

# St. Innocent Willamette Valley



## The Wines

- *Temperance Hill, Eola-Amity*. Riesling: Mark has long adored Mosel Riesling, especially at the Kabinett level (or drier) because of its acidity and ability to go with food. He persuaded vineyard manager Dai Crisp to plant Temperance's sole block of Riesling in 2014--all 1.3 acres of it. Facing northeast, the block grows on a hilltop at 850' of elevation in the vineyard's thinnest soils. The soil is volcanic and in this block's basalt soil are blue crystals.

The harvest is early, and the style of the wine is trocken. The alcoholic ferment is mostly natively (Mark adds a tiny amount of neutral German yeast as insurance, but no SO<sub>2</sub> until well after ferment is completed). No malolactic fermentation because the ph is too low. Élevage is ~6 months in steel on the lees, followed by one year in the bottle before release. Production averages 200 cases.

- *Freedom Hill, Willamette Valley*: Pinot Blanc. The Freedom Hill Vineyard was first planted in 1982 by Dan and Helen Dusschee in what is today's Mt. Pisgah AVA. Phylloxera reared its ugly head in 1995, necessitating a painful replanting, but also giving the Dusschees, now veteran viticulturalists, a welcome chance to completely change spacing, trellising, and orientation. The vineyard is one of the state's most western, a warm site facing east but with quite cold nights, growing in ancient marine sediments. The Dusschee's kids, Dustin and McKenzie, have taken over the management of the vineyard.

Mark first made Pinot Blanc from Freedom Hill in 1997. These days the wine is a mix from tank with 20-25% from 1,000-liter Slovenian acacia *foudres*, blended after eight months of aging on its lees. Malo typically happens naturally. Production averages 400 cases.

- *Freedom Hill, Willamette Valley*: Chardonnay.: Mark has been making Chardonnay from this site since 1992. He works with two blocks of Dijon clones, one planted in 2006 and 2007 with the 76 and 548 clones. Over the years he has modified his winemaking, and now lets his ferments start spontaneously without SO<sub>2</sub> or bacteria additions (a small amount of SO<sub>2</sub> is added at bottling). Ageing is for twelve months on the lees—no stirring—in entirely neutral barrels, which are never moved once wine is inside of them. No fining, only a light filtration, and bottled by gravity. Production averages 1,100 cases.

- *Villages Cuvée: Pinot Noir.*: Villages Cuvée is St. Innocent’s calling card, a compelling Pinot blend from top vineyards at an honest price. The winery’s production of single-vineyard Pinot Noir is intentionally limited, and what remains goes into this Cuvée (it would be a mistake to think this is simply the lesser barrels of the single-vineyard wines—the “lesser” ones are splitting hairs and they are outnumbered by excess production). Wine from St. Innocent’s home vineyard of Enchanted Way became part of the blend for the first time with vintage 2023, along with wine from Freedom Hill, Temperance, and Shea.
- *Freedom Hill, Willamette Valley: Pinot Noir.* The first vintage of Freedom Hill Pinot Noir for St. Innocent was 1994. Today Mark works with three blocks: two acres of Pommard; two acres of Wädenswil; and three acres of 777. As with all of the St. Innocent Pinot Noirs, the fruit for this is de-stemmed but only minimally crushed, leaving 30-40% whole berries, and fermentations begin spontaneously in large stainless tanks without SO2. After several days, an extremely small amount of a mild strain of German yeast is added to the side of a fermenter, without being mixed in; this is Mark’s insurance policy against stuck ferments (which can require radical interventions), and the amount and strength of the yeast is such that it is not an inoculation so much as a reinforcement for the fermentations that have already begun. Aging is for 16 months in barrel with a maximum of 25% new wood. No fining, only a light filtration, and bottling is done by gravity. Note that all of St. Innocent Pinot Noirs open significantly with air, and decanting is recommended.

Freedom Hill consistently produces some of the state’s most distinctive Pinot Noirs, with muscular structure, drive, and dark fruit profiles. St. Innocent’s production averages just under 1,000 cases.

- *Momtazi, Willamette Valley: Pinot Noir.* Moe Momtazi got his engineering degree in the US, returned to Iran, and then fled after the revolution. With his pregnant wife, he made his way back in the US via Mexico and applied for political asylum. They ended up in Oregon, where Moe started a construction firm, and then in 1997 bought an abandoned wheat farm that had sat idle for seven years. His father and grandfather had made wine in Iran, and this was a way to return to his roots. From the beginning, he put in his vineyard parcels without conventional chemicals, and by 2004 all of the vines (now 260 acres) were certified biodynamic by Demeter. The AVA is McMinnville.

Mark first made Pinot Noir from the Momtazi Vineyard in 2006. He works with five blocks, a total of 8.1 acres planted to clones 777, 115, 667, and Pommard. These vines are the highest on Momtazi's steep hillside at 680-760 feet above sea level. As with Freedom Hill, the soils are uplifted marine sedimentary loams and silts, mixed with volcanic soils (admittedly, this is odd; back when this land was ocean floor, a volcanic eruption cracked the seabed, and lava poured out, mixing with the sedimentary soil). But at Momtazi the topsoil is much more shallow than at Freedom Hill, especially higher up the hillside. Plus, the afternoon wind is a force to reckon with. The site is seven miles west of McMinnville, on the north side of the opening of the Van Duzer Corridor that cuts through the coastal range and funnels cold air into the Willamette Valley. With the first scent of this wine, the extremes of exposure, temperature shifts, and shallow soils make themselves felt—the aromatics grab you and demand attention. Production ranges from 900 to 1,100 cases.

- *Shea, Yamhill-Carlton*: Pinot Noir. Dick Shea planted his first vines in 1989 and today his vineyard has 140 acres. He sells fruit to a who's who of Oregon producers. Farming is sustainable, and for the ten years that Shea participated in USDA's Conservation Security Program it made the top 5% of farms who were awarded best practices.

Mark made his first Shea Pinot Noir in 1994. His grapes come from 6.3 acres in two hillside parcels, both growing in shallow marine sedimentary soils. One parcel faces southeast at 450-500 feet, planted with Pommard and 115, and the other faces southwest on a very steep slope planted with the Pommard clone. The wine is consistently full-bodied, complex, and age-worthy. Production averages 1,000 cases.

- *Temperance Hill, Eola-Amity*. Pinot Noir: Temperance was established in 1981 and since 1991 has been managed by Dai Crisp, who moved it to organic footing. It was certified in 2012 (and is certified salmon safe). It's the highest vineyard in the Eola side of the Eola-Amity AVA, and the coolest of the sites that St. Innocent sources, losing direct sunlight by 5 or so in the afternoon. The vines grow along the spine of the Eola-Amity hills in and around a caldera of an ancient volcano. The volcanic soils are a mix of Nekia, Rittner, and Jory. Some 25 wineries source from its 100 acres of vines.

Mark began making Pinot Noir from Temperance in 1994. He works with 9.2 acres in two blocks, ranging from 650 to nearly 850 feet, planted in dense parcels to Pinot Noir (Pommard, Wädenswil, and 667). The wine is classic Eola-Amity with its balance, spice, and perfume laced with smoky highlights. Production averages 1,000 cases.