

Interesting

Characters

Jim Bernau – A Grower’s Passion

Jim Bernau

CEO and Chairperson of the Board of Directors for
Willamette Valley Vineyards

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The Early Days

As a native Oregonian, Jim Bernau’s love of wine started at the young age of 12. His father, a big booster of new enterprises, did legal work for many small start-ups and often brought home samples of their work. At times, these samples included wine from new client Richard Sommer. Jim and his brother decided to try their hand at making wine on their own, starting with fermenting frozen Concord grape juice concentrate in gallon jugs. Though not what you would call drinkable, Jim had found his passion.

Following graduation from Roseburg High School, Jim attended Oxford University in 1971 and University of Oregon where he served as Student Body President. He later attended the Willamette University Atkinson Graduate School of Management. From there he found a home at the State Capitol in Salem as a lobbyist for small businesses. At this time, winemakers who had gained experience in California were moving to Oregon, and thus began the birth of the Oregon wine industry. As a small business lobbyist during the 1981 session, Jim was approached by winemakers to help with the passage of legislation that would establish a fund for research and promotion that in turn led to the development of an Oregon wine industry. The enthusiasm of the winemakers was infectious and lit a path for Jim that has held true for him for over 26 years.

After weekends spent driving up and down country roads studying south facing slopes, Jim found a location he believed to be the perfect site for his vineyard in the hills south of Salem. In 1983, Jim purchased the original site, the Estate Vineyard, and named the property after his desire to make high-quality wines representative of



the region –Willamette Valley Vineyards. Using a small tractor, he cleared away the blackberry vines and remnants of a pioneer plum orchard and planted the vineyard to Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay, becoming one of the early wine-growers in what has become a major Oregon agricultural industry. Today the winery and underground cellar are carved into the top of an ancient volcanic flow, surrounded by these same original vines.

The Vineyard

The Estate property, located in the heart of the Willamette Valley on 50 acres of south and southwest facing slopes, has grown from these humble beginnings into a world class winery with a focus on high-quality and sustainable wines. Jim’s approach is to grow, by hand, the highest quality winegrapes using careful canopy management, and to achieve wines that are truly expressive of the varietal and the place where they are grown. Yields are low, with the Pinot Noir purposely limited to 1.75 tons per acre. The stylistic emphasis is on pure varietal fruit characters, with attention to depth and richness of mouthfeel and balance. The wines are truly a collaborative effort of the entire vineyard and winemaking staff.

The Estate vineyard at Willamette Valley Vineyards rises from 500 feet in elevation to 750 feet with 7 to 12 degree slopes tilted toward the sun. As a result, the vines get excellent air drainage and are above the frost line. At this elevation and slope, the temperature is approximately 10 degrees warmer than the valley floor during the day.

A World-Class Winery created by a World-Class Man

The goal of Willamette Valley Vineyards is to make the highest quality Burgundian varietals possible from the Willamette Valley, to treasure the environment and use sustainable practices in growing and vinifying the winegrapes. Jim’s wines have received some of the highest ratings and recognition among Oregon wines, including the “Top 100 in the World” designation from *Wine Spectator* Magazine.



Recognizing Sustainability and Accountability

Sustainability and stewardship of the land is a driving principal in Jim's business. All vineyards have been certified sustainable through LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology) and Salmon Safe since 1997. This includes fifty acres of vines at the Estate Vineyard, over 200 acres at Tualatin Estate Vineyard, and sixty acres at Elton Vineyard. LIVE is certified through the International Organization for Biological Control, the international standard for sustainable agriculture.

The whole farm system certification includes preventative measures for water run-off into salmon streams, natural pest management, riparian areas, and reduced sprays. Additionally, the Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir plantings were certified organic in October 2007 by Oregon Tilth.

Willamette Valley Vineyards has taken additional steps to ensure that not only the grapes and wine, but that the com-



pany as a whole is sustainable. In 2005, Jim launched the employee biodiesel program, offering fifty gallons of biodiesel a month to each employee, at no cost. As many as ten employees use the program and employees, delivery vehicles and tractors fill up

onsite or at card-lock stations. In August 2007, along with Governor Ted Kulongoski, the Oregon Environmental Council and the Oregon Wine Board, 15 wineries (and counting) pledged to work towards carbon neutrality by 2010. Willamette Valley Vineyards signed to the pledge and is now investigating solar energy, green energy, carbon offsets and other unique ways to address global warming. Willamette Valley Vineyard's staff have already reduced travel, are taking direct flights, and purchasing carbon offsets for their travel. Additionally in 2007 Willamette Valley Vineyards became the first winery in the world to use cork certified through the Rainforest Alliance to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards. Cork is a natural, sustainable product where the cork tree is never cut down but continues to sequester carbon and produce oxygen throughout its long life. The recently launched Cork ReHarvest program takes the use of this sustainable product one step farther by providing a means for consumers to recycle wine cork, which is then remanufactured in the creation of new products.

Jim loves this land and has now lived at the vineyard for 26 years. When asked where he would most like to be, it is in the vineyard. He takes pride as a native Oregonian following the lead of the emigrating winemakers to build a world-class Oregon winery by organizing the energy and resources of thousands of wine enthusiasts.

Over the years Jim has been presented with many awards such as:

- Glenn L. Jackson Leadership Award by Willamette University's Atkinson Graduate School of Management for his

work in promoting entrepreneurship.

- Jim's work on sustainability was recognized by LIVE with their first Founder's Award in 2008.
- Entrepreneur of the Year of the Pacific Northwest for Food and Beverage by Ernst and Young
- Agriculturalist of the Year by the Agri-Business Council of Oregon
- Beta Gamma Sigma Award by the Willamette University Atkinson Graduate School
- Outstanding Service and Founder's Award for his leadership as President of the Oregon Winegrowers Association Oregon State Society's Webfoot Award in Washington, DC for his civic work and demonstrated commitment to bringing Oregonians together

The Philanthropist

Jim's financial contribution established the nation's first Professorship of Fermentation Science at Oregon State University (OSU) in 1995. He now serves on the founding Board for the Oregon Wine Institute where he is the leading financial contributor toward establishing this new research effort at OSU. His charitable contributions have also funded an endowment at Willamette University's Atkinson School of Management in memory of his professor and mentor, Earl K. Littrell, who served on the first Board of Advisors for Willamette Valley Vineyards and was one of the companies' first investors.

Willamette Valley Vineyards is unique in that Jim funded its start-up conducting the nation's first successful, self-underwritten, public common stock offering – an effort that has led to a new fabric of federal and state laws facilitating small business capitalization, and which founded Willamette Valley Vineyards as a consumer-owned business. What began as a small group of fellow Pinot Noir enthusiasts, the winery has grown to over 4,500 owners and is traded on the NASDAQ.



Jim explains that a consumer-owned winery is naturally oriented to the long term, sustainable interests of the community. Much of the above accomplishments have been a team effort where Jim has been blessed with involved shareholders and long-term employees that have spanned the life of the business.

Business success has led to the winery being named the top performing Oregon publicly held company in share value growth by *The Oregonian* in 2006, Agri-Business of the Year by the Salem Chamber of Commerce and among the top 200 Best Small Companies in America by *Forbes Magazine* in the October 2006 issue. Willamette Valley Vineyards was named the "Hottest Small Brand" among U.S. Wine Companies for 2007 by *Wine Business Monthly*.