



It is once again time for The Upper Left Edge's Oregon Wines of the Year. This is the 2nd edition of this prestigious listing. The ground rules for qualifying are pretty simple. First of all, the wines were tasted over the course of 1995 by a select party of one (me). Mental notes were kept along with some scrawls on random pieces of paper. Secondly, the wine usually had to be something I could afford. Since staff raises didn't come through this year (the editor is tightfisted) some wines had to remain on the shelves of various wine shops. The list is not totally inclusive in the sense that many good wines went untasted. An effort has definitely been made to include wines of exceptional value. Lastly, the wines listed here are all still available (to the best of my knowledge). So pop open a bottle of something good, settle in and either enjoy and concur or get your ire up and completely disagree with me. In either case head on down to one of the fine local wine shops that advertise in the Edge and pick up a bottle or two and have a damn fine holiday season.

Pinot Noir

Of all the categories this one received the bulk of my tireless research. Good Pinot noir is now an Oregon staple and I easily could have listed 25 or more different wines that I found attractive during the year. With pardons to many producers I have narrowed the list down to 9.

Cameron 1992 Clos Electrique: This may have been one of the top 3 or 4 wines I had all year. Explosive fruits showing rich black cherry and rivers of blackberry are complemented by exceptional depth, length and texture. A big and robust Pinot that maintains elegance. Limited availability but I know it is still out there and is a deal at \$24.

Adelsheim 1992 Elizabeth's Reserve: A big, chewy Pinot of substantial weight and depth. This one is quite the mouthful. Dark black cherries are complemented by earthy undertones and enough oak to be noticeable without intruding. Big tannins and outstanding structure make this one of the best cellaring Pinots around. About \$32.

St. Innocent 1993 O'Connor Vineyard: Simply a beautiful wine. Elegant fruits waft up through the perfumy nose. Rich cherry, raspberries and spice are substantial on many levels. A touch of tannins on the end allow the wine to linger on the palate. Getting harder to find but a real deal at \$15.

Cristom 1993: Steve Doerner is one of the state's most consistent producers of high quality Pinot. This wine is loaded with bright fruits, a velvety soft mouth feel and has a nice backbone of some earthy tannins. Super food wine. Steve also made the 1993 Brick House which barely missed the cut. \$16 for this super wine.

Torii Mor 1993 and 1994: Two wines out of the block for this exciting new winery. The '93 is a heady monster of a wine that will continue to benefit greatly from bottle aging over the next several years. A bit of a barnyardy nose leads into deep, rich wine absolutely swirling with black cherry, blackberries, earth and some oak. Very un-Oregonlike Pinot. The '94 is already an elegant wine that will gain depth and richness over this next year. The wine has distinctly feminine characteristics but is no lightweight. Excellent body supports a ton of spicy fruits. Both wines go for about \$15.

Broadley 1994 Reserve: Going out on a limb a little with this one. A brand new release. This wine has huge fruits, actually more characteristic of Rhone wines. This wine is full of muscle. A spicy finish that has a hint of drying to it that is worrisome, but not necessarily how the wine will show in the future. Cellar for years. \$15 is a deal.

Bethel Heights 1993 Southeast Block: Always an excellent producer and the Southeast Block of their vineyards is a superb site. Compliments to the Casteels for allowing the quality of the site to come through in this intensely fruity wine. An elegant nose leads into a big, satisfying wine. A good deal even at \$25.

Cooper Mountain 1992 Reserve: Silky smooth Pinot. Deep and heavily concentrated wine. Deep, brooding cherry flavors, coffee and a buttery quality make this a sinful Pinot. This has been out for a while but don't pass it by just because you've seen it on the shelves for a long time. This is a real beauty at \$18.

Chardonnay

Recently, noted wine columnist Matt Kramer wrote in his Wines of the Year column that there were no Oregon Chardonnays worth mentioning at this time. Matt is wrong. Yes, by and large Oregon Chardonnays are not so good but there are some that merit recognition.

Kramer 1992 Estate Bottled: Soft but sturdy apple and pear flavors are the backbone of this delightful Chardonnay. Unexpectedly it is as much like French Chablis as any stateside Chard I have had. Good weight and excellent balance make for a wine that you can close your eyes and taste the French limestone in. Good value at \$13.

Ken Wright Cellars 1994 Celilo Vineyard: Still very young but already quite impressive. This wine needs to breathe for a couple before serving. It is tight and a tad gassy at first but after breathing it develops into a luscious wine with flavors of apricots, almonds and apple pie a la mode. Full bottles go for \$17, splits at \$10.

Pinot Gris

Eyrie Vineyards 1994: The premier producer in the state. Still. The key to Eyrie's Pinot gris has always been excellent body and weight. Flowery fruits of pears, apricots, kiwi and lilac make this wine lovely to drink on its own or with food. A nice wine for \$13.

Cabernet and Merlot

Bridgeview 1993 Black Beauty Merlot: Laurant again proves to be the top dog of Merlot makers in Oregon. This is as good a bargain as you will find. Rich and deep with flavors of cherry, leather, tobacco and a wonderful finish of bitter chocolate. Good now but will age over the next couple of years into a smooth wonder. Only \$12.

Cuneo Cellars "Cana's Feast" 1992 Bordeaux Blend: A stunningly good Cabernet blend (73% Cab, 15% merlot, 12% Cab Franc) from Oregon. Big opulent fruits are dominant in the wine but earthy qualities are distinct in

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the mid-palate. Gripping tannins provide the wine with structure on the finish while still allowing the fruit to rush through to the lingering finish. \$25 and well worth every penny for drinking now or cellaring.

Other Wines

Edgefield 1994 Zinfandel: Yes, the brothers McMennamin have a wine worth ordering instead of a Terminator. The best Oregon Zin I have had. Big, sumptuous mid-palate fruits and good structure and, importantly with Zin, not too overblown, fat or hot. Not released yet, but soon. Look for it.

Serendipity 1994 Marechal Foch: Another star from this Polk County winery. Despite its youth this wine shows very well. Deep fruits meld with American oak to create flavors of chocolate covered cherries, coffee and sherry. Excellent wine with a wide variety of meats. A good wine to cellar, especially at just \$14.

Secret House Red Silk 1993 Methode Champenoise: It's always good to find a wine that goes with brunch. This 100% Pinot noir based sparkling wine is one that will go well with desserts. Beautifully colored, this wine delivers big fruits, crisp, tight bubbles all without being too leesy or yeasty. Toast the holidays for \$16.

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