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William "Rusty" Gaffney

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## Pinot Noir “Clone 95”: Dick Erath Revives an Old Treasure

Dick Erath, one of Oregon’s original pioneering vintners, recently sent me a bottle of 2012 Clone 95 Pinot Noir from his Prince Hill Vineyard planting in the Dundee Hills of the Willamette Valley.

Dick moved to Oregon in 1968 from Northern California where he grew up and earned an engineering degree. He had attended courses at University of California at Davis, and one of his classmates was Richard Sommer who would be the first to plant Pinot Noir in Oregon. Dick bought his first vineyard site in the Chehalem Mountains in 1968, and the following year planted four acres of Pinot Noir, Riesling and Gewürztraminer from cuttings he had brought with him from California. The vines did not survive a severe frost and late snow in 1969.

He subsequently developed a business relationship with Cal Knudsen who owned vineyards in the Dundee Hills and later became a partner in the Argyle Winery. Dick produced his first 216 cases of wine, including 100 cases of Pinot Noir with the Erath label in 1972. In 1975, after Erath planted additional vineyards for Knudsen, the winery became known as Knudsen-Erath. In 1976, Dick started construction of the first winery in the Dundee Hills. About twelve years later, Dick bought out Cal’s interests and the winery became known simply as Erath again in 1983. Erath Winery became quite successful, growing to 35,000 cases by 1987. Erath Winery was bought by Ste. Michelle Wine Estates in 2006 with the new owners increasing production significantly. Dick kept his vineyards including Prince Hill Vineyards.

Along with David Lett and Charles Coury, Dick led the lobbying effort in Oregon in the 1970s to limit the importation of grapevines into Oregon that were not virus-free, in the hopes that the use of only certified vines would prevent the spread of phylloxera and other vine diseases.

In 1975-1976, Dick had a friend visit Clos Vougeot in Burgundy, and while there, he grabbed cuttings that lay on the ground, smuggled them into the United States, and gave them to Dick. Dick sent them to Austin Goheen at University of California at Davis Foundation Plant Services (FPS) to have the vines cleaned up. The original material was given the designation FPS S1 and initially underwent heat treatment. Goheen retired, and Dick heard nothing more for many years. Dick was to find out later that the original material had tested positive for virus in 1986 and underwent microshoot tip tissue culture disease elimination therapy, whereby a new selection plus some backup vines from the same material were created.

Dick received a surprising letter from FPS in 1998 telling him the vines, which had been designated Pinot Noir FPS 95, “Were ready.” They sent him 5 disease-free vines. He now has 2 acres planted at his Prince Hill Vineyard in the Dundee Hills.

FPS 95 was taken off the Davis listing because it tested positive for leafroll virus in 2005, although Dick has not seen that infestation in his vineyard plantings. The backup vines from the same source material were advanced to FPS 117, and are now available from FPS.

Dick thinks FPS 117 (95) is similar to Pommard in appearance. However, it has higher tannin levels and is resistant to botrytis. In 2013 in the Willamette Valley, 8 inches of rain fell during harvest, but no botrytis developed in Dick’s FPS 117 plantings. Dick thinks that FPS 117 may be a good East Coast selection because of its resistance.

Dick is currently working with Laurent Montalieu at NW Wine Co. to do a separate 2013 vintage bottling of “clone 95” under the Prince Hill label. Dick’s Prince Hill Vineyard, first planted in 1983, consists of 34 planted acres, 24 acres of which are Pinot Noir including clones 777, 667, 114, 113, 115, Pommard, Wädenswil, Coury, and 95. The vineyard has slow-moving phylloxera infestation. Dick currently sells budwood from his vineyard to raise money for his Erath Family Foundation that advances viticultural and enological science in Oregon.

In 2012, Dick bottled one barrel of “Clone 95” Pinot Noir and one barrel of “Coury Clone” Pinot Noir from the Prince Hill Vineyard. He recently sent me a sample of each to taste. For a history of the “Coury clone,” refer to [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1214/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1214/) (Solving the Mystery of the “Coury Clone”).

**2012 Erath Prince Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 95** Sample, not commercially released. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very aromatic with gorgeous aromas of black cherry, dark red rose petal, hard cherry candy, and exotic spices. Medium bodied flavors of black cherry, brown spice and a hint of oak vanillin robed in fine-grain tannins and juicy acidity. Very seamless on the palate, finishing with grace and some persistence. Similar to Pommard in profile but has its own unique character.*

**2012 Erath Prince Hill Vineyard “Coury clone” Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** Sample, not commercially released. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Beautifully perfumed with hi-tone aromas of fresh red raspberries, spice and fragrant rose petals. Elegant and relatively light in weight, but very polished, with a tasty core of raspberry and cherry fruit accented with a touch of spice. An exceptionally good wine with impeccable balance and noticeable finishing presence.*

