



**AFHE Virtual Wine Tasting:  
Willamette Valley (OR) vs. Russian River Valley (CA)**  
Hosted by Mike Whitty, AFHE President  
November 12, 2020

# Welcome!

- Join Mike Whitty and **guest sommelier Ryan Arnold** for a delicious comparison of two close rival wine producing regions:
  - The Willamette Valley of Oregon, and
  - The Russian River Valley of California.
- We will taste 4 different wines, two whites and two reds from each region.
- We'll discuss the different qualities of the grape varietals and the different wine terroir for each region.
- Attendees are encouraged to purchase their own wine in advance to participate in the tasting. We will be tasting the following wines (all retailing between \$17 and \$25):

# Our Four Wines



# Geography

- The Willamette Valley in Oregon (with most production north and west of Salem) is a drive of ten hours or so to the Russian River Valley of Sonoma County, California (with most production in and around Healdsburg or Santa Rosa, and Sebastopol in Sonoma County), mostly along I-5.
- Just for perspective, this drive would be about half again as long as the drive from Piedmont, Italy to Beaune, France, which we compared on October 1.

# Geography

Both the Willamette Valley and Russian River Valley benefit from:

- Being close to, but not right on, the Pacific Coast
- Between the coastal range and the higher inland ranges (Cascades, Sierra Nevada), with passes that bring in cooler Pacific breezes (Van Duzer Corridor, Petaluma Gap)
- Volcanic soils
  - Willamette Valley near Mt. Hood and other Cascade volcanoes
  - Russian River Valley near the Mayacama range that included volcanoes and pyroclastic flows  
(Mount Saint Helena is technically not a volcano, though)

# White Wines (Chardonnay, for today)

- The USA, especially the West Coast, produces some excellent white wines in several varieties: Riesling, Pinot Gris, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, and of course **Chardonnay**.
- The Chateau St. Helena Chardonnay (Napa Valley) was one of the wines that won the 1976 tasting competition outside Paris that helped gain international attention and respect for American wines, as featured in the film "[Bottle Shock](#)."
- [Averaen Chardonnay](#)
- [Rodney Strong Chalk Hill Chardonnay](#)

# Averaen Chardonnay

- Grapes produced in Willamette Valley, but wine produced in Healdsburg, CA.
  - “It would be hard to find a better Chardonnay at this price. A blend of grapes from two AVAs, it’s been given reserve-level care, including aging in 10% new French oak. Toasty, tasty and well balanced, it offers ripe apple fruit accented with nut butter and caramel.” Review by Wine Enthusiast (92)
- [More information at Wine.Com](https://www.averaenwines.com) <https://www.averaenwines.com>
- Secondary Options: [A to Z](#) [Acrobat](#) [Phelps Creek](#)
- Upgrades: [Bergstrom](#) [Adelsheim](#)



# Rodney Strong Chalk Hill Chardonnay

- From the Chalk Hill sub-AVA of the Russian River Valley
- “Rod Strong first planted chardonnay in the white volcanic soils of Chalk Hill in 1965, and this estate-grown wine carries a memory of that chalky soil in its mineral freshness and apple-skin spice. It’s clean and powerful, that power driven by some reduction that keeps the wine tight. Give it time in a decanter to open up...”

Review by Wine & Spirits (92)

- [More information at Wine.Com](http://www.wine.com) <http://www.rodneystrong.com/>
- Secondary Options: [Laguna](#) [Frei Brothers](#) [Davis Bynum](#) [Jordan](#) [Raeburn](#)
- Upgrades: [Benovia](#) [Dutton Goldfield](#) [Walter Hansel Estate](#)  
[Walter Hansel North Slope](#) [Rodney Strong Reserve](#)



# Red Wines (Pinot Noir)

- Pinot Noir is a perfect fit for several West Coast valleys with moderate “Goldilocks” climates and good soil. Dundee Hills and the Russian River Valley are excellent examples.
- [Averaen Pinot Noir](#)
- [Rodney Strong Russian River Valley Pinot Noir](#)
  
- [Miles on Pinot Noir, from “Sideways”](#)

# Averaen Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

- “Textbook Willamette Valley Pinot Noir with juicy, fresh fruit and berry flavors - think dark cherry, cranberry, blackberry, more cherry. Clove, mocha, blood orange and vanilla accents abound adding complexity. The texture is ripe and plush with a line of acid running through to keep the wine vibrant. The wine is all about focus, electricity, and verve.” (Summary by winemaker)
- [More information at Wine.Com](https://www.averaenwines.com) <https://www.averaenwines.com>
- Secondary options: [A to Z](#) [Pinot Envy](#)
- Upgrades: [La Crema](#) [Bergstrom](#) [Erath](#)



# Rodney Strong Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

- “Bright in acidity and cradled moderate oak, this wine shows a crunchiness to the tannins and bright bursts of cranberry, pomegranate and orange peel flavors. Elements of baking spice dot the finish, contrasting well against the rich fruit.” Review by Wine Enthusiast (91)
- “Refined, featuring lithe flavors of cherry tart and raspberry, with hints of nutmeg, all supported by medium-grained tannins and fresh acidity. Chocolate, spice and cream details emerge on the rich finish.” Review by Wine Spectator (91)
- [More information at Wine.Com](http://www.rodneystrong.com/) <http://www.rodneystrong.com/>
- Secondary options: [McMurray Ranch](#) [Mossback](#) [Angeline](#)
- Upgrades: [Benovia](#) [Merry Edwards](#) [Walter Hansel South Slope](#)  
[Walter Hansel Cahill Lane](#)



## **Thanks to our guest sommelier, Ryan Arnold!**

[Sommelier Ryan Arnold](#)

*(follow links above and below for more information)*

- [Podcast: The Grape Nation, Episode 51 featuring Ryan Arnold](#)
- [Podcast: The Sunday Scaries \(Sept 29, 2019\), featuring Ryan Arnold](#)
- [Interview with Ryan Arnold](#)



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# Thanks for participating!

For further reading / watching:

- [Lettie Teague in WSJ on virtual wine tastings](#)
- Wine at the movies (with links to IMBD.com):
  - [“Red Obsession”](#) (2013) – about a burst of Chinese interest in Bordeaux and its effects on prices and vineyards
  - [“Bottle Shock”](#) (2008) – Dramatic retelling of the story of the 1976 Paris wine tasting when Napa wines surprised the French, featuring Chris Pine, Alan Rickman, Eliza Dushku, Bill Pullman, Dennis Farina
  - [“Sideways”](#) (2004) (R) Wine-tasting buddy road-trip featuring Paul Giamatti, Virginia Madsen, Thomas Haden Church, Sandra Oh (*single-handedly killed the Merlot boom*)