



No winery review this month. I thought it might be a bit more practical to cover more bases this month rather than talk about just one winery. It's December and with all the holidays this 31-day span rivals August for the month in which the least amount of work is done. The thing about December is that there are literally at least one dozen days (and I am not talking about those 12 Days of Christmas from that really weird song) on which there are either great excuses, excellent reasons or pure necessity for drinking good wine. So whether you are toasting (or getting toasted) with friends, enjoying a romantic evening at home, recovering from the insanity that generally goes along with this time of year or avoiding the in-laws, the following list should help you do it in style and good taste.

I proudly present the **Upper Left Edge's 1st Annual Top 24 Oregon Wines of the Year**. This list has been compiled in a thoroughly unscientific and biased manner. It unquestionably does not represent the best 24 wines available from Oregon vineyards. Due to the low salaries offered at this paper, many super, expensive wines are omitted. I have also tried to present as broad a perspective as possible. It's kind of like the Baseball All-Star Game, some people are left out because each team has to be represented (thus Scott Cooper of the Red Sox is a 2-time All-Star with no credentials to be in the game.) An effort has been made to include only wines that are either still available at the winery or at a variety of wine shops. This all being said, here we go:

Pinot Noir

Domaine Drouhin 1992: A superb wine. The color is a beautiful garnet. The wine is soft, virtually weightless in your mouth. As you savor each drop the flavors of cherries and blackberries are unmistakable. As you swallow the wine gains a nice spiciness and finishes with a subtle lingering tobacco flavor. It is an elegant wine without question. President Clinton served this wine at his first white tie dinner. Call him and ask what he served. It is expensive, \$28-\$30, but a joy to drink.

Amity 1987 Reserve: I could have mentioned 2-3 other Amity Pinots (the 1990 Estate Reserve for instance) as well, but this one stands at the top. It is luscious, oozes with spices and fruit, is incredible rich and complex. '87 was a great vintage. This wine was just released so it has been in the bottle waiting and developing for 5 years. This is a wine for a special time with someone special in front of a nice fire. Tight when opened so let breathe for 3-5 hours before serving. \$25 is a steal for this jewel.

Chehalem 1992: A big, fruity, spicy Pinot. Chehalem is a newcomer to the Oregon wine scene and this wine is a great way to get on board. One of the better Pinots you will find at a very moderate price. Available most places at about \$12.

Duck Pond 1992: Buy it by the case. This is my 1994 Best Buy of the Year! \$7 for this wine is larceny. Usually I expect only basic drinkability from a Pinot priced at less than \$8-\$9. This wine exceeds those expectations. It is spicy and rich. A great wine to bring to dinners and show off to relatives whom you don't want to spend big bucks on. Available in most stores and wine shops.

Autumn Wind 1992 Reserve: This Pinot is one of the reasons Autumn Wind is moving up in the world. This Pinot is made in classic Burgundy style so it is deep, robust and will be great with steaks or other red meats. A nose of french oak and vanilla is intriguing. Expect the fruit to open up and the tannins to smooth out over the next two years, but still a very rich wine right now. \$20.

Broadley 1992 Reserve: Broadley is a rare find because their market is in San Francisco and other big cities where deep, lusty Burgundies are desired. This Pinot blends its fruit and oak very nicely to create a robust wine that just keeps on going in your mouth. Limer and Elsen in Portland is about the only place you can get this wine. \$13 is a steal.

Adelsheim 1992 Seven Springs Vineyard: If you have read my columns you probably know that I am simply wild for big, robust Pinots. This one delivers as well as, and perhaps even more so than the above two. Big and bold but smooth and round the way a good Burgundy should be. Finishes with a long, lingering taste of spice and tobacco. \$20-\$22.

Springhill 1992: A great Pinot from Albany? You bet. A big surprise and a terrific wine. This little known winery has hit the big time with this fruity and spicy wine. One of my favorite recommendations, especially at only about \$13.

Chardonnay

Valley View Vineyards 1992 Anna Maria: One of a very few Chardonnays I would make a habit of buying. Made solely from the free run juices of the grape and in a style designed to accentuate a creamy body, this

Chardonnay is simply amazing. Oregon Wines on Broadway, Made in Oregon, and Costco all carry it. Ranges from \$18 down to \$12.50 and is well worth any of those prices.

Tualatin Vineyards 1988 Reserve: The only rival to the above Chardonnay. This is the way good white wine is supposed to be. This wine has no edges to it and no inconsistencies which plague many Chardonnays. A great blend of oak and fruit. The most expensive white wine I bought all year... and worth it. Limited availability. \$20.

Pinot Gris

Adelsheim 1992: Harder and harder to find as the '93s have come out but worth looking for. Still available at many restaurants. Do not confuse with the '93 which does not match it, at least not yet. This smoky white is great with salmon, quiche, alfredo and hearty casseroles. \$10.

Eyrie 1992: The best Pinot gris in the country. No question. At \$10 or less it is probably the Best Buy of white wines around, providing you like Pinot gris. Carried by many restaurants and almost all wine stores. This is superb Pinot gris. Not yet diluted by an overly early release of 1993 making it a breath of fresh air, too.

Bordeaux wines

Valley View Vineyards 1990 Anna Maria Reserve: This wine is to die for. A 55/45 blend of Merlot and Cabernet. This wine will compliment red meats and hearty red sauces beautifully. It is getting rarer though. Have found it for as low as \$20 but look to pay in the mid 20s.

Ashland Vineyards 1991 Merlot: Not too many Merlots made in Oregon and even fewer worth going out of your way for. This is one of them. A beautiful example of this wonderful grape. I love Merlot and this one only extended that love. Doesn't leave you with too much "fuzzy tongue" like even good Merlots can do. A great holiday wine. \$13.

Valley View Vineyards 1993 Anna Maria Fume Blanc: A super wine. Not quite a Sauvignon Blanc so hence the name. It is fruity and has a smooth hint of oak. A great turkey wine for sure. Not sure of the price, probably about \$12.

Autumn Wind 1992 Sauvignon Blanc: A really fine Sauvignon Blanc. Nutty and smoky hints of vanilla. A great bouquet. Finding Sauvignon Blanc from Oregon is tough. Finding good ones is almost impossible. Take a break from Chardonnay and enjoy this with holiday meals, especially for only \$8.

La Mearleausine 1992: Made by Bridgeview Vineyards winemaker, this limited edition wine took the state by storm. The superbly crafted labeling hints at the wine inside. A 95% Merlot 5% Zinfandel combination create a unique blend. Tastes of currants, cranberries and espresso beans along with some pepper are packed into this soft red wine. Find it, buy it, drink it. \$14.

La Garza 1992 Cabernet Sauvignon: It took me a long time to find a Cab worth talking about. This is a very nice one. It is big and bold like a good Cab should be. It comes on fairly strong, has a nice body and finishes with a nice spicy pepperiness. \$15.

Sparkling Wine

Argyle 1989 Brut: As good a sparkling wine from Oregon as you can find. Was served at President Clinton's first state dinner. It is very crisp and dry with tight, small bubbles that rise in perfectly straight lines as they should in a fine sparkler. Is omnipresent and can be had for as low as \$14.50. Great time of year for it.

St. Innocent 1990 Brut: A winery to watch out for. Their Pinot noir is outstanding and this sparkling wine is dynamite. Very crisp and elegant. Definitely a way to make an impression with people. Probably a little tricky to locate. Around \$16.

Other Wines

Serendipity 1992 Marechal Foch: One of the finer steak wines around. This wine is beyond ruby-red, it's purplish-maroon. The deep color is a mere lead into this wine that just takes over in your mouth. It is so smooth to begin with it can easily be quaffed on its own, but with a medium rare steak with all those tannin neutralizing properties it would be a heavenly match.

Amity 1993 Dry Gewurztraminer: Easily the best of this variety I encountered. It's very dry and has that Gewurztraminer spiciness to it which makes it excellent with Thai, Moroccan, Ethiopian and Indian foods. My favorite pairing was with spicy grilled prawns. \$7-\$8.50.

Willamette Valley Vineyards 1992 Pinot noir Ice Wine: A fantastically interesting dessert wine. A natural compliment to chocolate based dishes. A residual sugar of 16.8% makes it very sweet but still allows you to appreciate the natural tastes of the Pinot noir. This definitely makes people take notice. I have only found it at the winery. \$13.95. The 1993 (now out) is good but not as good as the sugar is just 10.6%.

Amity 1992 Late Harvest Riesling Select Cluster: The pinnacle of Oregon dessert wines. This is as good as they come. The initial residual sugar was 34% which makes it like drinking honey mead. This wine continually blows my mind. It goes for \$15 but pay any price for it.

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