



2006 WILLAMETTE VALLEY AUXERROIS

BACKGROUND When two clones of Auxerrois (oak-sair-wah) were brought into Oregon from Alsace in 1977, we knew next to nothing about the variety. Still, after tasting some test wines made at Oregon State University, our interest was piqued. Much more recently, DNA testing has shown that Auxerrois, like Chardonnay, Aligoté, Gamay and 10 other varieties, is a cross dating from medieval times between Pinot noir and an ignoble variety called Gouais blanc. It is also the name of a duchy surrounding the town of Auxerre near Chablis, but the variety has disappeared from that area and all other parts of Burgundy. In fact, there are probably less than 500 acres of it planted in the world. Its early ripening has allowed it to flourish in Luxembourg (even achieving Premier Cru status), but in Alsace, the variety is now treated as a second-class citizen, consigned to blends often with Pinot blanc. In the US, we know of only one other producer.

GROWING SEASON Although storms carrying a lot of rain swept through Oregon in mid-January - slowing up pruning work - by the time spring rolled around, the 2006 growing season had caught up to what we assume to be "normal" timing in this day and age. Bud break occurred in the third week of March, and bloom about the second week of June. Perfect bloom weather resulted in too many clusters, each with too many berries. Thus, we had to spend a significant amount of time in "green harvest" passes to pare back the crop to what our climate could actually ripen. Harvest was accomplished in near perfect weather, warm enough that everything ripened smoothly, yet not all at once, with cool mornings for picking, and very little rain. Our Auxerrois grapes were picked on September 23.

VINEYARDS Though we planted Auxerrois soon after its release from Oregon State University back in the mid-eighties, that vineyard, plus a second planting, never gave us reason to treat the wine as anything more than a blending tool. However, the 1.65 acres we planted in 2002 on a north slope at Ribbon Springs Vineyard proved so exciting that we've added another 2/3 acre. It turns out that there are two keys to growing Auxerrois so that it can become exciting wine: the first is planting on a cool site, the second is avoiding vineyard drought stress. Our vineyard management at Ribbon Springs incorporates both, and the white wines from Ribbon Springs seem to gain in complexity each year.

WINEMAKING The techniques used to produce this Auxerrois mirror those of almost all our other white wines. We gently press the whole clusters in our membrane press to get juice as free from bitter tannins as possible. Then, after allowing the juice to settle for a day, it is pumped into stainless steel tanks (though 5% - 1 barrel's worth - was put in old oak to give a touch of richness, but not oakiness), then malolactic fermentation was prevented in order to retain as much of the gorgeous fresh fruit aromas as possible. After the cool fermentation, the wine was allowed to sit on the dead yeast lees to gain a little more complexity. The Auxerrois was bottled in late April of 2007.

THE WINE There are aromas of juicy apple, pear, white peach and honey in the nose of this wine. In the mouth these fruits reappear together with subtle flavors of fennel and tarragon. With its perfect textural balance of acid, alcohol and fruitiness, the wine has body and length on the palate, yet remains fresh. Auxerrois is wonderful on its own as an apéritif, or with many courses at the beginning of a meal. It would pair beautifully with crab salad, for instance, or cured salmon with tarragon dressing.

THE LABEL This wine belongs to our series of relatively rare wines - officially (and lovingly) designated as "Wacky", since they are not what one expects from a Willamette Valley winery. We use the same drawing by Ginny Adelsheim for all of them, a "portrait" of our winery as seen from the foot of our Calkins Lane estate vineyard.

PRODUCTION There were 499 cases of the 2006 Willamette Valley Auxerrois produced.

