

St. Innocent Willamette Valley (CA sales only)



These judiciously oaked Pinots, which in this case do not show like the spawn of hot years, are consistently in the upper tier of New World Pinot Noir, especially if one favors elegance over power. Vlossak's pricing regimen is also truly Old World in its fairness, which deserves a tip of the hat.

-Josh Reynolds, Vinous Media, February 2022



Mark Vlossak grew up tasting wine at the side of his father, who imported fine wine on the side for a group of buddies in a wine club (the container truck would pull up to the house in Wisconsin once a year and all these guys would unload the wine, distribute it among themselves, and throw a party). After a postgraduate degree in medicine, he moved to Oregon to practice pediatrics. In 1983, he re-discovered his passion for wine, which led to school at UC Davis as well as a two-year apprenticeship at Oregon's Arterberry Winery. In 1988, he founded St. Innocent Winery, named for his father, who was born on All Innocent's Day and christened with the middle name of Innocent.

He's long been guided by a European sensibility. Ten years after starting his winery, he went to Burgundy on the first of many such trips, where he came to understand that the innate qualities of great Pinot Noir don't come from the more-is-better philosophy that guided so many of his new world peers back in those days. Intensity of extraction, for example, didn't result in a more powerful wine (just a bigger, clunker one). By the turn of the century, he was known for wines of nuance and layered richness, many from what are now among Oregon's most respected sites.

He was the winemaker at Panther Creek from 1994 until 1999, when he was able to go full time with St. Innocent. In 2007 he moved out of the tiny winery he had built in an industrial park in Salem (a practical place without a shred of romance) to a state-of-the-art facility deep in the Eola-Amity Hills. It was called Zenith Vineyards, and St. Innocent bought an interest in this LLC during its conceptual phase, allowing Mark to design the cellar from start to finish. In 2017, wishing to be unencumbered by partners, he sold his share in Zenith and bought a small property in the south Salem hills.

There, with the help of a friend, the viticulturist Mimi Casteel, he planted a vineyard, plus an apple orchard, and built a new winery. He's come full circle back to owning his own place, with the enormous plus of having a vineyard. He planted it one vine at a time via a drilled hole, all 15.5 acres—without earth-moving equipment, bulldozing, or grading, meaning that virtually none of the soil and its microbial life was exposed to light or oxygen—and made the parcels organic from the start (now he's talking with Moe Momtazi to determine biodynamic preparations).

In the process, he's downsized his production by nearly 40%. His focus remains on Pinot Noir—it comprises some 70% of what he makes—from the Freedom Hill, Momtazi, Shea, and Temperance vineyards. In addition, there's a bit of Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc.

www.stinnocentwine.com