

The Cat from Carter Vineyard

TASTING **PANTHER CREEK PINOT NOIR** FROM THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY

by Julie H. Case



Consulting winemaker
Tony Rynders (left) with
Panther Creek Cellars
founder Ken Wright.

GET KEN WRIGHT AND TONY RYNDERS IN A ROOM TOGETHER and you get Oregon history as it is being made. In July, the duo—Panther Creek Cellars' founder and its consulting winemaker, respectively—talked to a group of wine professionals about Carter Vineyard.

Set in the Willamette Valley's Eola Hills, Carter Vineyard is a basaltic site covered in shallow soil shot through with mother rock, which is visible everywhere. Since 1998, Wright has managed Carter vineyard, which is just over 21 acres in vine, and controls the sale of all fruit. Naturally, Rynder is using Carter Pinot Noir for Panther Creek single vineyard-designate wines.

If the proof is in the bottle, the vineyard holds its own. Domaine Serene's 1993 Carter Vineyard Pinot Noir, which was made at Panther Creek by Wright, shows roses and Bing cherries, strawberries and herbs on the nose. On the palate, the fruit remains in cranberry and raspberry, roses and herbs, and an ever so slight milk chocolate note along with pepper and roses. The wine may have benefited from a cooler vintage, one that Wright says had a slight herbal streak.

"I was a little worried it wouldn't be as opulent as we wanted," he says. "It was so tight for so long." And yet, he continues, the wines have the acidity to hold for ten to 12 years—enough time to allow them to fall beautifully into balance.

Perhaps that's why even in a 1994 Ken Wright Cellars Carter Vineyard Pinot Noir—a vintage so warm and with such small crops that Wright says it would have been easy to miss the mark—the site shines through in supple fruit notes and hints of umami. And the site is there, too, in the new release: Rynder's 2013 Panther Creek Cellars Carter Vineyard Pinot Noir which, though still coming out of its shell, is laden with Bing cherry and raspberry, dust and strawberry gelato on the nose, and pencil lead and pepper, dust and fruit still emerging on the palate. **SJ**



*The Panther Creek Cellars 2013 Carter Vineyard
Pinot Noir is young but shows great potential.*



Carter Vineyard in Oregon's
Willamette Valley.

PHOTO: ETHAN SHOTZ

In late-breaking news, Ken Wright tells The SOMM Journal that he has recently reached an agreement with the Carter family to buy Carter Vineyard with his wife, Karen. The transfer of ownership is scheduled to take place on November 3.