

## Get to Know Willamette Valley Vineyards

Willamette Valley Vineyards is an Oregon winery you need to know; one of those joyful finds that includes the best of the Oregon winery wine tasting experience. They make fabulous wines and are especially fun to visit. By any measure, they're also one of Oregon's top wineries, and offer the best of the Willamette Valley AVA has become.

Since their first vintage in 1989, they've racked up countless 90+ wine scores, accolades and awards, and "best of" honors from the wines themselves, to the wine experiences they provide. Willamette Valley Vineyards (WVV) maintains three tasting rooms; the Estate Tasting Room in Turner, Tualatin Estate Tasting Room in Forest Grove and the McMinnville Tasting Room in downtown McMinnville.

On a spring day when the sun was (actually) shining and cherry trees and flowers were in bloom, I visited the Turner Estate, where Jim Bernau started it all.

### Tour Willamette Valley Vineyards



In 1983, Jim Bernau bought his 50 acre property in Turner, Oregon, and set to work to plant a vineyard. He cleared the Scotch broom and blackberry vines that grow every time you turn around in western Oregon. He took classes and got to know other winemakers in the Willamette Valley to learn more. Bernau then planted Pinot Noir, initially watering his vines by hand with lengths of garden hose.

I take that in as I join others on the extensive deck of the Tasting Room and enjoy views of bucolic farmland, the valley and the mountains that go for miles. The first wave of modern Oregon wine making began in the mid-1970's, so while Bernau was not one of the very first pioneers growing

grapes and making wine here, building a winery in the mid-1980's definitely meant detractors were still many and sweat equity was a far more common currency than investor equity. I like it that these men and women get to see their hard work has grown to something significant.



There are a few different options for touring the winery. The tour we take takes us through the fermenting rooms, barrel rooms, and library.









Just as it takes the physical labor of growing and harvesting grapes and making wine, it takes hard work and creativity on the part of a lot of others to make a winery a success. Senior Wine Ambassador Wende Bennette wears a lot of hats at WVV and kept the stories and humor and the wine coming on her tour. We enjoyed some of the winery's 2015 Pinot Blanc, a fabulous wine, a bottle of which I definitely took home. Wende described the wine as being "like Pinot Gris and Chardonnay had a baby." While she's no doubt not the first to say it, I'm fine admitting it was the first time I heard it and found it an hilarious, apt description. So, *people*. It takes good people to make a good winery.

Back in the extensive Tasting Room, there are several tasting options to choose from; you won't go wrong.

Afterwards, get a glass or bottle and settle in, indoors or on the deck.





## **Wine and Food Sort of Go Well Together, So...**

Plan on staying awhile and enjoy some food to pair with your wine. The kitchen is open daily until 6:00, and on Friday and Saturday evenings join Winery Chef DJ McIntyre for a Pairings Wine Dinner. (Make a reservation ahead of time.)





On our visit, we enjoyed a *feast* of a lunch. We started with a spring harvest salad that combined spring peas, bay shrimp, green beans, and fresh spring greens. Chef DJ paired this with their 2016 Rosé of Pinot Noir.

Oregon steelhead is always a good seafood choice. Chef DJ roasted ours on planks with lemon and thyme, and served it with white beans, tomato, basil, capers and kale. Delicious. This was paired with a glass of one of their most special Pinot Noirs; the 2014 Bernau Block Pinot Noir is made from grapes grown on the first 15 acres Jim Bernau planted.





You can't say no to a perfect crusted vanilla crème brûlée in a little Mason jar. (You really should have to *pound* that spoon in to break the caramel crust!) We ended that sweet note with a glass of the 2015 Semi-Sparkling Muscat.



Whether you indulge in a full meal or just a selection of appetizers, you'll appreciate the expert pairing advice.



**Stay the Night**



Increasingly wineries with a little vineyard space (and business acumen) are offering on-site lodging, and Willamette Valley Vineyards has jumped on that wagon with their stately stand-alone Winery Suites. And why not? Their package is tuned to create a perfect stay. By day, take a private winery tour and enjoy a winetasting. Take advantage of the wine credit and bring a bottle back to your suite and more to take home.

Freshen up in your suite, impeccably done and LEED Gold certified. Then, either venture, have an early dinner in the dining room or, if you book on Friday or Saturday evening, attend one of the Pairing Wine Dinners, mentioned above.

Each suite has views of the vineyard, king-sized beds, a butler kitchen, living area, and more. Oh; like the outdoor living area with fireplace. Wake up in the morning to that great view and hang out with a cup of coffee. Sounds good, yes?





Time to head on with our day. I'm laden down with wine, and looking forward to creating my own pairings; or just a glass on the deck.

**For More:**

- Willamette Valley Vineyards, [WillametteValleyVineyards.com](http://WillametteValleyVineyards.com).
- Wine Chef DJ McIntyre shares his recipe for [Spareribs with Blackberry-Pinot Noir BBQ Sauce!](#)
- Willamette Valley Wineries Association, [www.willamettewines.com](http://www.willamettewines.com)
- For more to do in the area, take a look at [Travel Salem](#), [Visit Albany](#), and [Willamette Valley Wine Country](#).