

Brittan Vineyards

WILLAMETTE VALLEY

Robert Brittan

I left Stags' Leap Winery in Napa after 16 years as Winemaker and Estate Manager to fulfill my dream of making Pinot Noir and Syrah from unique sites in cooler climates. My winemaking career began in my dorm room at Oregon State University, where I was a physics and philosophy major. I soon realized that alcohol was an attractant to co-eds, so I began my career in fermentation sciences in order to get a date. I ultimately completed my education at UC Davis and moved to Napa Valley, where I made wines for Far Niente, Saint Andrews and Stags' Leap Winery.

With over 30 years of experience growing grapes and making wine, I bring a significant amount of viticultural and winemaking knowledge to this new venture. I have always had a passion for Pinot Noir, and I hope that with the fruit from our estate vineyard in the foothills of the Coastal Range, I can bring a new voice to the McMinnville AVA, and help form the style and definition of Pinot Noir from this recently designated region.

I searched for years to find the ideal site on which to grow Pinot Noir and finally found it on this 128-acre hillside in Oregon, which we purchased in December 2004. The soils are a mixture of glacial deposits and volcanic material, with a predominant presence of broken basalt. We have east, south and west exposures to choose from on a cool, windy site on the edge of the Coastal Range. As a result, I believe I have found a site where I can grow unique wines, wines that truly speak of this place. There were 18 acres of existing vines when we purchased the property and I have subsequently re-planted close to 50% of the vineyard, fine tuning the viticultural practices and improving the clonal and rootstock combinations, which included one of the first plantings of the Swan clonal selection of Pinot Noir in Oregon. After dropping all of the crop in 2005 to allow the vines to get better established, we made our first two Pinot Noirs from the mature vines on the property from the 2006 vintage, a total of 720 cases. In the spring of 2008, I planted an additional 3.5 additional acres of Pinot Noir, which we expect to be in production in 2012. I have found that because of the rocky soils and low water retention, it takes five years for a vine to get into production on this site. In addition to the Pinot, we now have 1.5 acres of Syrah planted, a varietal that I believe benefits greatly from a cool growing climate, provided you can get enough hang time to get it fully mature.

In addition to our own wines, I am also the winemaker for Winderlea Vineyards & Winery and Ayoub Vineyards, both in the Dundee hills. This has been a wonderful opportunity to make wine from a very different viticultural area and as always, Pinot Noir lends itself to many wonderful interpretations, depending on the soils and microclimates where it is grown.

