

# St. Innocent Willamette Valley

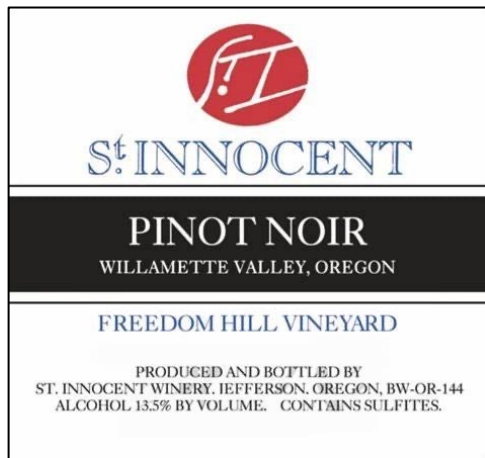


*This year's lineup from Mark Vlossak at St. Innocent Winery was a big standout in my recent Willamette Valley tastings... St. Innocent is also doing a fantastic job with sparkling wine. Pricing at this estate remains fair, especially considering the high caliber of the wines.*

-Eric Guido, Vinous Media, July 2025

*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, whose most passionate hobby was wine. He was a wine educator and imported fine wine on the side for a group of buddies, which resulted in a truck pulling up to the house in Wisconsin to unload 300 cases of wine twice a year.

After a postgraduate degree in medicine, Mark moved to Oregon to practice pediatrics. In 1983, he was inspired by a quote from André Tchelistcheff, "The greatest sparkling wine in America will be made in Oregon." Mark decided he wanted to do that. This led to five years of study including graduate seminars at UC Davis and 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, clunkier 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.

Mark was the winemaker at Panther Creek from 1994 until 1999, when he decided to go full time at St. Innocent. In 2007 he moved out of the tiny winery he had built in an industrial park in Salem 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 and build the winery from start to finish. In 2017, wishing to be unencumbered by partners, he sold his share in Zenith and bought a 47.5-acre property in the South Salem hills.

There, with the help of his close friend, the viticulturist Mimi Casteel, he planted a vineyard plus an apple orchard to produce cider to distill into apple brandy and built a new winery. He's come full circle back to owning his own place, with the enormous plus of having an estate vineyard. He planted it one vine at a time via a drilled hole, all 15.5 acres, without bulldozing or grading, let alone plowing, 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.

In the process, he 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, Temperance Hill vineyards, plus beginning with the 2023 vintage from his home vineyard of Enchanted Way. In addition, St. Innocent produces Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, and small amounts of Riesling as well as *méthode traditionnelle* sparkling wine.

[www.stinnocentwine.com](http://www.stinnocentwine.com)