

The time of the year may be spring but my first winery column of the year will put the spotlight on autumn. . . **Autumn Wind Vineyards** that is. First of all I have to admit that this column is a slight bit of a cop out. I have been holding the Autumn Wind review up my sleeve, like the proverbial Ace of Spades in the Old West, for a time when I really needed it. Given the shortness of the month and the fact that I started writing this column a day after the deadline I have no choice but to casually slide my high card into my hand. Save the quick draw of the six-gun, partner, because although I am using my insider knowledge to create an on the spot review everyone will win. That's because this is a damn fine winery that should definitely be on your "Must Visit Soon" list. If you haven't yet figured out that I work there, don't feel too bad; you'll catch on.

Autumn Wind is settled on the southern side of the base of the Chehalem Mountains which separate Washington and Yamhill Counties. It is only about 8 miles outside of Newberg, but its distance from the often-times crowded 99W makes it an ideal spot to visit, hang out, relax, picnic and enjoy some of the best and most reasonably priced wine in the area.

The place to begin is at the beginning and the welcoming committee. Not too many wineries boast as wonderful and enthusiastic a receiving party as Autumn Wind. That's because Frank and Cujo only work at this winery. Frank and Cujo are a pair of very friendly mutts for whom each arriving car offers the hope of new friends, ear scratches and treats. Frank, a big white dog, has an act so big that U2 has a hard time topping it. Frank is a perfectly healthy dog who is in the prime of life. He also has eyes that make him appear as if he is blind; walks with a pronounced limp, for which he has little excuse; and lies down a lot as if constantly overexerted. Credit given where it is due, Frank succeeds in eliciting sympathetic remarks and extra attention at an appalling high rate. Cujo is a smallish, excitable pooch who wiggles like a bowl of jelly and is more than onto Frank. These two are pros at visiting each party arriving at the winery, no matter how busy. With a start like this how can you go wrong?

The owners of the winery are Tom and Wendy Kreutner. They moved up from California in the mid-1980's and more or less stumbled into the wine business. Since 1987 they have been turning out an increasing array of quality wines while developing a large and loyal base of Autumn Wind fans.

Unlike many wineries in Yamhill County, Autumn Wind has opted for a more calm and rational approach to business, and for Tom and Wendy, life in general. The area in which the winery is set can truly be enjoyed because the traffic is minimal, Portland's encroachment non-existent and a feeling of calm is, at times, pervasive. This is an alarmingly underappreciated and rapidly disappearing approach to, well, everything. Many cities and towns are going through a period of intense urbanization. The lifestyle and attitudes that come with those changes are often at odds with living life and running a business (at least in part) for the love and fun of it. If for no other reason than to salute people who are capable of having this outlook, we should endeavor to buy wine from Autumn Wind, purchase a book from Jupiter's Rare and Used and quaff a beer at Bill's Tavern on as regular a basis as possible.

Autumn Wind is not a fancy place. The tasting room is the winery, the winery is tasting room. Fancy mustards, despicably cute chachkas and fancy cork pullers are notably (and thankfully) absent. What is available is good wine. If you go to almost any winery in the state and taste all the wines they make (or all the ones they have open) you will, almost without exception, find at least one wine that is either markedly beneath the quality of the other wines or just plain bad. Winery owners do plan to make money with their wineries (whether a great deal succeed or not is another matter). Leftover grapes of lesser quality can still be used (inexpensively) to make cheap wine that generally falls into the Chablis (California jug style, that is) category. People will buy it. Tom and Wendy have settled on a handful of wines they enjoy drinking and making and they concentrate on bringing out the best in each wine.

Of the 4 white wines they produce the most alluring is the Sauvignon Blanc. This wine is the lost soul of white wines, at least in America. Only a handful of wineries in Oregon make it and some of the Sauvignon Blanc produced in Oregon is just awful. Autumn Wind's 1992 Sauvignon Blanc received the highest rating in the state last year by the prestigious Wine Spectator magazine for a true Sauvignon Blanc. The wine is smooth with intriguing flavors of vanilla, nuts, oak and soft fruits. People are usually impressed by this wine (especially at only \$8) and often ask, "Why don't more wineries in Oregon make it?" The reason is because people don't buy Sauvignon Blanc. In this country Chardonnay dominates the white wine market. Sauvignon Blanc in Oregon receives no attention from the industry as a whole so there are no promotions done for it, no special industry-wide tastings at the Hilton in Chicago; and so if you are a producer of it you have 100% of the responsibility for selling what you make. This wine made my "Best of 1994" list and it is getting scarcer by the minute. The 1993 vintage will be released this month though. Do yourself a favor and pick up some of this wine and put it together with baked salmon or grilled veggies.

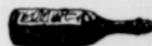
Usually 2 Chardonnays are produced each vintage, a reserve and non-reserve. Both 1992 models are still available and both are very good. The reserve at \$15 is a super deal. It is a full-bodied Chardonnay loaded with fruit and oak and balanced with a creamy body that makes it a fine white with rich foods. This wine will sit nicely for a couple of years and continue to gain complexity and depth. The regular Chardonnay is extremely popular at the winery as it goes for \$9. It is simple, straight-forward Chardonnay. This is as good an everyday, drinking on the spur of the moment Chardonnay as you will find. A quality often times underrated in a wine.

The two other whites are Pinot gris and Muller-Thurgau. The Muller is the biggest seller at the winery. First off, I have to say I am not a big fan of Muller-Thurgau. I can appreciate it for what it is, I know Autumn Wind's Muller is probably the best in the state and I know why it sells. At the end of the day at the tasting room when the remnants of the tasting day are being divided up amongst Tom, Wendy, myself and anyone else who was working no one wants to take the Muller home. If, however, you enjoy a slightly sweet wine, where the sweetness is derived from a fruity flavor rather than a sugary flavor, and which is

simple and crisp with a little bit of effervescence you will love this wine. At only \$6 you'll love it even more.

The Pinot noir is the thing to come for though. I wish Autumn Wind produced more Pinot than Tom and Wendy do because it is outstanding. The 1992 Reserve made the "Best of 1994" list and it will be a great wine, given time. Right now it is a rich, very full Pinot that will just knock your socks off. Most Oregon Pinot is somewhat light in style and aims for a fruity, spicy combination that is delicious. Autumn Wind produces a wine in the Côte de Nuit style of Burgundy. Very rich and complex, lots of toasted oak balanced with fruit and a super long finish. A handful of Oregon wineries make Pinot this way. The '92 Reserve is probably the best wine Autumn Wind has produced and, as I said, it will lay down for 2 years and continue to develop into a beautiful monster of a wine. Sadly the '92 non-reserve is gone. Restaurants in Portland such as Il Piatto and Coyote's carry this wine and it is worth ordering even at jacked-up restaurant prices. The '93s will probably not be released until the fall, but between the lighter '91 and the fantastic Reserve I believe the wait will be fairly painless.

Autumn Wind's opening day is March 18th. During the year a handful of weekends are specially selected for extra fun. Opening weekend is one of them. All sorts of food is available and the case discounts are heightened. Autumn Wind is open from 12-5 each weekend until December. The winery is located about 2 miles off Hwy 240, northwest of Newberg.




There are many excellent wines lurking out there right now which haven't received a whole lot of recognition but certainly deserve it. Some wines out there are quite a deal as well. February turned out to be a fine month for finding tasty wines. My hope is that they are still around in March.

Eola Hills 1992 Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc: An early entry into the top wines of the year. A stunning dessert wine. Sweet fruit and honey flavors combine with the unique flavors of the Sauvignon Blanc grape to create this award winning wine. The wine is a beautiful color of gold and is an immense treat with, or in place of, any dessert. This is a wine to seek out at all costs. \$15 is no burden for this quality.

Di Stefano 1992 Cabernet Sauvignon: I went Cab hunting, as promised, and found a lightning bolt in my head. From somewhere in Washington this tiny winery has produced a mind-expanding, soul-enriching, nirvana-in-a-glass type of Cabernet. This may be a complete tease because I don't know if anyone has it or even the address of the winery, but endeavor to get ahold of at least one bottle of this magnificent wine anyway possible. I got my bottle for \$17 after a small taste and gladly would have paid twice that to own this stunner encased in a wonderful bottle.

Cooper Mountain 1992 Pinot Noir: So Matt Kramer gets one right and beats me to the punch. This is a very findable, very drinkable Pinot. \$8-\$10 is all you will pay for a Pinot with lots of fruit but also equal amounts of earth and tannins that give it a well balanced, distinctly Burgundy style. Certainly one of the best buys out there right now.



Jay Raskin
Architect

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