

Wine Spectator

“Wineries To Watch...Producers Pushing Limits In Oregon”

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By Tim Fish

Lavinea

When Isabelle Meunier and Greg Ralston left Evening Land in 2014 - she was winemaker and he was CEO - they wanted something to call their own. The up-and-coming winemaker and wine business veteran have made a good match. “At some point, it became clear that making my own wine was important,” Meunier says of her decision to go ahead with the change.

After just two vintages, the duo’s new winery, Lavinea, has made a strong impression with a collection of sleek, plush and well-structured wines such as its Lavinea Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Temperance Hill Vineyard 2015. The winery harvests from five different vineyards, all of which are among the oldest in the Willamette Valley: Tualatin Estate, Lazy River, Nysa, Elton and, of course, Temperance Hill. “You get more depth with older vineyards,” Meunier says. “And we wanted vineyard sites that could grow with us.”

To emphasize the distinctiveness of each site, Meunier uses the same winemaking regimen for each single-vineyard wine, down to the same percentage of whole-cluster fermentation, barrel coopers and new oak. “I wanted to play around with what potential was there and how to make that sing in the bottle,” she explains.

Meunier is a Québec native who studied winemaking and viticulture at the University of Dijon and in New Zealand at Lincoln University. She worked with French-Canadian winemaker Pascal Marchand at Domaine de la Vougeraie in Burgundy and with Blair Walter at New Zealand’s Felton Road. Before joining Evening Land, Ralston was a key player at Chateau Montelena and Schramsberg in Napa Valley, as well as with marketer and importer Wilson Daniels.

Lavinea is still in its fledgling stage, so a self-contained winery and estate vineyards remain in the future. Currently, Meunier makes the wines at the Carlton Winemakers Studio, an artisan crush facility that specializes in small wineries.

Lavinea produced about 1,800 cases in 2015, its second vintage, and the results are impressive. It was the middle vintage of three warm growing seasons in a row. “It got so warm in 2015,” Meunier recalls, “that the vines just shut down,” halting ripening. “Because of that, we had better sugar-acid balance in the wine and better fruit flavors.”

As she looks ahead, Meunier is keen to see people’s reactions to the 2017s. After a series of hot years, it is a return to what she considers a classic Willamette Valley vintage, a style many Oregon wine lovers are looking forward to drinking again.



Greg Ralston & Isabelle Meunier - Photo by Andrea Johnson