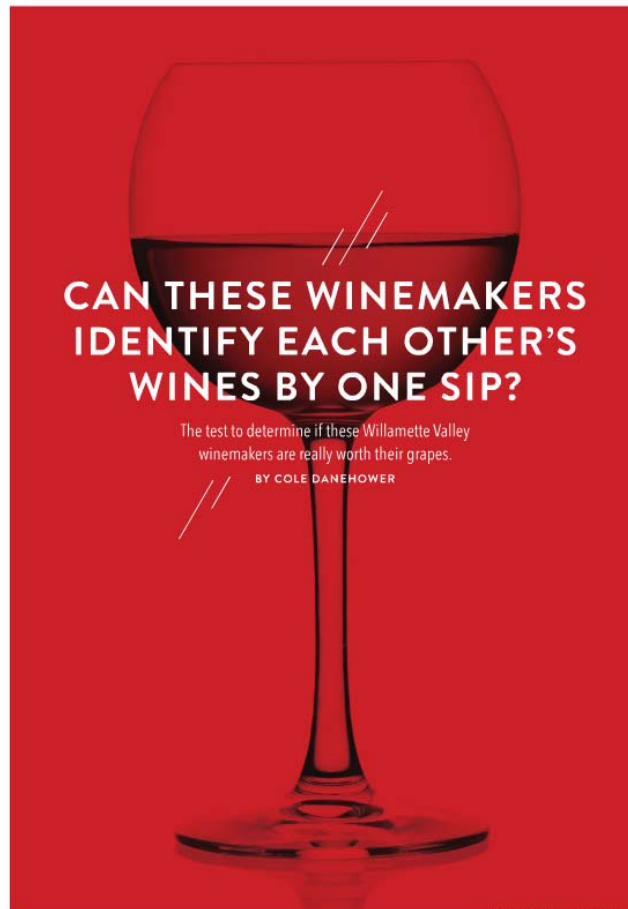


*Soléna*

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## mystery wine A

As the first bottle was poured, inevitably someone piped up: "Well, this must be Adelsheim's wine; it says 'A' on the bag."

But as they settled in to their task, it was no longer a joke. They rolled the glasses around, studying the color of the liquid contained. They stuck their noses in the glasses and sniffed. They took sips. Some closed their eyes as they concentrated.

"This does smell like a David wine," said Michael. "Cedar, smoke. It has age. Great acidity on the palate."

"It's pretty evolved," added Laurent. "I think it's 10 to 15 years."

Cody jumped in with both feet, getting technical: "I'd say it's Pommard clone, from Chehalem Mountains. It has a lot of structure and lots of cherry fruit backbone."

"I would say this is 1999 because of the tannin in the finish," said Ken.

"I'm thinking it's older than that," Michael responded.

Laurent noted aloud that David was remaining silent.

"Well, it's a very pretty wine," said Clare as she took another sip, "and a big 'thank you' to whoever brought it."

### THE GROUP CONSENSUS David Adelsheim

**MAIN INDICATION** Classic mature pinot noir character (cedar notes, fruit purity, good acidity) speaks of age; David has been making pinot noir longer than anyone in the room.

## mystery wine B

"Well, if we're going by the alphabet, then this is 'B'..." everyone looked to Robert, indicating his Brittan Vineyards label.

"I brought Winderlea," he pointed out, revealing a clue, "not Brittan." Robert also makes wine for Winderlea Vineyard and Winery, a boutique producer in Dundee.

Cody took a stab at his evaluation. "This reminds

me of Dundee Hills. It has the spice, it has the structure, it has the minerality, it has the fruit. Definitely Dundee Hills."

Laurent laughed, "Don't ever use that word, 'definitely.'"

"You do like to go out on a limb, don't you, Cody?" said Michael with a smile.

"My failure rate is big, but when I win, it's massive!" he replied. Everyone laughed. They understood the potential embarrassments – and rewards – when it came to tasting their respective aging wines.

"It reminds me of Dundee Hills, also," said Clare.

Laurent, however, had a different sense of the wine. "To me, it seems more Yamhill-Carlton. It's earthy, a little mushroom. It has really good structure and good lushness. It has nice complexity."

"What about vintage?" asked Robert.

"I'd say 2012. I think it's young."

"Definitely a warmer vintage," Robert agreed.

"Definitely?" Cody raised an eyebrow.

### THE GROUP CONSENSUS Laurent Montalieu

**MAIN INDICATION** Earth and mushroom overtones are often associated with the Yamhill-Carlton AVA; lush fruitiness speaks to a warmer vintage, like 2012. Laurent isn't the only winemaker to use fruit from this AVA, but his estate vineyard is there.

## mystery wine C

"This is a very rich and powerful wine," offered Michael. "My first impression was that it was Big Table Farm (nodding toward Clare), but now I'm not so sure. I'm confused."

Everyone took some time to evaluate the wine; it clearly had their attention. After a moment, the guesses begin.

"I'm going with your Big Table Farm, as well," said Cody.

"Could this be a 2011?" asked David.

"Not with that color" responded Clare.

"It could be a very ripe 2011," said Laurent.

"There were ripe 2011's" said Cody with feigned



**Close Examination**  
Michael Etzel in the midst of thoughtful analysis – he does, after all, co-own Beaux Frères with the world's most famous wine critic. (opposite) Robert Brittan (pictured left) shares a laugh with Laurent Montalieu in between serious sips.

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amazement. The 2011 vintage was notoriously cool, so not generally considered a "ripe" vintage. "Where was I?"

Laurent jumped in. "I think it is Robert's wine. It does that floral, perfumy thing that I associate with Dundee Hills."

"It has nice oak integration," added Cody, "also definitely whole cluster."

"Definitely..." said Robert, smiling. "I agree with you."

"Who uses whole cluster here?" asked Laurent. There was a moment of silence.

**THE GROUP CONSENSUS** Clare Carver or Robert Brittan  
**MAIN INDICATION** Whole-cluster fermentation (keeping the berries on their stems) can give spicy tones and heightened aromas and tannin. Both Clare and Robert have admitted to using whole cluster on occasion.

## mystery wine D

"This wine elicits a lot of attention, and the comments were succinct and rapid-fire as the winemakers focused on what's in their glasses."

"Delightful! Really great wine."  
"Lots of pretty blue/black fruit."

"But not a lot of tannin."  
"The integration is pretty impressive."  
"It's seamless."

"I love the clarity of this wine. I also like the length."

"Is it your wine?" Clare asked Michael directly. "It has that elegance..." she was searching for another descriptor, "that control." He hesitated, then took another small sip.

"It's possible," replied Michael.

**THE GROUP CONSENSUS** Michael G. Etzel

**MAIN INDICATION** Fruit that is more blue and black than red in character often comes from sedimentary soils, such as Ribbon Ridge AVA, where Michael's Beaux Frères is located.

## mystery wine E

"A little cranberry?" asked Michael, then corrected himself. "No, pomegranate."

"Could this be Laurent's Hyland?" David asked. "I don't think it has the verve and the high elevation energy that Hyland has," answered Michael.

"The more it sits in my glass, the less I think it is Yamhill-Carlton," said Clare.

"You think it's Dundee Hills?" asked Cody. "I think it could be."

Laurent said he agreed. If from Dundee Hills, the field of possible winemakers was very small.

Cody commented on how the fruit filled the mid-palate, something he attributed to the use of whole clusters - another clue.

"We talked about tannin structure before, and this one has noticeable tannins," said Ken, "and they feel like stem tannins to me." Another indication of possible whole cluster, again.

**THE GROUP CONSENSUS** Clare Carver or Robert Brittan  
**MAIN INDICATION** Higher levels of tannins and a sense of power in the wine lead to speculation that this is whole cluster - again, signifying Robert or Clare.

## mystery wine F

"All right, who brought the syrah?" joked Clare. The wine was exceptionally dark, darker than a typical pinot noir.

"This is a powerful pinot!" commented Laurent.

"The length is great here. I like the way it finishes and then continues on," said Robert.

"Aromatically, there's a lot of earth," said Michael.

"On the palate, there's a nice dark cherry component."

"To me, it has some darker fruit tones. And amazing structure."

"My first impression was of great age," declared Michael, "but now I don't think so. I seem to have a rotating palate tonight."

"I don't think it is that old, perhaps 2008?" proposed Laurent.

"I like your thinking," Ken nodded in agreement.

David offered a new perspective: "I think we're getting sucked in by the dark color of the wine. I think actually the fruit smells more red."

"Don't you think that's one of the characteristics



**Grand Unveiling**  
Celebrating his accurate assumption, Cody Wright (pictured far left) of Purple Hands Winery may be the young gun in the group, but he has certainly learned from the best, including father Ken Wright (pictured second from right).

SMITH PHOTOS ANDREA UNWINDING PHOTOGRAPHY

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of Yamhill-Carlton?" asked Robert.

"It's not Robert's wine," declared Clare. "I'll bet five dollars it's not his."

"Are we playing poker?" Laurent laughed.

**THE GROUP CONSENSUS** Ken Wright

**MAIN INDICATION** Deep cherry notes, earthy overtones, and strong structure make the wine stand out – and are often associated with Freedom Hill Vineyard in Eola-Amity Hills. In the room, only Ken and Cody work with this vineyard.

## mystery wine G

Ken was the first to comment: "I like this wine a lot because it's so bright. I love the balance of acidity and fruit."

Somebody ventured that this could be Dundee

Hills. "I'll go along with that," said David. "It has that marmalade thing and not as much spiciness."

"It has structure and minerality. Whoever made this wine wanted to make a statement."

"It's still very young, no secondary bottle characters."

"I think this is 2012 Holstein Vineyard," asserts Ken.

"Which would make it your wine, Cody?" chimed in Michael.

"Yes," admitted Cody. Then he added, "So how do you feel about the oak? Could it use a little more?"

**THE GROUP CONSENSUS** Cody Wright

**MAIN INDICATION** Bright fruitiness, minerality, and a touch of spice are often associated with Dundee Hills – the AVA where Cody works with a number of sites.



**Taking Bets**  
Clare Carver of Big Table

## THE WINE revealed



**Mystery Wine A**

Adelsheim Vineyards, 1990  
Pinot Noir, Elizabeth's Reserve  
(Willamette Valley AVA)



**Mystery Wine B**

Solèna, 2012 Pinot Noir,  
Domaine Danielle Laurent  
(Yamhill-Carlton AVA)



**Mystery Wine C**

Big Table Farm, 2012 Pinot  
Noir, Resonance Vineyard  
(Yamhill-Carlton AVA)



**Mystery Wine D**

Beaux Frères, 2010 Pinot Noir,  
Beaux Frères Vineyard  
(Ribbon Ridge AVA)



**Mystery Wine E**

Winderlea, 2009 Pinot Noir,  
Legacy (Dundee Hills AVA)



**Mystery Wine F**

Ken Wright Cellars, 2008 Pinot  
Noir, Freedom Hill Vineyard  
(Eola-Amity Hills AVA)



**Mystery Wine G**

Purple Hands, 2012 Pinot  
Noir, Holstein Vineyard  
(Dundee Hills AVA)

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## MEET THE makers



**David Adelsheim**  
ADELSHEIM VINEYARD,  
NEWBERG

David planted his first vineyard in 1972 and has been making wine since 1978, becoming an influential pioneer and continuing leader of the Oregon wine industry.



**Robert Brittan**  
BRITTAN VINEYARDS,  
MCMINNVILLE

A legendary winemaker in California since the 1970s, Robert left Napa in 2008 to pursue cool-climate pinot noir. In addition to overseeing his label, he also consults for Winderlea Vineyard and Winery.



**Clare Carver**  
BIG TABLE FARM,  
GASTON

She and her husband, Brian Marcy, started their full-fledged working farm in 2006, which also doubles as one of Oregon's premier boutique wineries.



**Michael G. Etzel**  
BEAUX FRÈRES,  
NEWBERG

In 1986, Michael found his future vineyard home in the Ribbon Ridge, where he joined with his brother-in-law, Robert Parker Jr. (yes, the Robert Parker), to make some of the most sought-after new world-style pinot noirs.



**Laurent Montalieu**  
SOLENA ESTATE, HYLAND  
ESTATE, DUNDEE

Laurent arrived in Oregon to make wine in 1985 and is now one of the region's most respected winemaking stars, as well as consultant to multiple labels.



**Ken Wright**  
KEN WRIGHT CELLARS,  
CARLTON

With a label that is one of the most respected names in the world of pinot noir, Ken has become a cult figure on the Oregon wine scene with more than 30 years of winemaking experience.



**Cody Wright**  
PURPLE HANDS WINERY,  
DUNDEE

Learning from his father, Ken Wright, and other Oregon wine luminaries, Cody launched his own label in 2005 to express his own personal vinous vision.

**In the Willamette Valley,** winemakers sport faded jeans, flannel shirts, and boots. They talk more about sustainable farming than creative branding, of biodynamics instead of market dynamics. But, as we're about to see, they are also geeks – in the best sense of the word – about their wines, but also that of their neighbors.

On a cool December evening, seven of the state's most respected winemakers gathered at The Allison. It was here, not far from The Allison, that 50 years ago the first wine grapes were planted in Oregon's Willamette Valley. And since its opening in 2009, The Allison has become something of a clubhouse for the local wine community, a place where they can gather in Carharts and caps and talk shop while sampling totally different wines than their own thanks to the 800-label cellar. On this night, the idea was simple: to see just how well these vintners know each other's works.

Before seating themselves at the great single-slab black walnut table that occupies the private dining room at JORY, each winemaker – a mixture of vet-

erans and relative newcomers, some of whom have been friends for more than 20 years – secretly handed over a favorite bottle of pinot from their own labels. Obscured in cloth bags (marked A, B, C, and so on) so no one knew who brought what, each bottle was then poured in succession, while the winemakers worked out among themselves whose wine it was. Only after all seven wines had been tasted and discussed would they learn the true wine beneath each bag.

The conversation swerved divergently. There were reminiscences about the development of the Oregon wine industry and discussion of each winemaker's individual style and philosophy. There was mild wrangling about biodynamic farming, native yeasts, and whole-cluster fermentations. There were serious points made about vintages and markets. And there was a myriad of shared inside jokes.

But always they came back to the wine at hand. Always they returned to focus on the wine that their very hands helped crush, ferment, and pour.

*Continued* →

(ALL PHOTOS) ANDREA JOHNSON PHOTOGRAPHY

**Brotherly Love**  
Willamette Valley wine legends Laurent Montalieu (pictured left) and David Adelsheim (pictured right) regularly share their expertise: Montalieu consults for several labels; Adelsheim helps oversee The Allison's own Austin Knoll vineyard.

