

Fine Wine in Strange Places

Pleasant Hill has surprises, delightful and tragic

Something is happening in folksy little Pleasant Hill. And I don't know what it is.

Pleasant Hill is a wee rural community just a few miles east of I-5 on Hwy. 58. There's no town in the town, unless you count a small cluster of shops around Ray's Market. It's rather surprising that among the shops near Ray's we'd find 'S Wine, maybe the best outlet for German wines within a hundred miles. That's odd not only because German wines are notoriously hard to sell (buyers who can't pronounce *trockenbeerenauslese* are usually reluctant to plunk down \$100 for a half-bottle). It's odd, too, because Pleasant Hill, despite its proximity to Eugene, is distinctly country and we wouldn't expect to find there much interest in the nuances of fine wines: goats, yes; cows, sure; even miniature burros; beers and Friday nights watching the Pleasant Hill Billies play football, definitely.

We probably wouldn't expect much enthusiasm for the complexities of pinot noir.

But if we look closer, we get (another) lesson in how looks can be deceiving. Under that bucolic surface, Pleasant Hill is a complex place.

We've had some harsh lessons in that reality lately. Just two weeks ago, one of

Pleasant Hill's best youngsters took her own life and ravaged the hearts and shattered the hopes of hundreds of people. Rachel Nice was a bright, lovely girl with a nearly idyllic past and virtually unlimited future. She was not just one of the good kids, she was a star. I met her when she was a student in one of my LCC classes: sharp mind, good skills, strong work ethic, beamish smile, natural leader. As a student at PHHS, she'd been active: raised prize-winning goats in FFA; Girl Scout, silver and gold awards; cheerleader, on the state championship team for three years. Her prospects couldn't have been sunnier. Then — poof! — she was gone, and tears fell like rain all over that valley.

Yet the hills rolled on, green and fertile, and all seemed sweet and peaceful in Pleasant Hill. And there was wine.

Pleasant Hill now has Bodner Wine Company, which (at bodnerwinecompany.wordpress.com) calls itself a "microwinery." Surprisingly, **Bodner**



Wine Company Pinot Noir

(\$22) is quite tasty. The grapes are sourced from Briggs Hill vineyards (neighbors to Sweet Cheeks and Silvan Ridge), producers of long-lived wines under the Briggs Hill label. Bodner pinot noir offers light body and bright fruit flavors of red berries (cherry, raspberry) with good acidity for various food matches (keep it light).

We haven't found it yet, but Bodner also makes a Riesling, the great grape of — you guessed it — Germany.

Time for me to depart Pleasant Hill and its surprises, both the tragic and the delightful: **Spindrift 2011 Pinot Gris** (\$15) is typical of this label's fine wine-making: crisp, clean, yummy fruit flavors (pears, green apples, some tropicals) and zesty acidity, ready for cheesy/creamy pastas.

Sometimes we want what we see to be exactly what we get, no surprises. **EW**

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