

RECENTLY-TASTED AMERICAN WINES SUMMER 2025



This new report on some of America's greatest neo-classical producers includes a great many new releases from the 2022 and 2023 vintages from the west coast. It is funny, but its genesis was actually the arrival at my stoop of first, all of the 2023 bottlings from Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon at Walter Scott Wines in Salem, Oregon. This was followed only a day or two later with most of the 2023s from Rhys Vineyards and a note in my inbox about the coming release of the 2023s from Richard and Kathryn Hermann's OO Wines. So, I thought, it would make a nice, neat little article to just cover the 2023s from these three top domaines. And then more wines started to roll in! Finally, I realized that I probably had a full-sized report on my hands and I might as well reach out to a few more wineries and distributors to check on new releases from others of my favorite Old School or Neo-Classical estates in Oregon and California. Happily, there was a ton of new wines to taste and soon wines from great estates like Saint Innocent, Goodfellow, Philip Togni, Mount Eden, Porter Creek, Sky and Roederer Estate were sitting in my cellar waiting to be tasted. And all the time, in the back of my mind I was wondering if the broad selection of top Washington state wineries that had been offered to be sent was going to show up at my door.

Before I knew it, I had a burgeoning report on my hands, as there were a ton of great new releases on the market or pending from the excellent recent vintages on the west coast. Of the three vintages that are the most current, the 2023, which is cooler and almost classic in its weather patterns, is, of course, the most appealing to my palate and I have truly tasted an awful lot of stunning young 2023s in the course of the preparation of this article! But, there are also a ton of great wines in the pipeline right now from the previous two vintages as well. Given all of the great young wines I was tasting, I started to get the nagging feeling that the article was going to be too heavily-weighted towards new releases and not have enough balancing tasting notes on older wines and how they were holding up or drinking today, so I undertook to organize a couple of tastings of wines from the decades of the 1980s and 1970s to augment the notes all of the younger wines. The result has been one of the most enjoyable features to work on over these past couple of months.

I also have to take a moment to thank Jill Schlegel for kindly working her magic with the team at Roederer Estate and augmenting my shipment of new releases from the winery with a few older examples of their top of the line l'Ermitage bottling from the 2007, 2005 and 2002 vintages, which show how beautifully the finest American sparkling wine can age! Readers may recall that I reported on several older vintages of the l'Ermitage bottling back in the spring of 2022. At that time, Roederer Estate was celebrating their fortieth anniversary, as Champagne Louis Roederer had first established their California sparkling wine estate in the Anderson Valley in 1982. Maison Roederer purchased and planted two hundred and thirty-five hectares of new vineyards in Anderson Valley, after having spent a couple of years researching the various winegrowing regions in California, looking for a properly cool location to plant vineyards dedicated to the production of sparkling wines. So, the first vines at Roederer Estate were planted in 1984 and a winery was constructed in 1986, leading to their first releases in the 1988 vintage. Prior to the arrival of Roederer Estate, a few other French Champagne houses had come to till the fertile soils of California for their own sparkling wine projects, with Domaine Chandon and Piper-Sonoma two of the best known earlier French arrivals in the state. However, these projects tended to focus on more "entry level" wines, seeking to compete and supplant brands such as Korbel that had already realized mass market success with their California sparkling wines. With Roederer Estate, the emphasis has always been on a higher level of quality, more aligned with what one might expect from Champagne itself. In 1993, Roederer Estate would release their first iteration of their "l'Ermitage" cuvée, from the 1989 vintage, which would mark the debut of their top bottling.

As I have mentioned in the past, back in 1982, the only sparkling wine producer in the United States which aspired to this higher level of quality was Schramsberg, which already had a couple of decades' worth of experience in producing top level sparkling wines in the state of California at this time. Beyond the team at Schramsberg, there were really few producers making California sparkling wine who were seeking to create wines at the same level of quality as Champagne. One could list Frances and Terry Leighton as among those with the same aspirations for their sparkling wines, though the Kalin Cellars sparkling wine program was always very small in scale and probably as much for the personal drinking pleasure of Frances and Terry as it was an important component of their commercial success. The Reims-based *maison* of Champagne Taittinger would also break ground on a new sparkling wine project in the Carneros Valley in 1987, Domaine Carneros, which would also set the bar a bit higher quality-wise than was the case with the earlier-arriving French proprietors at Domaine Chandon and Piper-Sonoma. But, to this day, the California sparkling wine market has really been somewhat dominated by those focusing

on the mass market and there have really been a relatively few who have sought to make wines that could compete with those from Champagne. Of this relatively small number of producers, Roederer Estate has always stood at the forefront and it is hard not to argue that their l'Ermitage bottling is America's finest sparkling wine.

Today, Arnaud Weyrich remains the long-time winemaker at Roederer Estate and he continues to make utterly superb wines. He started his career here in the 1990s, worked a couple of other jobs after this and returned full-time at Roederer Estate in 2000. He ascended to the position of *Chef du Cave* in 2002 and has remained a fixture at the winery since that time. The winery's *Tête de Cuvée* of l'Ermitage has always been a wine built for long and graceful aging in bottle, so it was a treat to have the opportunity to taste this wine from the 2002, 2005 and 2007 vintages in preparation of this report. The first two of these vintages were the original disgorgements of the wine, which back in this era would have spent between four and five years aging *sur lattes* prior to their disgorgement. The 2007 l'Ermitage was a recently-disgorged example, as the winery has been making small quantities of older vintages available in the last few years, with these wines having been disgorged after far more extended periods of time aging on their fine lees. The 2007 l'Ermitage is the current release in this cellar program and was disgorged in November of 2024 and is presently available from the winery. All of these older vintages of l'Ermitage clearly demonstrate that this is one of America's longest-lived sparkling wines and that the wine clearly improves with extended time in the cellar.

The *vins clairs* for the l'Ermitage bottling do not undergo malolactic fermentation, which is one of the cornerstones on which its exceptional longevity is based. Thus, as my notes on the newly-released vintage of 2019 of both l'Ermitage and l'Ermitage Rosé show, this is a wine that typically starts out life properly structured and is really not ready for primetime drinking, at least to my palate, until five or six years after its first release. The team at Roederer Estate now gives this wine fully five years of aging *sur lattes* prior to disgorgement and preparation for release into the market, so it is not a "young" wine when it is released, but given the wine's extraordinary track record for long aging, it remains a wine that is truly deserving of longer cellaring. For this reason, the winery's relatively new program to re-release recently-disgorged older vintages is such a boon for sparkling wine lovers. I have to note that after now tasting several older vintages of l'Ermitage since the winery celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2022, I can observe that I have consistently underrated the wines when they are first released, as their ability to blossom and gain in complexity, elegance and nuance with longer cellaring is really unmatched in the world of American sparkling wines.

The following tasting notes are organized in my customary fashion, by type of wine first, (starting with Sparkling Wines). Within each type or variety section, the wines are list first chronologically by vintage and then alphabetically by producer. Typically I have listed single vineyard bottlings from the same producer in alphabetical order by the name of the single vineyard, but in a few occasions, where there is a perceived hierarchy amongst the various single vineyard wines from a given estate, I have listed them in this ascending order of quality, rather than alphabetically. As I have tasted a fair number of older, mature cabernets for this report, the section on cabernet sauvignon and Bordeaux blends appears at the end this time around, to give proper respect of placement to all of these great old wines. I hope in a coming feature on American wines to cover as much ground with older vintages of pinot noir from both Oregon and California, in the

same fashion as these older notes on cabernet sauvignon, but the newsletter was already getting a bit too long for its own good, so I put off organizing an old pinot tasting or two for the next iteration of this feature on American wines. And, I am still hoping that one of these days a proper range of wines from Washington state shows up at my stoop, as they have been offered and I would very much like to expand my knowledge of the wines of Washington, given that only California produces more wine than Washington state these days and my knowledge of the state's wines is woefully too narrow right now. But, in the meantime I hope you enjoy this article as much as I did putting it together!



Sparkling Wines

Goodfellow “Willamette Valley” Extra Brut NV (Willamette Valley)

Marcus Goodfellow’s “Willamette Valley” bottling of Extra Brut is from the base year of 2021, includes fully forty-six percent reserve wines from the previous two vintages and was disgorged in December of 2024. The *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented and almost all completed malolactic fermentation. The wine’s *cépages* is sixty-eight percent chardonnay and thirty-two percent pinot noir; it was finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The wine’s bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a lovely base of soil tones, bread dough, dried flowers and just a hint of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and elegant in profile, with a good core and foundation of soil, just a whisper of oak, frothy *mousse*

and lovely balance on the long and youthfully complex finish. This is already approachable, but more complexity will emerge if the wine is given a few more years in the cellar. 2025-2045. **90+.**
Goodfellow “Durant” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Dundee Hills)

This release of Marcus Goodfellow’s Durant Vineyard Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2021 and was disgorged in December of 2024, with a finishing *dosage* of half a gram per liter. It is made entirely of chardonnay sourced from the foot of the hill in Durant Vineyard, which is also where the Goodfellow still bottling of Durant chardonnay is sourced. The *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented, mostly in large, older oak *puncheons* and went through full malolactic. The final blend this year includes forty-five percent reserve wines from the harvest of 2019. The wine offers up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, apple, brioche, dried flowers, incipient notes of smokiness and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, focused and full-bodied, with a good core and soil undertow, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2025-2045+. **91+.**

Goodfellow “Whistling Ridge” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Ribbon Ridge)

The current release of Whistling Ridge Vineyard Blanc de Blancs from Goodfellow Family Cellars is also from the base year of 2021. The wine was disgorged in March of 2025 and was finished with a *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The *vins clairs* went through full malo and were barrel-fermented, again, mostly in larger *puncheons*. It includes fully sixty percent reserve wines from the 2019 vintage in the blend. The wine’s bouquet is bright and nicely saline in personality, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of apple, pear, hazelnut, salty minerality, a hint of iodine, white flowers and a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, good mineral undertow, zesty acids, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This seems a bit more tightly-knit and precise on the palate than the very good Durant bottling of Blanc de Blancs. Impressive. 2025-2045. **92.**

Rhys Vineyards “Perpetual Reserve” Extra Brut NV (California)

The new release of Rhys Vineyards “Perpetual Reserve” Extra Brut is made from a blend of seven vintages, ranging now from 2016 to 2022, and was disgorged in April of 2025, after two years aging *sur latte*. The influence of the older reserve wines in the solera for this bottling are showing more and more influence in its aromatic constellation with each passing year, with the bouquet offering up a superb and complex blend of apple, pear, brioche, raw almond, white flowers and a lovely foundation of soil tones. On the palate the wine is brisk, complex and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a long, refined and zesty finish. Despite the significant percentage of reserve wines in this cuvée, it is still a young wine and should be given at least a few years in the cellar to further blossom. 2028-2065. **93.**

2022 Bravium “Wiley Vineyard” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Mendocino County)

Derek Rohlffs barrel-ferments and ages his *vins clairs* for this bottling in older casks, using only indigenous yeasts, and allows the still wines as leisurely ten months of *élevage* prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine is made entirely from pinot noir and offers up a refined bouquet of white peach, macadamia nut, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones, just a touch of buttery oak and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, young, focused and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, frothy *mousse*, lovely balance and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is really first class sparkling wine! It is

certainly tasty right out of the blocks, but I would love to tuck it away in the cellar for three or four years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to take flight. Fine juice. 2025-2050. **92.**

2022 Goodfellow “Tsai” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut (Dundee Hills)

The 2022 Goodfellow “Tsai” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut was disgorged in November of 2024 and was finished with a *dosage* of one gram per liter. It is crafted entirely from pinot noir. Like all of the other sparkling wines from Marcus Goodfellow, the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and aged mostly in 820 and 600 liter *puncheons*. It was disgorged in December of 2024, with Marcus commenting that “the bottle aging was short, but the wine was just so vibrant, that I decided to disgorge it ahead of schedule.” It was finished with a *dosage* of one gram per liter. The wine’s bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, bread dough, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and hints of the smokiness to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with fine depth at the core, lovely soil signature and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, precise and nascently complex finish. More complexity will obviously emerge with further bottle age, but this is already pretty easy to drink, even in its youthful guise. 2025-2045+. **92.**



2021 Roederer Estate “Clark Road Vineyard” Vintage Brut (Anderson Valley)

The 2021 Roederer Estate “Clark Road Vineyard” Vintage Brut shares essentially the same *cépages* as the inaugural version in 2020, with seventy-seven percent pinot noir and twenty-three percent chardonnay. Seven percent of the *vins clairs* this year were barrel-fermented. The wine

was disgorged in December of 2024 and finished with a *dosage* of 5.5 grams per liter. The wine's bouquet is bright and youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a lovely base of salty soil tones, bread dough, white flowers and a hint of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, focused and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse*, a fine spine of acidity and a long, beautifully balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a superb bottle of sparkling wine. It is approachable today, but will be even better with three to five years of cellaring. 2025-2050. **93.**

2020 Rhys Vineyards "Mount Pajaro Vineyard" Blanc de Blancs Vintage Extra Brut

The 2020 Blanc de Blancs "Mount Pajaro Vineyard" Extra Brut was disgorged in April of 2025, after four years aging *sur latte*. The wine's bouquet is vibrant and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, nectarine, bread dough, a fine base of soil, dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, precise and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, elegant *mousse*, excellent balance and a long, nascently complex finish. This is certainly approachable right out of the blocks, but it really deserves five to six years in the cellar to allow its layers of complexity to properly emerge. 2030-2065. **93.**

2019 Roederer Estate "l'Ermitage" Vintage Brut (Anderson Valley)

The new release of the 2019 Roederer Estate "l'Ermitage" Vintage Brut comes in with a *cépages* of fifty-two percent chardonnay and forty-eight percent pinot noir, with four percent of the blend reserve wines from 2016. The wine was disgorged in February of 2024 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine's aromatic constellation is apple, pear, bread dough, a refined base of soil, white flowers and a touch of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, precise, young and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, refined *mousse*, impeccable balance and a long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. Given how well vintages like 2007 and 2005 are drinking today, it would be infanticide to not give this stellar 2019 l'Ermitage the benefit of some extended cellaring time. That said, for the perpetually curious, it is really already a lovely glass of bubbly! 2025-2065. **94+.**

2019 Roederer Estate "l'Ermitage" Vintage Brut Rosé (Anderson Valley)

The 2019 Roederer Estate "l'Ermitage" Vintage Brut Rosé was disgorged in November of 2023 and finished with a *dosage* of 5.5 grams per liter. It is crafted from roughly a fifty-fifty split of pinot noir and chardonnay, with four percent of the chardonnay being reserve wines from the 2016 vintage. Five percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented this year and this is the first l'Ermitage Rosé vintage to go through full malolactic fermentation. The wine's color is its customary pale salmon and the bouquet is bright and expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of white cherry, nectarine, bread dough, a beautiful base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, brisk and precise, with fine depth of fruit, lovely soil undertow, pinpoint bubbles and lovely balance on the long and complex finish. This is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but this bottling has such an exemplary track record for graceful aging that I would opt to tuck it away in the cellar for at least four or five years before broaching bottles in earnest, as there is more here to unlock with bottle age. 2025-2055+. **94.**

2019 Saint Innocent Blanc de Blancs "Temperance Hill Vineyard" Brut (Eola-Amity Hills)

Mark Vlossak's 2019 Blanc de Blancs bottling from the Temperance Hill Vineyard was disgorged by hand December of 2024. Mark ferments his *vins clairs* in stainless steel for this bottling and gave the still wines an extended *élevage* in tank prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation in June of 2020. The wine was aged fifty-one months *sur latte* and offers up a lovely

bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, almond, warm bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, a serious spine of acidity, frothy *mousse* and a long, well balanced and classy finish. Good juice. 2025-2040. **91.**

2019 Scharffenberger Cellars Blanc de Noirs Brut Vintage (Mendocino County)

The 2019 Scharffenberger Cellars Blanc de Noirs Vintage Brut is composed from a unique blend of red skinned grapes, as the *cépages* this year is forty percent pinot noir, thirty-three percent pinot gris and twenty-seven percent pinot meunier. It was aged four years *sur lattes* prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a very refined bouquet of apple, peach, bread dough, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil undertow, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and quite classy finish. This is most impressive. 2025-2045+. **91+.**

2007 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” Vintage Brut- Late Disgorged (Anderson Valley)

This was the first time I had tasted the 2007 vintage of l’Ermitage from Roederer Estate. This is a late-disgorged bottle which was disgorged in November of 2024, after more than sixteen and a half years aging *sur lattes*. The wine is crafted from a classic blend of fifty-two percent chardonnay and forty-eight percent pinot noir, with a bit of reserve wines included from the 2004 and 2005 vintages. Because it was recently disgorged, the wine is beautifully vibrant on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of baked apples and pears, hazelnut, rye bread, a gorgeous base of soil tones and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully precise, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, refined *mousse*, lovely acids and grip and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a superb bottle of sparkling wine that is drinking superbly well right now, but has the spine of acidity to continue to age gracefully for many, many years to come. Fine, fine juice. 2025-2045+. **94.**

2005 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” Vintage Brut (Anderson Valley)

I had not drunk a bottle of the 2005 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” Vintage Brut since all the way back in 2014 and was very grateful for the team here to generously send along a bottle for this report. This vintage is crafted from the customary l’Ermitage *cépages* of fifty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir and this bottle was the original disgorgement. The wine has developed splendidly over these past eleven years and today offers up a beautifully complex and refined bouquet of desiccated apple and nectarine, hazelnuts, *pâtissière*, a complex base of soil, dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and superbly complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, refined, vigorous *mousse*, still excellent acids and a long, perfectly balanced and vibrant finish. This wine is now at its apogee of peak maturity, but still clearly has decades of life ahead of it! I definitely underrated it a touch back in 2014! 2025-2045+. **95.**

2002 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” Vintage Brut (Anderson Valley)

This bottle of the 2002 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” bottling is from the original disgorgement. This was the first time I had the pleasure to taste this vintage of my favorite American sparkling wine bottling. The bouquet is bright and beautifully complex at twenty-three years of age, offering up a superb blend of baked apple and peach, fresh-baked bread, plenty of smokiness, a refined base of soil tones, sweet walnuts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate

the wine is bright, complex and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, still superb *mousse*, lovely acids and a long, seamlessly balanced and beautifully complex finish. This is drinking at its apogee today, but has the balance and structure to continue to cruise along superbly well for years to come. It is a gorgeous wine. 2025-2045. **95.**



Rosé

2024 Rosé of Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard”- Bravium Wines (Anderson Valley)

Bravium’s 2024 Rosé of Pinot Noir from the Wiley Vineyard is a lovely wine, coming at a pale salmon color and tipping the scales at a very civilized 12.4 percent octane. It offers up a pretty and stylish nose of white cherries, casaba melon, a nice touch of spice, dried flowers and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with a good core and grip, a fine spine of acidity and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. There is a succulence here on the palate that just invites another sip! A lovely Rosé. 2025-2027. **90.**

Aligoté, Pinot Blanc and Chenin Blanc

2023 Chenin Blanc “Mount Pajaro Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

As I mentioned in my historical feature on Rhys Vineyards last issue, I feel that the Chenin Blanc program here is one of the great undiscovered gems in the realm of long-lived, high quality white wines from California. The 2023 Mount Pajaro Vineyard bottling is another beautiful young