

ArborBrook Vineyards Review

Reviewed by Rob Boss on May 15, 2012

Making great wine takes time, but there's no reason for an up and coming winery to reinvent the wheel. ArborBrook planted their first vines in 2001 and released their first vintage only three years later. Eight years after that, they're pouring superb wine from the 2010 vintage. How could this small winery cover so much ground so fast? The answer is, it's who you know.

From the planting of the first vine, Dave Hansen of ArborBrook worked with some of the best consultants in the Willamette Valley, including Laurent Montelieu, who was hired as consulting winemaker. That kept the small, 3300 case winery from making mistakes in the early stages and brought them up to speed quickly. The results speak for themselves.

The wines are lovely, actually. The first wine of the flight, the 2011 Croft Vineyards Pinot Gris offered up lots of lychee nuts and pears. There's a touch of residual sugar that brings pear and pineapple flavors up to the front. Cucumber flavor in the finish is refreshing.

After that it was on to Pinot Noir which is what ArborBrook is all about. The 2010 Heritage Cuvee Pinot Noir has a gorgeous ruby color, with a nose of raspberry, cherry and briars. Bright cherry flavor unfolds into strawberry. It's an elegant, refined Pinot Noir and a clear indication that Mr. Hansen knows his stuff.

Next was the 2010 Origin 1866 Pinot Noir. The nose was fresh and earthy, with crushed cherry and blackberry notes. The round, silky cherry flavors exited the stage with black tea note at the end. Except that it didn't end there—things kept getting better with the 2010 Estate 777 Block Vines Pinot Noir. These were the first vines, planted in 2001. This one had a very briary nose with crushed fruit, and darker fruit flavors like black cherry and ripe black plum.

Three things it's best to avoid when it comes to Pinot Noir: rotary fermentation, 200% new oak and... saying never. The 2010 Vintners Select is made from the top five barrels from the vintage, rotary fermented and aged in 200% new oak. The spicy nose showed mint, tobacco and cooked fruit. On the palate were ripe, cooked cherry, strawberry and raspberry flavors with a nice long finish ending on an espresso note. Oh, it definitely needed more time to develop—this wine was made to lay down for fifteen years or more. But this was far from the over oaked monster it sounded like when presented. Yes, it's a keeper.

ArborBrook's unassuming building was built in 1910 to dry and crack walnuts, then later became a stable. The stalls are still there, complete with the sliding doors, for displays. There's nothing ostentatious about the place—it's behind the Hansen's house—so despite being clearly marked and on the beaten path, one might overlook it on the way to flashier places. That would be a big mistake. Tasting room manager Angelina Fey is among the most competent in knowledge and presentation in the Willamette Valley. The winery website features her recipes for those looking for the perfect food and wine pairing. She knows the wine intimately and has reason to be confident in her product. Right now, ArborBrook is a great little secret. Go and enjoy it before the other kids find out.