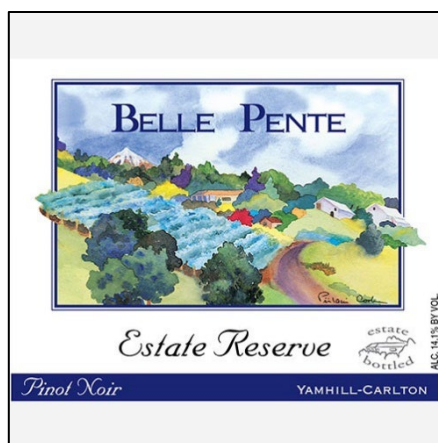


Belle Pente Willamette Valley



Belle Pente Vineyard in Carleton, Oregon is certainly to be numbered among the very finest producers of pinot noir one can find anywhere in the United States today. Jill and Brian O'Donnell founded their Belle Pente Vineyard in 1994 and produced their first bottled wines in the 1996 vintage. Jill and Brian had met when both were working in Silicon Valley in California in the early 1990s and eventually decided to change horses midstream and left the tech industry to plant their own vineyard in Carleton and begin to grow grapes and produce wine. The vines went into the ground in 1994 and they produced a small quantity of wine in the vineyard's "third leaf" in 1996. The Belle Pente Vineyard comprises six and a half hectares of vines, with some chardonnay, pinot gris and a bit of gamay also planted here amongst the blocks of pinot noir. The vineyard has been dry-farmed under organic principles since 2000 and many biodynamic principles are incorporated into the viticultural program here. Brian also works with a couple of grape growers in Yamhill County to augment his family's production from their own vineyard. Brian produces five bottlings of pinot noir at Belle Pente, including a "Yamhill-Carlton" entry level wine, as well as single vineyard cuvées from the Belle Pente Vineyard and the Murto Vineyard, with the latter purchased fruit from a parcel of vines planted in 1978 in the Dundee Hills on franc de pied rootstock. There is also a single block bottling of pinot noir from the Belle Pente Vineyard which is labeled as "Riona's Block" (named for the couple's daughter) and an Estate Reserve cuvée that is a cellar selection made in top vintages by Brian from his favorite casks of pinot noir from his Belle Pente Vineyard. Brian tends to use a bit less whole clusters than some of his contemporaries on my list, and generally ages his wines in around a quarter new oak. They are all outstanding wines, with stunning purity of fruit and aromatic sophistication and all cuvées are very much built for long and graceful aging.

—John Gilman, View from the Cellar, November-December 2024

Belle Pente Vineyard Estate Reserve Pinot Noir, Yamill-Carlton 2021

Brian O'Donnell's Estate Reserve bottling is a vineyard selection that he makes from his production in the Belle Pente Vineyard. There were only two hundred cases of the Estate Reserve produced in 2021, with the wine tipping the scales at 14.2 percent octane in this vintage. The wine shows off a beautifully complex, youthful bouquet of plums, black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, woodsmoke, coffee bean, a gorgeous base of soil, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and velvety on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely soil signature and grip, fine-grained tannins and impeccable balance on the focused and very, very classy finish. This is a great wine in the making! 2034-2085.

94 pts –John Gilman, View from the Cellar, November-December 2024

Riona's Block Pinot Noir, Yamill-Carlton 2021

The 2021 Riona's Block Pinot Noir from Brian O'Donnell at Belle Pente is an outstanding young wine. Brian first made this bottling, named for his daughter, in 2019, made from a section of the Belle Pente Vineyard that was planted in her birth year of 1999. The 2021 version is gorgeous, offering up a pure and sappy bouquet of plums, red and black cherries, cocoa powder, a gorgeous base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a refined foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, precise and already starting to get a bit velvety on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, beautiful soil signature, fine-grained tannins and impeccable balance on the long, focused and complex finish. This is going to be a stunning glass of pinot noir once the tannins have softened up a bit!

94 pts –John Gilman, View from the Cellar, November-December 2024

Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir 2021

The 2021 Pinot Noir "Yamhill-Carlton" bottling from Belle Pente Vineyards is beautifully black fruity in personality this year, offering up a deep and sappy aromatic constellation of sweet black berries, black plums, raw cocoa, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, gentle spice tones, a nice touch of new oak and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already starting to get velvety on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, firm, well integrated tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This wine comes in at 14.2 percent octane in this vintage, but is fresh and precise on both the nose and palate. Fine juice in need of some cellaring to soften up properly on the backend. 2033-2075+.

92 pts –John Gilman, View from the Cellar, November-December 2024

Belle Pente Vineyard Pinot Noir, Yamill-Carlton 2021

The 2021 Belle Pente Vineyard bottling of pinot noir comes in at 14.2 percent alcohol in this classic vintage and offers up a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, gamebird, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, peonies, a touch of graphite and a lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core of black fruit, lovely soil inflection, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the well balanced and complex finish. All this outstanding wine needs is sufficient hibernation time to melt away some tannin. 2035-2085.

94 pts –John Gilman, View from the Cellar, November-December 2024

Gamay Noir, Yamill-Carlton 2021

Brian O'Donnell's Gamay Noir bottling is made from a parcel of this variety planted in his Belle Pente Vineyard, with the gamay vines having gone into the ground in 1994. His 2021 version is nicely ripe, coming in at 13.9 percent octane and delivering a deep and black fruity nose of dark berries, cassis, coffee bean, dark soil tones, just a hint of savory elements redolent of fresh thyme, gentle stem tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and velvety on the attack, with a superb core of sappy fruit, good focus and balance, moderate tannins and a long, complex and classy finish. This wine has a very Moulin-à-Vent-like personality and seems likely to be every bit as long-lived.

92 pts –John Gilman, View from the Cellar, November-December 2024

Pinot Gris Cuvée XL, Yamill 2021

I have to confess to being quite surprised to pour a glass of Brian O'Donnell's 2021 Pinot Gris "Cuvée XL" and find that it was salmon in color, as the wine was given a bit of skin contact prior to pressing! The wine offers up a deep, vibrant and complex bouquet of rhubarb, white cherries, sumac, a touch of brown spices, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe, crisp and complex, with fine focus and grip, a good spine of acidity, lovely balance and a long, gently tannic finish. This wine is listed at 14.6 percent octane, but is fresh as can be and shows little sign of heat on the palate. With its combination of fine acids and a bit of tannin, I suspect it will age long and gracefully. A unique and completely fascinating wine!

91 pts –John Gilman, View from the Cellar, November-December 2024