

WINERIES TO WATCH

Two producers pushing limits in Oregon **By Tim Fish**

BIG TABLE FARM

Big Table Farm is not centrally located. The nearest town is Gaston, Ore., population 695, about 5 miles away via a dirt road. But Willamette Valley is like that, and this serenity is a big reason Brian Marcy and Clare Carver came to Oregon in 2005 to start a winery and farm.

"As Clare likes to say, it feeds our soul," Marcy says of the couple's 70-acre farm. All told, their homestead includes 68 acres of mature Douglas firs, where they hunt for mushrooms, and acres of pasture for a small herd of Irish Dexter cattle. They work with draft horses, tend beehives and American Guinea hogs, and live with a menagerie of dogs and cats and one cranky goat.

The heart of the farm, and what pays the bills, is the winery, where Marcy produces polished and expressive Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir, like the Big Table Farm Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2015, a supple and focused red, with lively black cherry flavors, orange zest aromas and stony mineral notes. "The 2015 vintage was very generous to us," Marcy says. "The wines are juicy, not overly tannic."

The winery's labels are as distinctive as the wines. Carver is an artist and designed more than a thousand wine labels before turning her focus to Big Table Farm. She takes inspiration from what she observes around the property. The label art changes with each vintage, although every bottling remains within a theme from year to year. The label for the Willamette Valley Pinot, for example, is always devoted to the farm's pigs, with the 2015 featuring a duo named Kirby and Pickle.

How Big Table Farm came into existence is a roundabout tale. Marcy, 48, hails from Ventura, Calif., and originally preferred beer to wine. After he got his political science degree from the University of California, Davis, he returned to the school in the early 1990s to study brewing. He then became the brewmaster for Sonoma Mountain Brewery, a short-lived venture started by the Benziger family, before turning his attention to wine.



Brian Marcy and Clare Carver

Recent Releases from Big Table Farm

SCORE	WINE	PRICE	CASES PRODUCED	SCORE	WINE	PRICE	CASES PRODUCED
93	Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Earth 2015	\$105	107	92	Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Wirtz Vineyard 2015	\$48	368
93	Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Sunnyside Vineyard 2015	\$48	369	91	Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Pelos Sandberg Vineyard 2015	\$48	402
92	Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Cattrall Brothers Vineyard 2015	\$48	202	91	Pinot Noir Yamhill-Carlton District 2015	\$48	303
92	Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2015	\$42	2,393	90	Chardonnay Willamette Valley 2015	\$45	950

In 1999, Marcy joined winemaker Ehren Jordan's team at Turley Wine Cellars in Napa Valley and later worked for Neyers and with Helen Turley at Marcassin. That same year, he met Carver, now 44, and in 2006, the couple relocated to Willamette Valley to found Big Table.

The farm, Marcy says, has been a slow build. They completed a winery in 2014, but one addition has remained just out of reach: vineyards. "That's the next step. So far, we haven't had the wherewithal," Marcy says. Of the 70 acres, only about 5 to 8 are suitable for vines.

In the meantime, they have put together a solid portfolio of older, lesser-known vineyards and put them to excellent use. They range from Sunny-side Vineyard, located south of Salem, to Pelos Sandberg and Cattrall Brothers vineyards in Eola-Amity Hills, to Wirtz Vineyard in northern Willamette Valley.

"I like to have a variety of vineyards to work with. Every vineyard has its own personality," Marcy says. "I've been here 11 years and I still have a lot to learn. Every vintage is different, and I relish that challenge."

LAVINEA

When Isabelle Meunier and Greg Ralston left Evening Land in 2014—she was winemaker and he was CEO—they wanted something to call their own. The up-and-coming winemaker and wine business veteran have made a good match. "At some point, it became clear that making my own wine was important," Meunier says of her decision to go ahead with the change.

After just two vintages, the duo's new winery, Lavinea, has made a strong impression with a collection of sleek, plush and well-structured wines such as its Lavinea Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Temperance Hill Vineyard 2015. The winery harvests from five different vineyards, all of which are among the oldest in Willamette Valley: Tualatin Estate, Lazy River, Nysa, Elton and, of course, Temperance Hill. "You get more depth with older vineyards,"

Meunier says. "And we wanted vineyard sites that could grow with us."

To emphasize the distinctiveness of each site, Meunier uses the same winemaking regimen for every single-vineyard wine, down to the same percentage of whole-cluster fermentation, barrel coopers and new oak. "I wanted to play around with what potential was there and how to make that sing in the bottle," she explains.

Meunier is a Québec native who studied winemaking and viticulture at the University of Dijon and in New Zealand at Lincoln University. She worked with French-Canadian winemaker Pascal Marchand at Domaine de la Vougeraie in Burgundy and with Blair Walter at New Zealand's Felton Road. Before joining Evening Land, Ralston was a key player at Chateau Montelena and Schramsberg in Napa Valley, as well as with marketer and importer Wilson Daniels.



Greg Ralston and Isabelle Meunier

Lavinea is still in its fledging stage, so a self-contained winery and estate vineyards remain in the future. Currently, Meunier makes the wines at the Carlton Winemakers Studio, an artisan crush facility that specializes in small wineries.

Lavinea produced about 1,800 cases in 2015, its second vintage, and the results are impressive. It was the middle vintage of three warm growing seasons in a row. "It got so warm in 2015," Meunier recalls, "that the vines just shut down," halting ripening. "Because of that, we had better sugar-acid balance in the wine and better fruit flavors."

As she looks ahead, Meunier is keen to see people's reactions to the 2017s. After a series of hot years, it is a return to what she considers a classic Willamette Valley vintage, a style many Oregon wine lovers are looking forward to drinking again.

Recent Releases from Lavinea

SCORE	WINE	PRICE	CASES PRODUCED	SCORE	WINE	PRICE	CASES PRODUCED
93	Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Temperance Hill Vineyard 2015	\$75	264	90	Pinot Noir Yamhill-Carlton District Lazy River Vineyard 2015	\$55	237
90	Pinot Noir Dundee Hills Nysa Vineyard 2015	\$65	353	89	Chardonnay Yamhill-Carlton District Lazy River Vineyard 2015	\$48	231
90	Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Elton Vineyard 2015	\$75	215	89	Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Tualatin Estate 2015	\$65	279