

Wine Tasting at Giovingo Vineyards Captured the Charm of the Willamette Valley

By Jane Edson

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Traveling to Oregon wine country is quickly becoming a popular destination for wine enthusiasts and travelers seeking a scenic and tasteful experience. Whether it's celebrating a milestone birthday, a weekend get-away without the kids, or a desire to tour the Pacific Northwest, visiting the Willamette Valley just south of Portland is time well spent. Locals pronounce it Will-AM-ette, emphasizing the middle syllable over the last for a more country twang. By the end of the trip, I got the hang of saying it and learned a lot about Pinot Noir.

Here's the story of our trip and an unexpected tasting that proves if you follow your palate and follow your nose, the sky's the limit.



My husband and I visited the Willamette Valley in September with my siblings and their spouses in honor of my husband's 40th birthday. My husband is an avid reader of *Wine Spectator* and has been intrigued by Oregon Pinot Noir for several years now. I knew we were in good hands with the wine tasting itinerary due to my husband's extensive research, but what I didn't know what how beautiful, welcoming, and unassuming Oregon can be.

It all started with a perfect wine pairing at our first night's dinner in Carlton at Cuvée. We requested a full-bodied, fruit-forward, local Pinot Noir, the waiter quickly recommended a small local producer called Giovingo Vineyards. Giovingo's 2018 bottles were drinking perfectly and in an affordable price range. We left singing its praises and took a business card for Giovingo Vineyards as we walked away.

The next morning, we began a day of planned tastings on our itinerary with appointments at various vineyards in the Willamette Valley. None of those tastings disappointed, and they all showed the various dimensions of Oregon Pinot. However, we couldn't get our minds off Giovingo Vineyards from the night before. We were eager to purchase some of its wine to take home with us. My husband picked up the phone and called the number for Giovingo Vineyards on the card. To his surprise, the owner Tony Giovingo called him back quickly. They exchanged a few texts, and Tony suggested we visit his boutique vineyard and home on the outskirts of Carlton.

When we arrived that afternoon, we were treated to a delightful tasting and tour of the property. A far cry from mass-produced wine, Giovingo's Vineyards are right outside Tony and Emi's front porch. The grapes were nearing harvest time, ripening to a light purplish-red hue. All the charm of the green hills of Oregon and the refined taste is bottled up inside the Pinot Noir. We enjoyed a walk alongside the vines, posing for selfies next to the grapes to later post on Instagram. We quickly learned that at Giovingo, Tony manages the one-acre vines while his wife Emi Giovingo is largely responsible for utilizing her tasting palate to direct the winemaker towards the full-bodied and luscious fruit flavors that we loved. That's the wonderful part about Pinot Noir. It is very adaptable. The winemaker makes it according to how they want it to taste, influenced by the soil types, wind, and sun exposure.

Emi and Tony were sitting on the perfect blend of all three of these. They welcomed us into their dining room for a taste of their vintages from 2016 onward. We sipped the wine while talking about the heart and soul they put into the grapes. We learned what it was like to be an Oregon winemaker. "For me, our wine is about making a connection with people," Tony Giovingo said. "We love to hear where they're from and how wine brought them here."

Within 24 hours we were friended by Tony and Emi on Instagram. That's how kind and welcoming they are.

Sometimes the best itineraries are spontaneous and involve meeting new people. We relished going "off the planned itinerary," meeting the locals, and tasting wine in the home of a winemaker all because we tasted and smelled what we liked. They say everyone's palates are different when it comes to winetasting. I'm thankful mine is somewhat like the Giovingo family's. Cheers!



(Images in order: Giovingo vineyards, Giovingo's 2018 Pinot Noir, Cuvée restaurant, and Giovingo's tasting room)

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