



What Makes Pinot Noir Burgundian or 'Orgundian'



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Examining the Environmental influences of two prominent Pinot Noir regions

By Stacy Briscoe

There's a common anecdote that the reason Oregon's Willamette Valley AVA is so successful in Pinot Noir production is because of its location along the same latitude as Burgundy's Cote d'Or AOC, the Motherland of said variety.

While the Old and New World regions may share some environmental similarities, it is in their differences that we can enjoy two distinct styles of Pinot Noir wines.

Climate

Interestingly, the latitudinal fact is not true. Willamette Valley is located along the 45th parallel (more in line with Bordeaux); Cote d'Or along the 47th.



winters with little transitional time between the two. The result is a shorter growing season—one reason why early-ripening Pinot Noir is well-suited.

Willamette Valley, located just 50 miles from the Pacific Ocean, maintains an overall **moderate maritime** climate: less differentiation between the hottest and coldest temperatures; transitions between the seasons happen less abruptly. Ripening can extend well into fall.

West of Cote d'Or, the Morvan hills provide some protection from rainfall (the annual average is about 700 mm, or 27.5 inches)—some of which can fall during autumn, threatening harvest (and potential grape quality).

Similarly, Willamette Valley has some protection from major weather systems due to the Coast Ranges—but is still known to be one of the coldest, wettest AVAs in Oregon, receiving about 1,000 mm, or 39.3 inches of rain annually. However, here, most falls during the winter months; summers can be quite dry.

Topography and Soils

Altitude and aspect are equally important for both growing regions.

For Burgundian growers, the more northerly location means aspect, altitude, and slope are important to ensure balanced vine growth. The best Pinot Noir vineyards (Premier and Grand Cru sites) are found on south/south-east facing aspects along the mid-slopes of the Cote d'Or. Here, adequate sunlight interception ensures full phenolic ripeness; diurnal range (shift in day and nighttime temperatures) means acidity is maintained. And, of course, as cold air sinks, spring frost—to which the region is highly susceptible—is less of a risk.

The well-drained limestone-clay soils found in the area aid in drainage, helping limit vine vigor and yield—much needed for good quality Pinot Noir. The limestone properties also absorb the heat of the sun, radiating it back up into the vine, further promoting ripening. Clay-inclusion means there are also some water retention properties, increasingly important as annual rain declines and temperatures rise. Irrigation is prohibited throughout Burgundy.

With Willamette Valley's slightly warmer temperatures during the growing season, diurnal shifts become a key factor for crafting balanced Pinot Noir. This is achieved by the cool coastal air that gets pulled in through the Van Duzer Corridor, a break in the Coast Ranges. Like Burgundy, there's also a range of site aspects and altitudes for growers to choose from.



soils are all fairly low in nutrients, but also have some water-retention properties. Though irrigation is not strictly prohibited in Oregon, it's limited to only long-standing producers who have been grandfathered into the current legislation. Newer producers either install ponds to trap and reuse rainwater and/or—where possible—opt for dry farming.

Wine Styles Produced

A wine's specific structural and aromatic profile is dependent on environmental factors, but also human factors. This includes everything from clonal selection and trellising techniques to fermentation temperatures and aging regimes.

Many describe Pinot Noir from Oregon as Burgundian. But this, of course, cannot be true for all the aforementioned reasons. But most importantly, Oregon vintners are not creating wine in Burgundy, and although they may utilize some of the classic techniques founded in France, the style of Oregon Pinot Noir is all its own.

Suggested Comparative Tasting:

Domaine Drouhin Oregon Pinot Noir 2017

Pinot Noir from Dundee Hills, Willamette Valley, Oregon

Joseph Drouhin Chorey Les Beaune 2017

Pinot Noir from Chorey-les-Beaune, Cote de Beaune, Cote d'Or, Burgundy, France



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