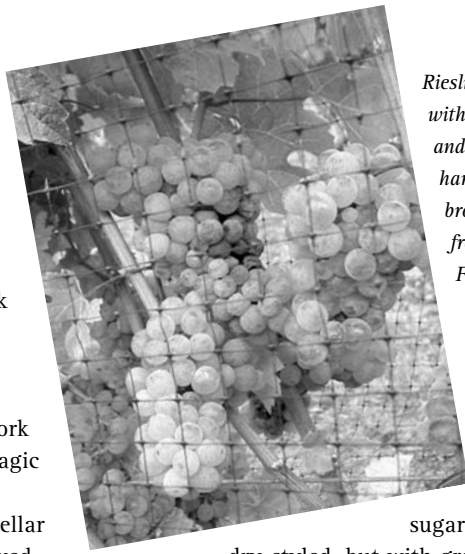
(Above) Whole cluster pressing prior to a long, cool fermentation in stainless steel with several yeasts.

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT)

the world of grace, manners, reserve and contemplation, riesling has been neglected, almost forgot. Riesling has deferred to a competition of wines made in macho proportions, wines on steroids like oak and alcohol and extract.

THE 2001 GERMAN RIESLING VINTAGE has done yeoman's work in waking consumers to the magic and delicious richness and complexity of the variety. A stellar vintage that seems to be followed by another in 2002 and has company in Alsace's 2000 vintage, 2001 Germans are worth seeking out.

Germany is not the only place for great riesling. There is a chorus of great wines



Riesling just before harvest, with bird nets for protection and some botrytis from late harvesting—with grapes brown, wrinkled and freckled, this could be Florida or Palm Springs!

coming from Alsace (usually dry but sometimes with a lush, low level of RS—residual sugar), Austria (normally dry-styled, but with great late harvests, and accompanying their other great white, Grüner Veltliner), Australia (especially Clare Valley), New Zealand, Canada (Okanagan Valley—oh my, *real* icewines!—and Ontario) and America (including Washington State, like Eroica, the

joint project between Chateau Ste Michelle and Dr. Loosen; New York State, Finger Lakes makers like Hermann Wiemer; California, like our friends at Navarro; and one or two friends and ourselves—humbly—in Oregon). Don't be surprised if you see a collective educational effort bridging regions and countries.

Although riesling grows well in several different cool growing regions, it doesn't hold that all regions' wines are the same in character. Fragrant, bright and highly focused wines are just as possible as heavy, bruised-fruited sweet wines. Riesling, like pinot noir in the red wine world, responds to site and soil better than any other white variety, reflecting in the finished wine differences in soils—like slate, loess, ocean sediment, volcanic or gravel. Wines can be round or angular, fruity or floral, acidic or soft, laser dry or sticky sweet, and mineral or unctuous in style.

Your job in this groundswell should include assembling some great riesling to see what all the fuss is about, including the standard bearers from Germany and Alsace, and the pretenders to the throne like

A Word in Passing

The beauty of the wine business centers largely in the rich mix of rare personalities who become your acquaintances and, hopefully, friends. Below is a short profile my daughter, Wynne, wrote a couple years ago on such a friend, vineyard partner and wine collector. He died in June. As he would have done, I drank a great bottle of Mazis-Chambertin, his favorite, as a tribute to his life and passion.

PROFILE: LOU MEECE The International Pinot Noir Celebration attracts a diverse array of people from all over the US. and the world, including many of our friends. It brings together people for one common reason, their love of a special wine. One of these characters is Lou Meece. This man is a heavy-set, gruff, southern-talking, chain-smoking guy in love with wine, who I first met in the back room at Nick's Italian Café when it was still a storage room and sometimes private dining room, when I was only 4 or 5.

He originally comes from Louisiana where he set up one of the largest, most successful barge companies on the Mississippi River, and occasionally flies to Oregon to be with people who share a similar enthusiasm for wine, which he holds largely in memory. Due to heart trouble and the medicine that is necessary for regulation of this problem, Lou is unable to drink any wine, and this is especially disappointing since before the trouble with his heart he owned one of the finest collections of Burgundy in the US. After he was told that wine consumption would no longer be possible, he was forced to sell his impressive collection to an insurance company, yet he would not give up the joy of attending one of the best wine festivals in the world. Still, he often makes the trip from Louisiana to Oregon to attend the IPNC and eat the food, listen to the conversations, and spend time with friends who enjoy a passion he can no longer share.

—Wynne Peterson-Nedry

Chehalem and other regional rieslings. And then see what you like.

CHEHALEM'S DRY RIESLING is indeed on the dry side, with threshold-or-less sugar remaining (<0.6%) and with a style that accentuates bright acidity or low pH, and fresh white fruits and flowers, balanced with stony minerality. It may be described as a cross between the fresh and racy German rieslings and the weighty, more alcoholic Alsace rieslings. We are beginning to learn our sites, with the three soils on our estate vineyards offering variety and the warmer sites like Stoller providing lushness, while progressively cooler sites from Corral Creek to Ridgecrest permitting longer hangtimes for complexity and retention of higher acidities. Clonal plant differences will be interesting to play with as we go forward.

Winemaking decisions for us include late harvesting, with even a bit of botrytis, most years meaning a November harvest, 120-140 days after bloom. Our yields we try to keep between two to three tons per acre (very low for riesling), with whole cluster pressing and

cool stainless ferments for elegance and to minimize harshness, and with multiple yeasts for complexity.

It is the range of wines possible with riesling, plus their utter finesse and food friendliness, that cause experts like Hugh Johnson, Jancis Robinson and Steve Pitcher to call rieslings "the finest of all white grapes" or "the easiest wines on earth to enjoy...also the hardest to understand." Once we forget we had riesling as introduction to our simple beginnings, we can realize how ultimately engaging intellectually these wines can be.

After all, riesling is a noble variety and its nobility needs to be defended. And I don't personally mind the characterization of a looney astride a mule tilting at windmills, wishing acquaintances richer futures graffitied with fewer sound bites, fast food joints, stock answers, stock cars and stock markets and, instead, simply decorated with more NPR, thoughtfulness, family meals, hybrid cars and farmers markets.

After all, life and its appreciation should be more of a dance than a hockey match. 🍷



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

PHOTOS: BASIL CHILDERS



Quartetto DI Donne at last year's art show.

CHEHALEM RESERVE RELEASE AND ART SHOW

Blending Old and New

Saturday and Sunday, August 23 & 24, 2003, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Returning Artists: Chehalem Label Artist, Ted Katz; ceramic artist, Karen Brock and **New Artists:** Photographer, Kirk Jonasson; painters, Nancy Tipton Steensen, Lyle Railsback, Kathryn Delany; and glass artist, Janis Miltenberger.

We will pour new releases throughout the day and Quartetto DI Donne will once again grace the cellar with the sounds of classical strings.

CHERYL TAKES OFF FOR FRANCIS TANNAHILL

It is with a mixture of *excitement* (anticipating her personal feelings of pride and success at working independently) and *sadness* (realizing the person I have worked with daily from the time she and I alone *were* Chehalem will now only visit on occasion) that I announce Cheryl Francis is stepping out on her own to devote full-time to 9-month old son Theo and to the Francis

Tannahill label she and Sam have begun. Please support her as she brings wines into the market in the next year. She flies prior to Harvest this year, strong of wing, with great places to visit, and appreciated. 🍷

Cheryl Francis, the "other" face of Chehalem winemaking since 1996, leaving for her own label.





NEW RELEASES

By Dan Beekley, National Marketing Manager

2002 RESERVE DRY RIESLING This wine makes me smile. Knowing that it's simply a concoction of earth, plant, and rain makes it all the more enticing. Understanding that a wine like this came from here, Oregon, and not from some old-world region like Wachau, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, Alsace or Rheingau validates its existence further. Riesling can titillate the senses from the first golden drop and conjure images of foods eaten, vistas beholden, and lovers forgotten. **WINEMAKER'S COMMENTS:** *Lushly rich and weighty carrying great acidity, due to the long, cool ripening finish at harvest. Auslese weight and white fruit makes the 2002 mouthfilling and impressive.*

2001 WILLAMETTE VALLEY CHARDONNAY Ahh, Chardonnay, the king of Champagne, the queen of Burgundy, and the crown prince of the new world. How does one grape cause so much consternation, and at other times merit so little consideration? How can one grape appeal to so many, yet be mastered by so few? Why does Chardonnay take center stage on wine lists, and store shelves, while the noblesse of riesling, chenin, and gruner duke it out for the bleacher seats? Is it because it's easy to pronounce? Easy to buy? Perhaps it means a little bit to a lot of people. See how this one measures up in your own world. Could be a standard. **WINEMAKER'S COMMENTS:** *Rich but focused, we like what the increased Dijon clone component provides. White-to-yellow fruit, honeysuckle blossom, lightly spiced apple butter on toast, minor barrel vanilla and soft, weighty impression on the palate. Good acidity.*

INOX™—A STEAL!

Inox is the word for stainless steel in France. At Chehalem, INOX™ is a new wrinkle on an older theme and is our version of a "steal".

We have never overwhelmed wines with oak and sympathize with consumers who protest those who do. The consumers have firmly refused to drink chardonnay on the premise that it is almost an artificial wine, intensely oaked, buttery, fully ML stamped and not very fruit driven. Few people actually know what chardonnay fruit tastes like, it's been the blank canvas for winemaking artistry for so long. ABC consumers have heavily underwritten wines like pinot gris, viognier, sauvignon blanc, and white blends to avoid the "C" wine.

INOX™ is a wine for ABCers but, with a perverse and ironic twist, we have made it out of....CHARDONNAY! We call it INOX™ because it is fully stainless steel fermented, never seeing oak or malolactic fermentation or lees stirring. It is pure fruit, resembling most Chablis or St Veran chardonnay, a little like our pinot gris in freshness but with a blonde tropical fruit character, minerality and weighty flesh. We make INOX™ not out of culled or average grapes but out of our best fruit, predominantly Dijon clone Stoller Vineyards fruit.

Although we made 1100 cases of this wine, it is not readily available. We introduced it in a controlled marketing study, so you'll largely find it in five or six markets nationwide. Plus, Kelly insisted we leave 100 cases at the winery—for those who want to know what chardonnay really tastes like. —Harry Peterson-Nedry

2001 STOLLER VINEYARDS PINOT NOIR Well, well, well. What have we here? Little Johnny's growing up so fast! Wasn't long ago you were just this high. Now look at you, filling out, getting muscular, and so charming too! Won't it be fun to see how you turn out? You know, you remind me of a certain cousin at your age—complex, broad shouldered, and powerful—yet refined, sweet, and thoughtful too.

WINEMAKER'S COMMENTS: *As vines mature, the wines get better and better, reflecting greater depth of color, mid-palate complexity and texture; fully ripe, reflecting warm brown spices, lush sweetness of preserves, and a finely structured framework of surprisingly bright acidity.*

2001 RIDGECREST VINEYARDS PINOT NOIR Another famous Harry (Waugh) said, "The first duty of wine is to be red...the second to be a Burgundy." Obviously Mr. Waugh would disagree with my earlier sentiments about riesling but I would lay odds that today he might amend his quote with, "...or an Oregon." It is time for us to stop the snippets: "It's the closest thing to Burgundy that I've tasted," or "Burgundy's got nothing on us." How about this—Here's an excellent pinot noir that's unlike any other wine in the world. Isn't that enough?

WINEMAKER'S COMMENTS: *Somewhat atypical due to the warmer harvest and softer fruit; warm and soft on the palate, with a deep red fruit profile rather than the normal black fruit; great flesh, moderate alcohol and complex strawberry preserves or cherry compote; spice and fine tannin is subtle but present, as is a youthful dose of barrel on the palate.* 🍷



WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

■ *Wine Spectator*, June 2003, Harvey Steiman, *The Oregon Report*

In this report, which takes in wines reviewed over the last 12 months, nearly half of the Pinot Noirs are rated 90 points or higher...and there are more coming. Tasting the 2002 vintage from barrel on a recent trip to Oregon, I found uniformly rich, well-balanced wines that promise extraordinary quality.

TOP WINES OF THE YEAR

92 2000 Stoller Vineyards Pinot Noir. Ripe and open-textured, blossoming with currant and plum fruit, shaded by grace notes of cream and pepper.

■ *The Oregonian*, Portland, OR, May 20, 2003, Cole Danehower, "Oregon shows off its white wines, too."

2002 Willamette Valley Pinot Gris ...a stunning version of what makes pinot gris so great...this wine is loaded with delicious aromas and tastes...the long 2002 harvest period meant the winemakers could pick each section of the vineyard at perfect ripeness. Chehalem made the best of that circumstance, and has produced a character-rich wine with a luxuriant feel in the mouth and huge flavors of sweet pineapple, melon and peach, plus notes of lemon-lime, a minerally overlay and nuances of warm nuts.

■ *Bon Appétit*, August 2003, Hugh Garvey, "Oregon's Pinot Gris Revolution."

...Oregon Pinot Gris is delicious...it has a satisfying medium-body and is marked by good acidity and snappy apple fruit. Think of Pinot Gris as Pinot Grigio for those who favor a bit more flavor...Rich Chehalem 2001 suggests melon, grapefruit and almond flavors...

■ *Gourmet*, July 2003, Gerald Asher, "New World Order when you're serving ceviche and steak."

2001 Pinot Gris Reserve, Recommended wine...



■ *Northwest Palate*, July/August 2003, Cole Danehower, "Putting Pinot Noir in its Place: The Art and Allure of Single Vineyard Pinot Noir."

...Certain single vineyards have established a solid reputation as great places to grow pinot noir grapes (of seven estate vineyards) Classic Single Vineyard Estate Wines, Ridgecrest Vineyards.

■ *Northwest Palate*, May/June 2003,

Conde Thompson Cox, "Amazing Gris"

...the best Oregon Pinot Gris wines are fruity but not cloying, richly textured but not overpowering, and they hold a lingering, warm, spicy finish that is topped off, at the very back of the palate, with a whiff of smoke...Chehalem 2001, Reserve, Enhanced texture. Lovely tropical fruit flavors.

■ *Oregon Wine Report*, Issue 15, Cole Danehower

A 2002 Willamette Valley Pinot Gris. Glittering lemon-lime yellow color. Crisp fruit and herb aromas reminiscent of the smell of warm cobblestones after a summer rain. Luxuriant mouth feel carries huge sweet pineapple, melon, and peach fruit flavors with compounding notes of light lemon-lime, a minerally overlay, and hints of warm nuts...This is one tasty—and surprisingly weighty—pinot gris!

A- 2001 Dry Riesling, Reserve. ...tight and bracing in the mouth, there are potent, tangy flavors of green apples and grapefruit...substantial mouthfeel is lightened by shining acidity...Always one of Oregon's best, grab this if you can and save some if you can because it will only get better!

B+ 2001 Pinot Gris Reserve. This layered pinot gris is so different from the average fresh and tart versions that one might almost feel that it is a different varietal! There is a luxuriant denseness to both the texture and the flavors that proves pinot gris can be a deep and complex wine...

B- 2000 Willamette Valley Chardonnay. Deep and glowing gold color. Plump herbaceous aromas with hints of pineapple, melon, and honey-on-toast. Tart and stout in the mouth with complementary mellow flavors of pineapple, green melon and crisp, fresh pears. Strong acidity keeps the flavors brightly forward, yet there is also a hint of peppery spice and minerals that gives the wine a spicy foundation... 🍷



IN THE VINEYARD

FROM PLANNING TO PLANTING!

By Michael Davies, Chehalem Assistant Winemaker and Vineyard Manager

WITH THE SUDDEN TRANSFORMATION of a fallow field at Wind Ridge to a veritable vineyard during the last two weeks of May—one big, long baby-sitting job has been created. Whilst the intensity surrounding establishment and planting has largely subsided (together with the heavily furrowed brows and the calloused hands) we still have much work to do. On the immediate horizon, watering and more watering takes priority together with our on-going farming efforts at Ridgcrest, Corral Creek and Stoller Vineyards.

PS. Any volunteers to help put up a deer-fence in November?



▲ **A STEEL GIRDER FARM?** (Above) Pressing metal line posts with crawler.



◀ **AUGERING** (Left) 15,000 holes--wide, deep holes give loose, mixed soil and directions for roots.

▼ **PLANTING BEGINS** (Below) Clone 115 is planted in May at Wind Ridge Vineyards.



▶ **WATERING PLANTS** (Right) Dry farming being preferred personally and irrigation being denied so far by watermaster, we hand water--especially necessary with a week of 90+ weather after planting.

