

# FOREST GROVE.

## Our Wine Legacy

Forest Grove had for many decades been considered a dry town. In fact, when the Dallas Cowboys used to practice here, they would walk to Cornelius for a drink.

However, details of our wine history have resurfaced again that confirm that the Forest Grove area was important to Oregon wine history before the town's first alcohol permit was issued.

The original idea that the Willamette Valley would be ideal for the production of Pinot came from Charles "Chuck" Coury, who purchased the vineyard now known as David Hill Winery on September 30, 1965.

Charles attended college with his friends, David Lett and Bill Fuller at UC Davis. Chuck had already obtained his degree in Climatology and Meteorology at UCLA.

The three friends and others spent many a night at UCD drinking wine and debating various details involving viticulture. Chuck maintained that Pinot would benefit from Cold Climate Viticulture, which could be done in NW Oregon. This was somewhat controversial due to UC Davis' proximity to Napa Valley. His friends acknowledged that pinot grapes could be grown here, but not at a commercially productive level.

Charles Coury's masters thesis was written on this very subject and details the soil, heat, and moisture reasons that his hypothesis was correct.

Chuck then went to Alsace to study grapes, with David Lett following on an internship to France thereafter. While they were there, Chuck's wife Shirley, wrote to her sister, Betts Coury, and announced: "Finally, David understands what Chuck has been saying". According to the letter, through his experience with French vineyards, David Lett now agreed that Pinot would be more successful in a cold climate setting.

Coury discovered the award winning history of what is now David Hill Winery and purchased the property on September 30th, 1965. This was the site in the 1880s where Ernest Reuter had become famous for his Klevner wines. Reuter won a gold medal at the St Louis World's Fair in 1904. Chuck immediately began planting his vineyard in October 1965.

While they were planting, Betts Coury, asked about some plants that were off to one side of the property. Chuck responded that those were David Lett's plants. He is holding them here until David gets his own property.

In January 1966, David Lett purchased some land between Dundee & Dayton and in the Spring of 1966 established his new vineyard.

Thus” Forest Grove, where Oregon Pinot was born”, illustrates that the idea was conceived by Charles Coury and he was the first to plant his Pinot vineyard in the Willamette Valley, right here in our Forest Grove area.

Coury’s ideas about Oregon wine proved correct. Where virtually no Oregon wine market existed in 1973, Coury’s salesperson, Betts established accounts with Fred Meyer, Stroheckers, Elephant Deli, Wizer’s, Gamco and Grape n’ Grain in Eugene. The Coury Winery produced Pinot noir, Chardonnay, Gewurtzraminer and Zwicker, a blended white table wine.<sup>1</sup>

Coury sold his vineyard in 1978 and started the first Oregon microbrewery in Portland with another wine pioneer, Dick Ponzi.

David Lett then went on to provide substantial leadership in the Oregon Pinot industry and around the time that Chuck left, he began to be affectionately known as Papa Pinot. His Eyrie Vineyard remains a vital member of our wine industry. According to Jordan McKay, NY Times wine critic in his book “Passion for Pinot” Lett gets more of the credit today because he stuck with it”.

There is more to the Forest Grove wine legacy. Bill Fuller arrived in the Forest Grove area shortly after Chuck and started his own successful winery: Tualatin Estates. He was the first Oregon winemaker to win best of show with two different grape varieties. He won Best of Show for pinot & chardonnay at the London International Wine & Spirits competition in 1984.

Wine Spectator has the Top 100 each year. Bill was the first Oregon winery to make that list with his chardonnay in 1989.

Chuck was thought of as a bit cranky and difficult. On the other hand, he loved the science of wine and then carried that love of science to his adventure in the microbrew industry. According to Susan Teppola of Laurel Ridge Winery, Chuck never cared who was first, but enjoyed the process of discovery. Today, wines from the original Charles Coury grapevines can still be enjoyed at David Hill Winery under their David Hill - Blackjack label.

In Forest Grove our dry town kept this information under wraps for decades. The fact remains that Chuck Coury chose this area to plant the first pinot vineyard in what would be come, in pinot circles, the world renowned Willamette Valley.



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*Where Oregon pinot was born*

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<sup>1</sup> Vineyard Memoirs, Kerry McDaniel Boenisch, 2004 . p. 90