

Q&A Interview with Steve Lutz, [Lenne' Estate](#), Owner/Winegrower

1. Where were you born and raised?

In Denver, Colorado.

2. When and how did you get into wine?

After college I was looking for a career and started drinking wine. I started drinking a jug wine out of Central California and thought it was pretty good at the time. It was the first time that dry wine started to taste good to me. Then I started exploring with other wines and started reading about wine. In the next year and a half I became more and more enamored with wine and decided that I wanted to make a career of it.

3. What has been your career path to where you are?

In 1984 I packed up my car and headed to Napa Valley. I worked in the cellar for a month then got a job in a tasting room. I ended up managing several tasting rooms and was lucky enough to work for the Mondavi's at Vichon Winery and Bill Harlan at Merryvale. In 1986 I made my first homemade Pinot from a vineyard that Clos Du Val owned in the Carneros area of Napa. In spite of being in Napa, I always had a love affair with Pinot Noir and organized a tasting group that often tasted Pinot Noir. I left California for a year in England in 1997 and my wife and I decided to move to Oregon when we came back to be closer to wine country and family. I started consulting for a small Oregon winery. In 1999 my wife's father died and left her a little money. That was the seed money that started Lenné and we are named after my wife's father, Lenny.

4. In your view, what makes your vineyards special?

In Oregon the three things you look for in a vineyard are elevation, orientation and soil types. The sweet spot for elevation is between 300 and 600 feet and my vineyard is 420 feet at the base and near 600 at the top. The vineyard faces due south. It is the soil, however, which really sets the vineyard apart. The soil is an old sedimentary soil called Peavine. It is mostly found in the foothills of the coast range. The county classifies it as the poorest ag soil in the county. The berry size is smaller than most vineyards and the soil imparts two things to our wine. The first is a distinct, mocha aromatic found in all our wines. The second is a certain mid-palette texture almost like the taste umami.

5. What is your general winemaking philosophy?

Just to get the wine into the bottle with as little oxidation as possible, to treat it gently from picking to bottle. Pinot Noir is very sensitive and needs to be treated as gently as you can. We don't believe in long macerations or extended bottle age. Pinot Noir is also one of the most transparent varieties and is sensitive oak. We limit the amount of new oak to around 35% or less.

6. What's your biggest challenge as a winemaker?

Well we don't have a building and make the wine at our friends winery: Owen Roe. They take such great care of us and buy some fruit for their own high end Pinot from us. It has been a great relationship over the years. Having said that I would like the flexibility of having a building on site so we could pick a small amount and process it immediately.

7. Who are your favorite winemakers in history, through personal account, or their wines?

Though I never met him, I think Andre Tchelistcheff was certainly admirable as was Robert Mondavi. In Oregon David O'Reilly of Owen Roe has been a mentor for me. Some of my favorite Oregon winemakers are Robert Brittan and Maggie Harrison of Antica Terra.

8. What new winemakers are you most excited about, and why?

I think Brian Marcy of Big Table Farm is one of my favorites and he makes very interesting wine.

9. What's your favorite wine region in the world – other than your own?

Well Burgundy, though I love Rhone wines as well.

10. What's the best wine you've ever tasted? The most interesting?

Well I was fortunate enough to taste Richebourg several times though with a young palate. Most recently I tasted a Chave Hermitage Blanc and thought it was an incredible wine. The most interesting wine I have tasted was over the holidays a 1983 Rex Hill Pinot Noir. I was fully expecting it to be oxidized and I was dumb struck by how intact it was. We drank the whole bottle which is saying something as I am very sensitive to oxidation in wines. It made me rethink how long some Oregon vintages can last.

11. What's the oldest bottle in your cellar? The most expensive?

Well I have a three liter bottle of 1982 Inglenook Cask Cabernet but most of my cellar only goes back to the late 90's and I don't think I have anything over a couple of hundred dollars.

12. What's open in your kitchen right now?

Oregon Pinot is always open in my kitchen but I love all kinds of white and presently a Moyer Fonne Pinot Blanc.

13. If you had to pick one red and one white to drink for the next month with every dinner, what would you choose?

Pinot Noir, of course. Maybe it is the hazard of the trade but I have developed a palate for Pinot Noir more than anything else. I suppose that Chardonnay would be my white because it comes in so many styles that I could keep from getting bored.

14. Is beer ever better than wine?

If you are thirsty, I mean really thirsty, yes. I love a crisp Mexican beer when I really thirsty on a hot day. I almost never have wine for lunch, but love a good Oregon IPA, especially in the winter.

15. How do you spend your days off?

I am a golf-aholic.

16. What would people be surprised to know about you?

That I am a pretty decent cook, a former pizzaiolo in Napa Valley and not a bad writer.

17. If you weren't making wine for a living, what would you be doing?

That is a scary thought. I have no idea!

18. How do you define success?

Having my wines recognized for what they are.