

Walter Scott Wines

Eola-Amity Hills

(CA sales only)

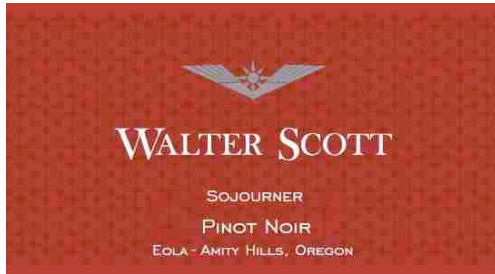


They continue to raise the bar across their portfolio and are producing exceptional wines with purity and balance.

-Audrey Frick, Jebdunnuck.com, September 2023

The Chardonnays at Walter Scott are easily some of the best examples I have tasted. And while the Pinots live in the shadow of the Chardonnay lineup, they're pretty amazing and deserve more attention.

-Eric Guido, Vinous Media, January 2024



Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon are the couple behind Walter Scott Wines. The operation is named for a grandfather and a nephew on Ken's side. It's a little business, young, altogether passionate, and financially solidly underpinned.

Ken got the bug in 1995 when he joined Mark Vlossak at the Saint Innocent Winery. For fourteen years, he was Mark's right hand, working every harvest, visiting vineyards, tasting barrel samples and blends, and taking charge of Saint Innocent's wholesaling within Oregon. In 1999 he augmented his income and wine education by taking a job as a rep for a local fine wine distributor. The income was necessary while the exposure to wine and winemakers from the world over was inspiring.

The thing about Ken is that he's passionately driven and endlessly inquisitive about viticulture and winemaking. He never stops. He's smart enough to know that he doesn't know everything (that's a memorable line from Etienne Chaix at Domaine Voillot in Volnay, but it applies), and he'd be the first to tell you that that's what keeps it interesting.

In 2007 he fell in love with soon-to-be Advanced Sommelier Erica Landon. This didn't exactly happen overnight—he had been presenting wine to her since 2002—but once the genie got out of the bottle, Erica proved to be the catalyst Ken needed to start up the winemaking venture he had long dreamed about. This required both of them to empty their nascent retirement funds in order to buy enough grapes and equipment to make a whopping 160 cases of wine in 2008.

In 2009, Ken traded labor for space at Patricia Green Cellars, and the young couple ratcheted up to 650 cases. In the process, he gained a new perspective on winemaking, thanks to Patty Green.

In 2010, Ken moved the operation over to Evening Land Vineyards, where he went to work in sales and in the cellar. For the next two years his viticulture and winemaking horizons expanded exponentially under the tutelage of Dominique Lafon and his team at the Seven Springs Vineyard (Evening Land's vineyard in Oregon). Erica, meanwhile, became one of Portland's leading sommelières.

In 2012, the couple took on financial partners and leased a small winery facility from the Casteel family, owners of the Bethel Heights Winery. This is located on the Justice Vineyard in the Eola-Amity hills. Bit by bit, they slowly expanded their production as they managed to secure increasingly better sources of grapes.

Perhaps the most pivotal year, however, was 2014. Ken quit his day job with Galaxy Wines, a distributor job he had taken after Evening Land; and Erica quit her wine director job with a Portland restaurant group—both to go full time with Walter Scott Wines. They made their most wine ever (3,600 cases), but the key event of that year was that they had a baby.

These days they make between 5,000 and 5,500 cases, which is a good number for them in terms of sustainability and manageability. In 2018 they had their ten-year anniversary. It was also a year in which they felt they hit their stride with winemaking, having settled on a less-is-more approach: pruning for low yields rather than green-harvesting; favoring more de-stemming and less whole clusters, and pump-overs rather than punch downs. That said, there's no orthodoxy here, and in a warm season such as 2018 a light touch was certainly warranted, whereas a cool season like 2019 warranted the opposite and they went for more extraction. Concerning additions, since 2013 they may have done one or two small acid additions, but only to keep a ferment going in a safe direction. Their SO₂ additions are in the 30ppm zone: a touch at pressing, a touch post malo, and a touch at bottling. That's it for additions, and there's typically no fining or filtrations for the reds.

The key thing is site. Erica and Ken know the Eola-Amity hills intimately, and this AVA accounts for close to 90% of their production. They work with some of the best vineyards in the state, and they're all dry-farmed. Surprisingly, in the context of Oregon, around 60% of their production is in Chardonnay. Try their Chards and you'll see why.

www.walterscottwine.com