

Wine & Spirits



TOP 100

Walter Scott

OREGON | WILLAMETTE VALLEY

Firmly planted in the Eola-Amity Hills, Ken Pahlow and Erika Landon are two of the great stylists of Oregon pinot noir and chardonnay.



KEN PAHLOW

KEN PAHLOW AND ERIKA LANDON, the husband-and-wife team behind Walter Scott, came to their own brand on the shoulders of other Oregon traditionalists: Pahlow worked for many years with Patricia Green Cellars and St. Innocent as an assistant winemaker, then helped to manage Evening Land Vineyards at its inception in the mid-2000s. Landon worked as a sommelier at Oregon restaurants that boasted deep selections of local wines. At Walter Scott, Pahlow and Landon set their sights on the Eola-Amity Hills, the 'island' of hills rising up from the Missoula floodplain mid-valley that offers tremendous geological and climatic diversity in a relatively small footprint. They make more than a dozen single-vineyard pinot noirs and chardonnays from the area, and nearly all of their other bottlings are from vineyards nearby. Pahlow likes to say that his signature style is no style at all, that he adjusts his winemaking techniques to reflect the nuances of the vineyard. His wines are defined by tension, lightness and, usually, an added textural element—in the chardonnays, a hint of gunflint; in the pinot noirs, the spice of whole clusters. They're among the most compelling wines in Oregon right now. —P.J.C.



2018 Eola-Amity Hills Sojeau Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$65, 96 points) High on a ridge facing southwest into the Van Duzer Corridor winds, Sojeau is planted on thin basalt soils ("rocky as f***!") says Pahlow. It produces a haunting wine, with scents of licorice, allspice and tea channeled through vibrant red-cherry and raspberry flavors. With diaphanous tension, it's a yin-yang expression of power and delicacy.

2018 Eola-Amity Hills Seven Springs Vineyard Chardonnay (\$65, 95 points) This grows at 1.7 acres off the shallow south ridge of Evening Land's vineyard, where the soils peter out to almost pure basalt. The wine's heady translucence seduces in seconds with its savor of bread dough and apple-pie crust, just a hint of caramelly oak behind the lees accents. But the texture is gossamer-light, with the acid-structure and vibrancy to cellar.

2018 Eola-Amity Hills X Novo Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55, 94 points) Walter Scott continues to purchase all of Craig Williams's chardonnay at X Novo and, with 2018, started to purchase his pinot noir, as well. The parcel, planted to fifteen clones on 1.3 acres, gives a wine with lean composure, scents of bramble, cherry and red currant, tobacco leaf and a whisper of oak. It's destined to be long-lived and complex at every stage of its life.

FOUNDED:

2008

OWNERS:

Ken Pahlow & Erika Landon

WINEMAKER:

Ken Pahlow

ACRES OWNED:

None

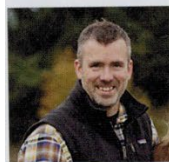
ANNUAL PRODUCTION:

5,500 cases

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Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon produce chardonnays and pinot noirs in a lean, savory style tailor-made for the 2019 vintage.



KEN PAHLOW

FROM THE STANDPOINT OF CHARDONNAY, Walter Scott's 2019 vintage was momentous (we've yet to taste the pinots). For fans of the winery, that's doubly fortunate, because the 2020 vintage was largely canceled due to smoke taint—2020 is the first vintage in more than 20 years in which Ken Pahlow did not make pinot noir. Working with his many growers, Pahlow tends to drop fruit early in the season to concentrate flavors and aid ripening. This was prescient in 2019, when a cool, slightly rainy fall slowed ripening. Many chaptalized; Pahlow didn't—and the wines are as flavorful as any in the state. Pahlow's visits to Burgundy, and his friendship with Dominique Lafon, have compelled him to go for a more pronounced textural component in his whites. His nuanced approach to chardonnay shines through in the X Novo bottling. Sourced from a small 2-acre block tended by former Joseph Phelps winemaker Craig Williams, it achieved an ethereal grandeur in 2019. —P.J.C.



2019 Eola-Amity Hills X Novo Vineyard Chardonnay (\$85, 95 points) Craig Williams interplanted 15 clones of chardonnay in the shallow basaltic soils at X Novo, and he sells it all to Pahlow and Landon. Having slashed potential yields to one cluster per shoot, he found the cool conditions at harvest brought yields even lower, delivering a wine of exceptional complexity, textural grip and layering. Made in a reductive style, it shows plenty of fruit cradled within its flinty, leesy savor, combining lemon curd and lime with hazelnuts and green apple. Taut and brisk, it lengthens into a nutty, smoky finish.

2019 Eola-Amity Hills Cuvée Anne Chardonnay (\$40, 94 points) While this cuvée often includes fruit from other parts of the Willamette Valley, in 2019 all of the fruit came from the Eola-Amity Hills, including pedigreed sites like X Novo, Sojeau and Justice. It's a classic Walter Scott chardonnay—smoky, flinty, and redolent of nutty lees. The palate is lean and lovely, the wine starting off rich only to gain tartness in the middle, with a finish that ends clean and cinched.

2019 Willamette Valley Rock Salt Chardonnay (\$55, 93 points) Brian McClintock contracts this bottling exclusively for his wine club, seeking out barrels that exhibit, for Brian, "a salt crunch." From four vineyards—Freedom Hill, Justice, Seven Springs and Koosah—it's nutty and bright, with a lemony lees scent and, yes, a salt crunch that's immediate and very crushable.

FOUNDED:

2008

OWNERS:

Erica Landon & Ken Pahlow, Sue & Andy Steinman

WINEMAKER:

Ken Pahlow

ACRES OWNED:

None

ANNUAL PRODUCTION:

5,500 cases