



# Unique varietal expressions from the Van Duzer Corridor

— Morgan Beck Johan Vineyards Chief Winemaker and General Manager

Johan Vineyards was established in 2005 by Dag Johan Sundby, a Norwegian businessman with an abiding interest in Pinot Noir, looking to make a mark in New World wines. On the recommendation of family friends, he looked at and bought a newly planted vineyard and farm in the Van Duzer Corridor, one of the latest remaining ‘affordable’ viticultural areas in Oregon at the time. In 2007, he was joined by viticulturalist and winemaker Dan Rinke, who helped establish the winery’s style, and focused Dag’s early interest in organics into biodynamics, with Johan Vineyards receiving both Organic and Biodynamic Certification in 2010. We talked with Morgan Beck, who started in the tasting room at Johan Vineyards in 2015, and quickly moved into overlapping roles as assistant then chief winemaker, and more recently general manager. <Interviewer: Dion Lenting, Kiwi Copy, January 2021>

### ◆ Your journey to winemaker is very interesting – can you share it in brief?

Morgan— I studied finance and international business and landed up in the mountains of Colorado after graduating in 2008. I got a job in finance, but left to be a ski bum for a couple of years, working in restaurants at night. There I dipped my toes into tasting wine and the wine world, working with the sommeliers during the day on wine tastings. From Colorado, I went to Argentina, and ended up working in a wine bar, and went to wine school so I could do tastings for tourists. After I finished the introductory class there was an oenology and viticulture class starting, and I dove straight in. I finished the certificate program, got an internship back in California, and within a couple of weeks fell completely in love with winemaking, the hard work and the energy of harvest.

I didn’t have an official degree so I wanted to gain work experience with as many winemakers as I could. I fell in love with Pinot Noir right away and was also introduced to biodynamics, so those were the two themes for me working in New Zealand, then Oregon, and Chile. Back in California, to gain viticulture experience, I worked for a vineyard management company through a few growing seasons, allowing me to work on a lot of different properties and see many grape varieties.

Back in Oregon for the 2015 harvest, I was blown away by a blind tasting of a Johan Chardonnay. The next day I got in the car and went to Johan and started talking to Dag and Dan. They were looking for a part-time tasting room person, so I took the job and within two weeks I was full-time helping Dan in the cellar and the vineyard, and the tasting room on weekends. I worked as Dan’s assistant from late 2015 to just before harvest in 2018, when Dag and Dan officially promoted me to winemaker. In 2018 I also started managing the books, and in 2020, I was promoted to General Manager.

### ◆ What distinguishes Van Duzer Corridor as the new AVA in Oregon?

— Climate is the main differentiator. The Van Duzer Corridor is the main east-west gap out to the Pacific Ocean and pulls in all the cold wind that cools the whole Willamette Valley. It rushes in and hits the Eola-Amity Hills, and from there flows north and south. We see this buffering effect from the cold winds on hot summer afternoons, while on days when it isn’t super-hot, temperatures remain more neutral. In warmer seasons we are usually 2-3 weeks behind the North Valley for our harvest. In a mild growing season, we are more in line with the North Valley. It is an interesting influence - with the wind we have thicker skins that don’t necessarily add bulky tannins, but create darker, more complex wines.

### ◆ And the soil and varieties in Johan Vineyards?

In the Valley you mostly see two parent materials - marine sedimentary / Missoula Flood, or volcanic soil. We are marine sedimentary. Just south of us is a unique formation where the valley narrows before it opens up into the Willamette Valley, which acted as a dam as the Missoula Floods\* flowed through the area north to south. It brought a lot of erratic granite with it, hit the dam and spread out across our little knoll. In the first 10 years of farming, we were coming up with these large chunks of granite. Our wines speak closer to marine sedimentary and marine soils, with dark fruit flavours, layered with floral and spice notes and nice focused acidity.

When Dag bought the property in 2005 it was already planted to Pinot Noir

All wines are 750ml unless otherwise specified. Prices do not include Consumption Tax.

and Chardonnay in 2002, and the vines were just beginning to produce their first fruit, which was mostly sold to local winemakers. Coming from a business background, the idea for diversification and a wider array of varieties allowed for mitigation of risk. His openness to exploration came from that mindset. Dan Rinke, who joined Dag as winegrower in 2007, brought world wine knowledge to the team. They began exploring other varieties from regions with similarities to Oregon’s climate to see what they could do. The first grafting projects in 2010 had an Austrian focus with Blaufrankisch and Gruner Veltliner. It was definitely a ‘Hey let’s try this’ and they grafted in one acre of each new variety, and have expanded on the ones that have been successful contributors to the portfolio of wines.



Morgan Beck, Johan Vineyards Chief Winemaker and General Manager

### ◆ Where did the knowledge and cuttings for growing these varieties come from?

The Gruner was sourced from a neighbour just south of us who was having success with it, and the Blaufrankisch came from a vineyard up in the Gorge. I think you have a better opportunity to make a white wine, if it doesn’t ripen enough you can make a leaner style, whereas red is more risky. Our Blaufrankisch is great, and we get it to our desired ripeness every year. Some years it is a little leaner and lower alcohol, but these are some of my favourite years, with more black pepper and floral notes.

Dan initially kept production methods very simple. With the Blaufrankisch he destemmed it all, with no whole cluster fermentation, put it in neutral oak. Same approach with the Gruner – it went directly to the press, and was fermented in neutral barrels. In 2017, after years spent understanding the grape’s expression on our site, we started experimenting a bit, trying a little skin contact, putting some in newer barrels, with lots of small lots for blending potentials as we tried new things.

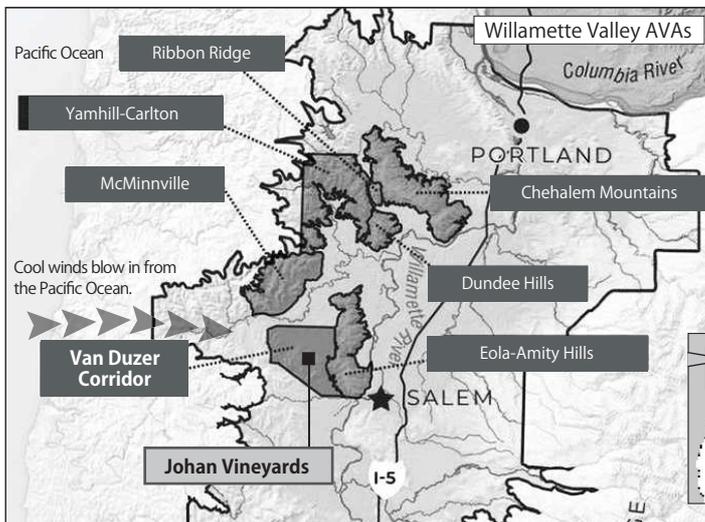
Before this year the Chardonnay was the only wine to have new barrels each year, and we have narrowed it down to two coopers I really like to work with. For white wine, the barrels start in the Chardonnay program and move into the other whites as they get older. The Gruner has always been fermented and aged in larger format barrels – 500-liter puncheons. This year, for the first time, we purchased a French Acacia barrel for the Gruner program – it gives superfine tannins, exotic peach notes, and the toast is more nutty than that of French oak.

The variety that bought me to Johan is Chardonnay. I love the Chardonnay on the property, the salinity really shines through and makes for a beautiful wine from this grape. When I started, we were only making 3 or 4 barrels of Chardonnay each year, and now I have 10 in the cellar this season.

### ◆ For fermentation you use all native yeasts?

We have never had a cultivated yeast or bacteria in our building. Everything that lives there is brought in from the grapes or generated in the cellar from harvest. Our red fermentations during harvest are probably a little bit longer than what a conventional winemaker would feel comfortable with – often 14 to 20 days.

Our whites are the ones that really take their time. For me, the ‘low and



Above: Vineyards next the winery: (Left) Morgan and Dan Rink (Right) Gruner's label (Illustration by Yong Hong Zhong)

slow' philosophy on the whites is great because you are constantly fermenting, and the yeast is constantly eating the sugar and creating the carbon-dioxide to protect the wine. The Gruner barrels in the cellar now are still fermenting after a year and three months, have never seen any sulphur, and are amazingly complex.

### ◆ What does the future hold for Johan Vineyards?

We are continuing to explore and seek to find the truest expression of our site. As of last spring, we introduced chickens and ducks to our vineyard system and have plans to bring sheep into the program this coming year. We would like to continue growing and sharing the biodynamic approach with our community.

As for vineyard diversity, I keep saying we have 16 varietals now, we have plans to focus on growing the quantities of the wines that we are excited about, the Gruner, Blaufrankisch, and Melon de Bourgogne. Making more of these wines will allow more experimentation in the cellar within each grape. We continue to grow and evolve within our team just as the vines and wines evolve with each growing season. I'm so excited for what's to come!

\* The Missoula Flood: At the end of the ice age, the ice dam containing Lake Missoula in Montana broke repeatedly, causing massive flooding in eastern Washington and the Columbia River Valley.

### 《From Village Cellars》

My first encounter with Johan Vineyards was an invitation extended to Village Cellars staff and wine taster Motohiro Okoshi to attend the annual Oregon Pinot Camp 2015, organized by an Oregon producers' organization. We admired the flavour and balance of all Johan's wines, not just Johan's Pinot Noir, and decided to introduce Johan to Japan.

The challenge for us is Johan's low production volume. Total production of Chardonnay is just 700 dozen, and the Melon de Bourgogne which sold out in the blink of an eye was only 100 dozen, with Japan allocated just 10 dozen. Johan is a very interesting producer and we are likely to see various 'spot' wines in the future, and hope they will continue to grow their quantities.

### 《Winemaking notes》

◆ **Pinot Noir (Farmlands / Estate / Nils):** The vineyards are separated by clones, rootstock, and in most cases we get one fermenter per block, which yields to 2-3 barrels.

**Farmlands (1)** is bright, fruity and fresh, with shorter time in the barrel before bottling. It is the most approachable at an early age.

**Estate (2)** the most representative blend of the vineyard and a given season, so we try to include at least one barrel from every block in the blend.

**Nils (3)** is our Reserve wine, with more weight and power while still maintaining balance and focus. The Nils blend is normally 6 to 8 barrels each year, includes at least two new barrels, and aged in barrel for 18-20 months.

◆ **Petillant Naturel Pinot Noir Rose (4):** Sparkling Pinot Noir Rose made by natural fermentation without the addition of yeast. After skin contact for 1-2 days, the grapes are pressed and fermented slowly and naturally at low temperatures in the tank. It is bottled just before fermentation is complete, and timing it is the challenge to retain some but not too many bubbles. Bottled unfiltered, so there is some sediment in the bottle.

◆ **Pinot Gris Drueskall (5):** Pinot Gris has nice pink or grey skins, so since 2009 we have treated it like a red rather than a white (which is pressed immediately) with skin contact to get the aromatics and tannins. After many years of trials and hard work, the supply can no longer keep up with demand.



From left:  
(See P.53 for details of each wine)

1. Farmlands Pinot Noir '17
2. Estate Pinot Noir '17
3. Nils Pinot Noir '12
4. Petillant Naturel Pinot Noir Rose '18
5. Pinot Gris Drueskall (out of stock)

### PICK UP WINE



#### Johan Vineyards Gruner Veltliner 2018

Origin: Van Duzer Corridor, Willamette Valley, Oregon  
Varietal: Gruner Veltliner  
Alc. 12.2%

RRP ¥4,200

A complex and exotic aroma that brings out the phenolic aromas produced by skin maceration. Under the rounded texture, the mineral acid tightens the whole, balancing the rich and exotic complexity. Great for appetizers with deli meats such as ham.



#### Johan Vineyards Blaufrankisch 2016

Origin: Van Duzer Corridor, Willamette Valley, Oregon  
Varietal: Blaufränkisch  
Alc. 13.6%

RRP ¥5,200

Deep bluish-purple, with aromas of violets, cherry, pomegranate and cassis fruits, bright acidity wraps around the iron minerality to add backbone, and the long finish shows a silky texture. Delicious with roast beef and stewed tomatoes.

