

WINE

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winemakers who traveled north in the early '80s. As a lobbyist, Bernau fought in 1983 to establish an Oregon wine advisory board, which would receive revenues for the research and promotion of an Oregon wine industry from two sources: a tax on wine and wine grapes.

"I was approached by California winemakers who were interested in passing laws for establishing an Oregon wine industry," Bernau said. "I really took a keen interest for what they were doing, and I already had a strong appreciation for pinot noir. I think I am the first native Oregonian to buy land and own a winery in Oregon following Prohibition."

According to information provided by Silvan Ridge/Hinman Vineyards in Eugene, the Oregon wine industry's historical roots date back to around 1825, when the Hudson Bay Company established the first vineyard at Fort Vancouver. The first commercial winery opened in 1883, and old zinfandel vines still exist near Hood River.

"Oregon is not as new as people believe in the wine industry," Johnson said.

Bernau said the wine industry is currently the sixth most important agricultural industry in Oregon with vineyards in the Willamette, Rogue and Umpqua valleys and the Columbia Gorge. Altogether, Oregon wineries produce more than 1 million cases per year, with gross revenues of approximately \$220 million, placing

the industry just behind milk and ahead of wheat and Christmas trees.

"A lot of people don't realize just how important an industry it has become," Bernau said. "It may even eventually surpass milk."

In the national spotlight

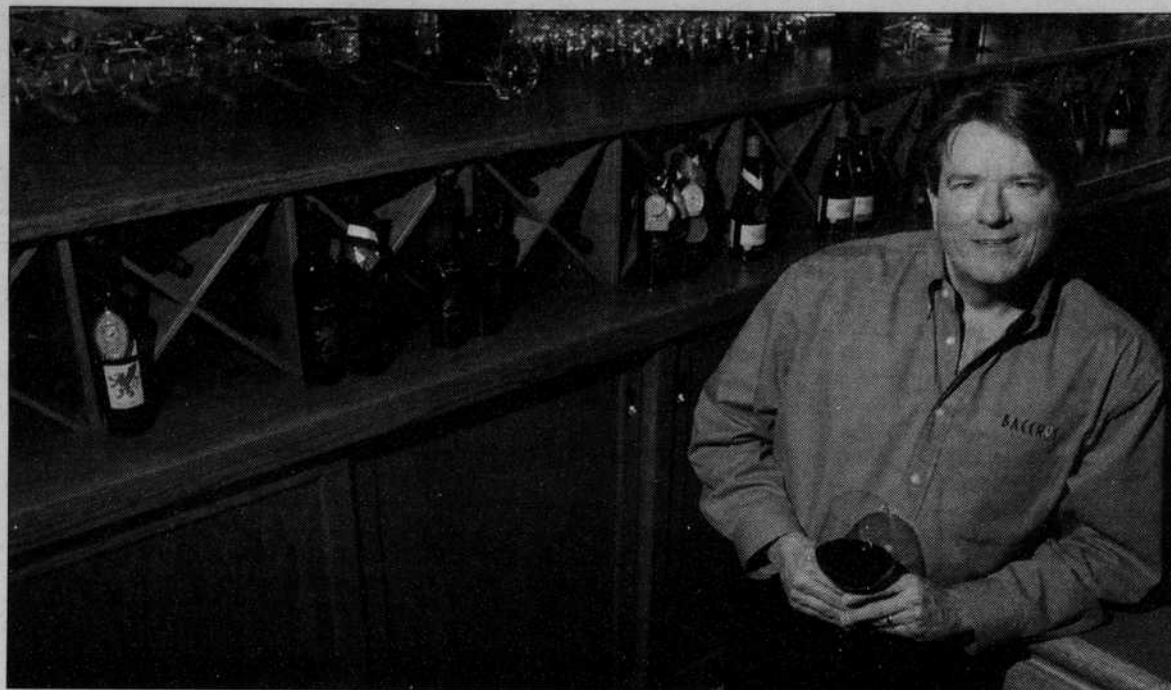
Although Oregon's largely small-scale wine production pales in comparison with that of California and France, its pinot noir and pinot gris have gained national recognition. The Willamette Valley Vineyards and King Estate Vineyard labels have recently garnered accolades from USA Today and The Dallas Morning News, respectively. USA Today columnist Jerry Shriver recently named the Willamette Valley Vineyards 2002 bottlings among the best in \$11-\$20 white wines — placing Willamette in the "Great Producers" category.

"Other Oregon wineries have had such recognition too," Bernau said. "Others have performed brilliantly in world competitions and in reviews."

Willamette's wines have also been featured in "Wine Spectator" and "Bon Appétit" magazines and on prime time television shows.

"(The 'Friends' chef) so loved our wines that she bought some and took them back down to the studio, and she shared them with the actors on the 'Friends' show," Bernau said. "The actors ended up drinking it right on television."

He said he was recently watching an episode of "The West Wing" where President Jed Bartlet, played by Martin Sheen, presented his wife with a



bottle of Willamette Valley Vineyards wine before her birthday dinner.

"He said, 'We've got this for the entrée, this for the dinner, and by the way we have Willamette Valley Vineyards pinot noir,'" Bernau said. "I was watching television and just about fell off the couch."

Bernau said Oregon wine producers are setting themselves apart in protecting the environment while maintaining a viable harvest. His 260-acre winery operates to the standards

of the Low Input Viticulture and Enology, an organization with a set of standards established in Europe to protect the environment from harmful byproducts produced by farming.

"We use no herbicides or pesticides, and we use natural methods of improving soil nutrition and vine health and balance," he said. "We are very into being a good steward for the land."

After harvesting the grapes in October, Bernau said the grapes are taken fresh from the field to the fermenter in one day.

"That's where quality comes from," he said. "The fruit begins to break down the moment it comes off the vine."

Baker said the pinot noir is a particularly difficult wine to grow right, with an average of six out of 10

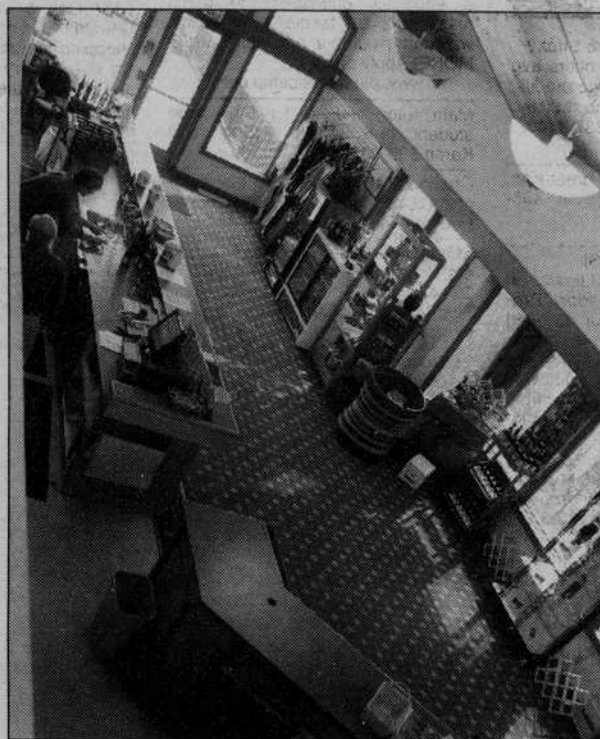
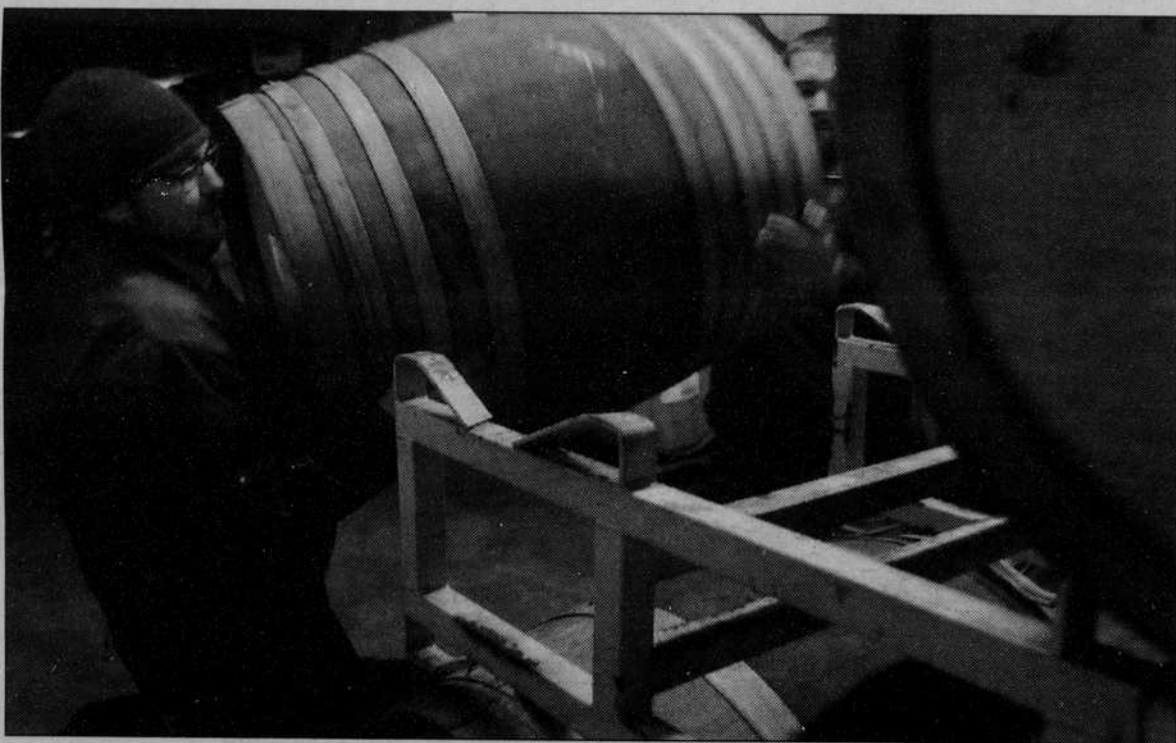
vintages receiving too much rain.

"You really get superior flavor development and complexity when it is struggling to get ripe," Baker said. "The pinot noir is a Holy Grail not just to consumers but winemakers as well. They feel it is one of the most seductive, and — when you get it right — one of the most entrancing wines in the world."

Bernau said although attention to detail is costly and time consuming, consumers notice the difference in taste and quality.

"There will always be a place in the world for high-quality low-level production," he said. "I believe in time we will see a good return."

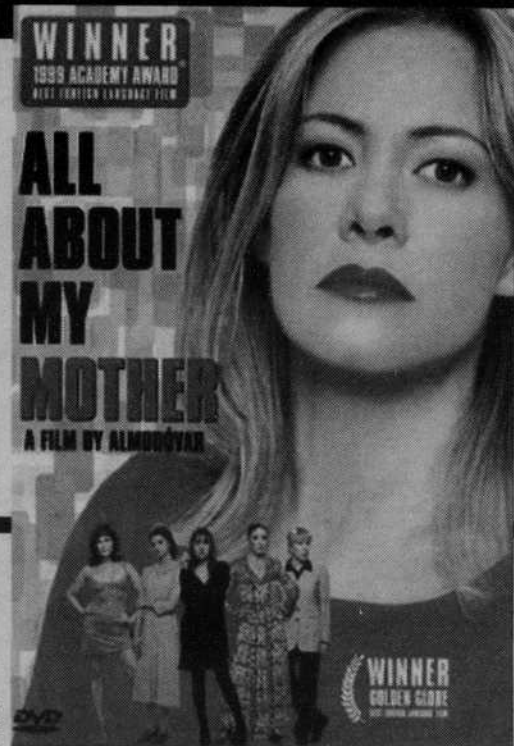
Contact the freelance editor at jennifersudick@dailyemerald.com.



(Above) University alumnus Jim Bernau founded Willamette Valley Vineyards more than 20 years ago and now employs about 100 workers. (Far left) Workers in the Willamette Valley Vineyards barrel room move empty oak barrels for storage. (Left) Visitors can sample wines in the Willamette Valley Vineyard's tasting room.

Adam Amato
Senior Photographer

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5:00, 7:15 & 9:30 Nightly Sun Mat 2:35
"BRILLIANT! A WONDER OF A MOVIE."
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A Son's Journey
4:50 & 7:10 Nightly Sun Mat 2:25
Greendale
a film by Neil Young
"An unsparingly personal and passionately political film that brings the album to life in a way that transcends the traditional long-form music video and defies easy categorization."
—Kevin Christ, LOS ANGELES TIMES
9:35 Nightly SAT MAT 2:50 also playing later in the night!
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