

Illaha Vineyards 2014 Estate Pinot Noir

Remaining True to the Farm

Nestled amongst the hills of the Willamette Valley, on a south-facing slope with stunning views of the region, lies **Illaha Vineyards and Winery**. A warm spot, this vineyard seems in every way the typical, picturesque site you would imagine for northwestern Oregon: rolling hills, vines and farms for miles, and a multi-level wine production facility in the background. At first glance, Illaha Vineyards could be just any Oregon winery, until you notice a horse pulling a ton of grapes up the slope to the winery.

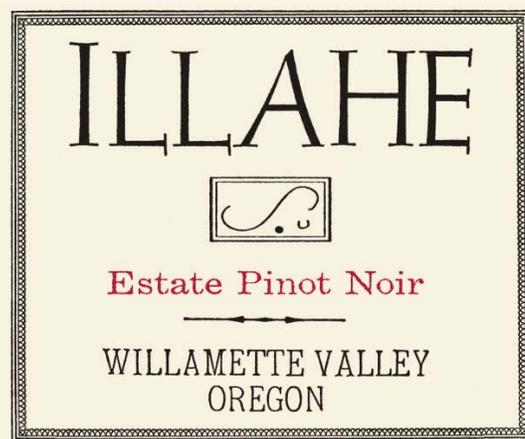
When **Brad Ford** and his (now) wife **Bethany Ford** first purchased the vineyard site in conjunction with **Lowell and Pauline Ford** in 2000, they planted Pinot Noir and sold the grapes to more established Willamette Valley wineries, like **Bethel Heights, Cristom Vineyards** and others. As the vineyard matured and gained recognition for its Pinot Noir, Brad decided that the time was right for him to start making his own wine. In 2006, just after he finished up the viticulture and enology program at the local community college, he made his first vintage.

It was around that time that a local reporter out of The Dalles, Oregon, stumbled on the winery and interviewed Brad. The reporter asked, "What does this vineyard do that other vineyards in the area don't?" and Brad was dumbfounded. He said he didn't have an answer. "He gave a strange face at that answer. I thought, 'This is not good.' People are curious to see something different," he said.

This standard reporter's question started Brad down a path that would eventually lead to Project 1899—one fairly unique to the West Coast of the United States. As wineries across the country modernize and update their technology, Brad would distinguish his brand by doing the opposite: creating a wine using only the methods and technology available to winemakers in 1899.

Using horse-drawn towing equipment, wooden vats, no electricity and a whole lot of manpower, Ford and his team produce a limited number of cases each year. In 2014, they took the project further, using a canoe and the local river system to "ship" (pun intended) their wines to retailers/restaurants in Portland.

"People assume that we do all our winemaking the hard way. The good part is that consumers think, 'Oh, you're the place that uses horses and canoes your winery to Portland.' But we don't do everything that way," he said. "More than anything, it works because people are interested in it; it gets them to look us up and come see what's going on.



"We're probably the only place in the United States that actually makes wine on some commercial level with no electricity. That's the spark that gets people interested."

Though not all of their wines are created in this manner, the ethics, message and methods of the Project 1899 brand have permeated through to other tiers and brought some much-deserved attention to the winery, which aims to make all its wines as naturally as possible. The 2014 Estate Pinot Noir is a perfect example of the attention and devotion to this vineyard expression Ford is looking for.

The 2014 vintage was a hot year, though not as hot as 2015, Ford pointed out. Sugars in the grapes spiked in September, following a heat wave near the end of harvest, and Ford was picking grapes that shot to more than 24° Brix in less than a week. It was a low-rainfall year, forcing some fairly low pH and a loss of malic acid.

From there, the Pinot Noir underwent a natural fermentation, something Ford picked up from his former client, the Cristoms.

"Cristom was the one winery with no yeast in its database. It's the one place they have been doing native fermentations for years and years. It has created a more complex wine, and we hope that as we continue to do it, the inoculated yeast population will decrease a bit to maintain that complexity and strong

fermentation," Ford said.

Continuing his hands-off approach, Ford doesn't use any additions or acid and does not filter the finished wine.

"It's just another example of use trying to be hands-off," he said. "The Estate has been a consistently good bottle of wine—we get good feedback from distributors and buyers. People enjoy it. I think we've been able to do that by having a good vineyard in the first place and by maintaining a simple, natural winemaking style."

Since the vineyard's inaugural 22-acre Pinot Noir vintage, the Fords have expanded the site in both acreage and varietals. Illaha Vineyards is now home to 51 acres of Pinot Noir and another 9 of Pinot Gris, Gruner Veltliner, Tempranillo, Viognier, Lagrein, Schioppettino and Teroldego.

With all his success, Ford doesn't see too much changing at the winery in the future. "We're in a really nice place right now, and are looking forward to celebrating what we've done and continuing to increase the quality of production," he said.