

LENNE' ESTATE

MEDIA KIT

OUR STORY

To hear Steve Lutz tell it, his vineyard sits on the poorest soil imaginable. “The worst in the county,” he boasts with pride and bravado. That’s because the depleted ancient sedimentary soil, outside of Yamhill, OR. he believes, is the best in which to grow Pinot Noir grapes. He produces six wines from those 21 acres, but first and foremost, Steve Lutz loves his dirt.

“It’s a pain to work with,” he says of his steep hillside vineyard called Lenné, “but it controls vigor and produces small clusters and berries.” With Pinot Noir, those are two integral factors to making really good, balanced wine.

Steve began making wine for himself in 1986 in Napa Valley which led him on a search 15 years later for the perfect Pinot Noir site in the Northern Willamette Valley. After an eight month search it only took 15 minutes when he climbed a steep hill 1 located outside the town of Yamhill, in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA. He made the deal within an hour, planted the vineyard in 2001 and determined, “This is the perfect piece. It wasn’t even officially on the market when I looked at it. I just happened to know a friend of the friend of the land owner. It’s the luckiest thing that has ever happened to me. It’s a gem.”

Though he likes to call himself a “minimalist” winemaker, it’s on this ground into which he puts the preponderance of work. “It’s more than a passion, it’s a privilege,” to be working with this soil, he contends. And, “the more work you do on a place, the more interested you are in it. To say, ‘This is what I do every day’, is a great thing to be able to do. I want other people to experience and understand that. This hillside gives my wines a certain aromatic quality and density, which spells terroir to me.”

With the 2014 vintage, Lenné’s vines are reaching maturity to which leads Lutz to exclaim, “I’m more enamored with this site now because it’s getting some age; we have a good feel for the clones, and the type of wines they produce.”

So in 2005, after he tasted the first wines to come off this stressed vineyard from which he at first wasn’t sure would be viable, and after “just writing checks which was tough on a marriage, I told my wife, ‘Don’t worry about it, everything’s going to work out.’” The Pinot Noir he recollects, tasted like chocolate black cherry; and that mocha-like taste has been a constant thread throughout all of Lenné’s wines since.

Lenné's winemaking style is described as minimalist. It produces two labels both of which are comprised of entirely estate fruit. The first Pinot Noir is called **LeNez** (The Nose) and represents the entire vineyard and each clone planted. The other Pinot Noir is called **Lenné Estate** and is a barrel selection of the best of the vintage. Both wines are from low yields and are minimally handled in the winery. Lenné also makes small lots of single-clone wines each year, also under the Lenné Estate label. In all, approximately **1,500-2,000 cases** are produced each vintage.

What sets Lenné apart from other Oregon Pinot Noirs? Location, location, location. Lutz doesn't seek to make highly extracted wines but the soil produces wines with density because of the small clusters and berry size. Lenné's terroir produces wines that have a distinct mid-palate texture and mocha-like aromas.

HOW LENNÉ GOT THAT WAY

People often ask about the French origins of Lenné. Then, Lutz tells them it was born from a chicken farm west of London, England, in the small village of Wolkingham. It was there that Steve Lutz's father-in-law **Len** raised a family including his wife Karen who eventually made her way to Oregon. The chicken farm is long gone, replaced by upscale houses and Lenny is gone with it, having died in 1999. But he helped Steve and Karen put a down payment on Lenné and as Steve says, "I'd like to think he is up there now, doing what he can to keep us going."

STEVE LUTZ

Stephen Lutz attended the University of Oregon and graduated with a B.S. in 1979. After two years of working in the corporate world, he developed a zeal for wine and moved to Napa Valley to pursue a career. He worked briefly in the cellar at *Beringer Winery* and then worked in the tasting room at *Franciscan* before becoming an assistant tasting room manager at *Inglennook Vineyards (pre-Francis Coppola)*. After two years, Steve went on to manage the now-defunct *Vichon Vineyard's* tasting room and finally to manage the tasting room and create wine club at *Merryvale Vineyards*. He also made his first homemade Pinot in '86 from fruit in the Carneros region of Napa Valley.

In '92 Steve left Merryvale to start a gourmet pizza business called *Borolo's Gourmet* in Santa Rosa, Calif. He operated the business for five years (he's still making pizza at Lenné, not so incidentally) after which he sold and moved to England. He subsequently moved back to Oregon with his wife Karen to pursue a career in wine.

In 2000, after some consulting for *Chateau Benoit Winery*, Steve accepted a position as VP in charge of marketing and administration at *Anne Amie Vineyards*. Also In '00 Steve and his wife bought a 21-acre parcel two miles east of Yamhill and planted 15 acres of Pinot Noir starting in 2001.

In '05 Steve left Anne Amie to oversee the construction of a tasting room on his property and manage the vineyard fulltime. Finally in '07 Steve realized his dream, opened the tasting room and started selling his **first estate wine from the '04 vintage**. Steve currently manages all vineyard, winemaking and business aspects of Lenné. Steve lives with Karen in Portland.

THE LENNÉ VINEYARD

“This is tough stuff to grow grapes in,” Steve Lutz starts off when asked to describe his site – which the cornerstone of the operation, although it’s officially classified as the worst soil in the county. Nonetheless, Steve Lutz calls it an “A-plus” site.

“I can vouch for the fact that this soil is about as bad as they come,” Lutz says often. “When you dig into it you wonder how anything grows. We have had our share of disasters and lost thousands of plants over the years. We have paid a price for our determination (or stupidity) not to irrigate and we have made our share of mistakes.”

The 20.9 acres of Pinot Noir are south facing, which makes it a warm site, and sit at an elevation of 375 feet-to-575 feet, which he pronounces as “the sweet spot,” and “perfect” height. Below 375 feet Lutz contends, there are possible frost issues. Above 600 feet, there may be concerns about ripening. At Lenné, those problems do not exist.

The soils – peavine mainly – are shallow and well-drained, there are steep slopes, and the vineyard is dry-farmed. And the due-south orientation Lutz insists is perfect.

“I didn’t choose Lenné it chose me” Steve explains. “This steep south-facing slope fit all the criteria for making great wine. I also liked the neighborhood and this specific ridge which includes *Willakenzie Estate, Deux Vert, Shea, Solena, Roots* and *Penner-Ash*. *Soter* and *Beau Frères* are close by.

After purchasing the property, Lutz laid out the first 11 acres in 2001; into three blocks made up of Pommard, 777 and 115. The grapes were planted on 7x3 spacing without irrigation. The site proved to be difficult from the beginning, stressing young vines and producing a high mortality, with nearly 35 percent of plants lost the first year. The steep slope also proved difficult to work safely and destruction from deer impeded young vine growth.

In the third year one would normally expect the vines to set a small amount of fruit. But Lutz could see the vines were still struggling to develop enough roots to sustain growth. In that year, 2003, ; an additional 2.5-acre block of Pommard was planted behind what is now the tasting room. The block succumbed to the record 2003 heat and all but a handful of plants were lost. In 2004 the block was replanted along with an additional 2.5-acre block of 667 and 114.

Finally in ‘04 the vineyard produced a minuscule amount of fruit. But it wasn’t until ‘06 that enough fruit was derived from each block to vinify each clone separately. In **‘07 Lenné produced its first normal fruit set**, seven years after planting.

Now the vineyard has matured and the vines have sent roots into the subsoil and found the water and nutrients capable of sustaining them. The vineyard is healthy but the poor soil does its work in limiting canopy growth and produces exceptionally small clusters. But because the soil is so depleted, for the first time since 2001, nutritional compost will be added.

The soil produces the mocha aromatic and the distinct mid-palate texture which is the *terroir* signatures of Lenné.

Composition

- 2001 Planted 3.5 acres to 115; 3.5 acres to Pommard; 1.0 acres to 114; 2.5 acres to 777
- 2003 Planted 2.5 acres Pommard
- 2004 Planted 2.5 acres split between 114 & 667

Orientation - South-with both southwest and southeast rolls

Elevation – 375-575 feet

Soil - Primarily Peavine with some Willakenzie

Spacing - 7x3, single Guyot. 2084 vines per acre

Trellis - All steel with four fixed wires.

Location - Laughlin Road off Hwy 240, east of Willakenzie Winery and the town of Yamhill

Appellation - Yamhill-Carlton

THE WINEMAKING

Steve Lutz thinks of himself as a “minimalist” winemaker. That is, he doesn’t add enzymes to the wines in an attempt to extract color.. He presses the juice when there’s a still a lot of natural CO2; and he doesn’t allow the cap to fall to ensure as fresh a wine as possible. He doesn’t utilize centrifugal pumps, which would contribute to oxidation. “The goal,” Lutz explains, “is to get the fruit into the bottle as intact as possible and let secondary flavors develop how they develop in the bottle, not in the winery.”

However, he concedes, “we do manipulate” with some oak (35 percent new French) for 11 months; and the wines are filtered at bottling.

“It’s pretty basic winemaking,” he explains. “It’s the site that gives concentration and density to the wines. There’s no way to compensate for poor soils; which is a very definition of the philosophy of minimalist winemaking.”

THE WINES

The ancient sedimentary soils of the Yamhill-Carlton District produce Pinot Noir with black fruit flavors and rich textures. Lenné’s predominate soil type is peavine, a nutrient poor soil which produces small clusters and berries. The resulting wines have a concentrated mid-palate and long finish, with black cherry and mineral components in the nose. Underlying all is the mocha character which is the aromatic signature of the terroir of Lenné.

Each year, Lenné produces about 1,500-to-2,000 cases of Pinot Noir, across two labels and six wines. A new, seventh wine, a five barrel blend representing the best barrel from each clone on the property is slated to be released later in 2014 and is from the 2012 vintage The current wines available are:

Le Nez

Lenne’ Estate

Jill’s 115

Karen Pommard

Kill Hill

Eleanor’s 114

WINE EDUCATION

RED AND BLACK SEMINAR

Since 2008, Steve Lutz has been teaching a course that defines the differences between the **Yamhill-Carlton District** (Black) and the Dundee Hills region (Red), two significant American Viticultural Areas of the Willamette Valley. Steve believes that while there are many different influences distinguishing one Pinot Noir from another, none are more important in the Northern Willamette Valley than soil type. While a variety of sub soils exist, at the most basic level they can be separated into two main types: volcanic and sedimentary.

The Yamhill-Carlton District is primarily composed of sedimentary soil types. The coarse-grained, ancient marine sediments native to the area are among the oldest in the Valley. These soils drain quickly, making them ideal for viticulture. Thus, the vines stop growing shoots and leaves form(?) earlier here than elsewhere, leading to more complete ripening, even in cooler growing seasons. This allows Pinot Noir to develop deep ruby colors and broad, silky tannins. Wine characteristics: Lower acidity, minerality and dark, masculine wines. Black cherry, black raspberry, plum, cedar, tobacco, cocoa, anis flavors and aromas.

Dundee Hills: The Jory soils, covering the mid-and upper-elevations of the Willamette Valley were formed from ancient volcanic basalt. These volcanic deposits originated from lava flows over 15 million years ago, before the hills were actually formed by plate movement in the Pacific. Jory soils are typically 4-6 feet in depth and consist of a brick-colored silt-y, clay loam. The depth and quality of the soils lend themselves ideally to the viticulture. These exceptional growing conditions produce consistently excellent wines. The characteristics of those wines are bright acidity, and are more feminine in style, with cherry, raspberry, mixed red berries, violets, rose petal, and currant flavors and aromas.

Steve teaches this class on a quarterly basis at Lenné. Consumers have a chance to taste the wines blind and even guess at which soil type each wine represents after Steve spends some time familiarizing them with the main characteristics of each soil type. Visitors even get to learn how to rank the wines and come up with a group preference. See www.lenneestate.com for more info.