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William "Rusty" Gaffney

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Solving the Mystery of the “Coury Clone”

I want to acknowledge the following Oregonians who contributed valuable historical and current information for this article through personal recollection and experience: David Adelsheim, Dick Erath, Jason Lett, Laurent Montalieu, Joel Myers, Lynn Penner-Ash. Steven Price, Mark Wahle, M.D., Bill Wayne, and Amy Wesselman.

Background

The mystery surrounding the origins of the so-called “Coury clone” of Pinot Noir is as enigmatic as Charles Coury himself. He has been described variously as extremely bright, stubborn, annoying, hot-tempered, lofty, and a brilliant theorist, who was never quite able to translate his innovative ideas into success in the business world. Dick Earth, who partnered with Coury in a nursery in the early 1970s in Oregon, noted in the *Oregon Wine News* (March 2011), “Unfortunately, he didn’t have the follow through....He just couldn’t get from A to Z.”

Coury was born in Southern California but grew up in Oregon. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in climatology from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1952 which led him to become well versed in agricultural growing seasons. While serving as a Naval officer during the Korean War, he became intrigued by French wines served in the officer’s club. After the war, this interest led him to a job selling imported European wines for Jules Wile in Southern California. He then decided to pursue a career in winemaking and entered the University of California at Davis (UCD) where his classmate was David Lett who would go on to found The Eyrie Vineyards. Coury obtained a Masters of Science degree in Horticulture from UCD, graduating June 10, 1964. He had submitted his master’s thesis in early 1964 and received his degree while in Alsace, France where he was studying cool climate viticulture.

Coury's master's thesis was titled, "Wine Grape Adaptation in the Napa Valley, California." Coury claimed his thesis showed him to be the first to expound the idea of pursuing winegrowing, and in particular, Pinot Noir cultivation, in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. He is quoted in *The Boys Up North* (Paul Pintarich, 1997) as saying, "My master's thesis was a very, very clever approach to climate and grape choice. I knew there were great similarities between the climates of France and Oregon, which are nearly on the same latitude. My professors argued with me, but I was right. I had an absolute climatological basis for my thesis and knew that the cool, rainy conditions of Oregon would be ideal, particularly for the Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Riesling varieties."

Coury's pronouncements about the potential for certain varieties in Oregon turned out to be correct, but his master's thesis did not directly reference Oregon. A review of the 112-page thesis reveals that Coury's intent was to prove that agro-climatic analogues (environmental characteristics such as topography, soil, rainfall, day length) and the hypothesis of cold limit amelioration, combined with empirical knowledge, could lead to the successful choice of suitable varieties in the Napa Valley. There is only a single mention of Oregon (page 30) and it is perjorative: "European wine growers glory in a dry, sunny summer as in 1959 their grapes completely ripening. The same thing, in reverse, may happen in Western America. We observe as a good illustration our own 1963 California spring whose weather resembled rainy Oregon more than its own." The truth is that Oregon summers are usually dry and sunny and 1963 was typical.

Coury referenced the potential of California in his thesis by noting, "Burgundy perhaps is not the best place to grow Pinot Noir....Perhaps the best environment for these may be found elsewhere. Perhaps a region may be located where they would yield even better wines than in their home regions. Perhaps in California would be the place."

What Coury became known for was the emphasis in his thesis on the importance of selecting appropriate grape varieties for particular sites. He refuted the supposition that the heat summation classification proposed by UCD professors Maynard Amerine and Albert J. Winkler could alone adequately predict plant performance, emphasizing the contributions of topography, soil, rainfall, water balance, and day length. He drew on work by ampelographer Victor Pulliat in France in the 1800s, who had proposed a ripening classification of *Vitis vinifera* grape varieties in his treatise, *Mille Varieties de Vignes, Description and Synonymies (A Thousand Varieties of Vines, Descriptions and Synonyms)*.

The just of Coury's thesis was as follows. "Everywhere in Europe the same pattern repeats. Varieties have been selected which in the average year just barely attain adequate maturity. This consistency inspires the proposal of a theoretical approach to ideal variety adaptation: The Hypothesis of Cold Limit Amelioration. Any variety yields its highest quality wines when grown in such a region that the maturation of the variety coincides with the end of the growing season. Or another way of expressing the concept: Any variety yields its highest quality wines when grown in a region whose ecologic potential to mature fruit just equals the requirements of the variety, no more or no less." Coury notes that the hypothesis explains the variety distribution in Europe and seems to fit the Napa Valley experience. "It is proposed as a rational approach to variety selection."

David Lett was a fellow student of Coury's at UCD in 1964, and spent a year in northern Europe studying coolclimate viticulture. Mary Boyle (*The Quarterly Review of Wines*, summer 1996), quotes Lett, "After my year of studying Burgundian varieties in France, I was sure the marginal climate of the Willamette Valley was the perfect place to cultivate them in the United States." Lett came to believe that Oregon had a growing season closest to Burgundy of any other known alternatives in the United States. Like Coury, Lett was influenced by the writings of Pulliat that emphasized the principles of ripening date classification in the

Wine Grape Adaptation in the Napa Valley, California

By
CHARLES JULES COURY
A.B. (University of California, Los Angeles) 1952

THIS IS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

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Committee in Charge

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choice of wine grape variety plantings. Lett hand-copied copied Pulliat's theories in great detail in his personal notebooks.

As the years went by, Coury became quite outspoken and is quoted in *The Boys Up North* as saying, "I was the big gun in 1965; I was a leader and talker! Not only was I a voice for the wine industry, I was a loud voice." Unfortunately he tended to adjust time lines to suit his reputation. The truth is, a study of history and dates would indicate that David Lett should be recognized as first suggesting that Oregon possessed a suitable climate to cultivate Pinot Noir, acted on it, arrived in the Willamette Valley first, and Coury followed. My careful review of historical records would indicate the following timeline.

Lett returned to the United States from Europe in the fall of 1964 and began to gather grape cuttings from UCD and other sources. Armed with several thousand cuttings, he traveled to the Willamette Valley in early February of 1965, and upon arrival, started a nursery in Corvallis where he planted several cool-climate grape varieties including Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir (Wädenswil, UCD 2A, and Tout Droit, UCD 18), UCD 1 (Pinot franc) and Riesling. Lett's personal journal indicates he found a suitable site to lease for his plantings in Corvallis on February 22, 1965. Willamette Valley's first Pinot Noir vines were planted in the nursery on February 13, 1965, and planting of all varieties was completed on March 1, 1965. Lett's first plantings in Corvallis are shown in the photo below.

Lett's journal indicates that on April 3, 1965, he planted some cuttings for Coury. According to Lett, the rootings had mites and were in poor condition. Coury had returned from Europe in late 1964 and first visited the Willamette Valley in the early spring of 1965 according to Lett's journals, then returned to California, and sent his cuttings north for Lett to plant. Coury then returned to the Willamette Valley in the summer of 1965, and after researching appropriate sites and talking with old timers who had grown grapes successfully in the Willamette Valley, chose a suitable site in Forest Grove, an old cattle ranch and farmstead known as David Hill. The records from the Office of County Assessor in Washington County indicate Coury obtained title on October 5, 1965. It is unlikely Coury planted a nursery on the property before obtaining title, so it can be assumed that his Forest Grove nursery was first established some time after the close of escrow and most likely in 1966.

Lett subsequently located his original vines to his ideal vineyard site in the Red Hills of Dundee. Field preparation and transplanting began in 1966 when David, and his new spouse, Diana, founded The Eyrie Vineyards. Coury planted his first vineyard in Forest Grove the same year, confirmed by the obituary of Coury's spouse, Shirley. Lett was to receive considerable recognition for his wines and deservedly so, since his Pinot Noirs set the mark and won international recognition for the fledgling Oregon wine industry. Coury's wines, in contrast, never achieved critical success, and unable to develop a following, Coury left the Willamette Valley in 1978.

Origins of the "Coury Clone"

Coury studied cool climate viticulture and clonal adaptation at INRA (National Institute for Agronomy Research) in Colmar, Alsace, France with the viticulturist Pierre Huglin in 1964, and this is where the mysterious origins of the "Coury clone" can be traced. David Adelsheim told me, "There has always been the story that Coury had smuggled cuttings into the United States, presumably from Colmar. When Coury was in Colmar, clonal selection work was focused on finding one or more clones of each variety that represented the typical attributes sought in Alsace. There was only one clone of Pinot Noir available at the time, clone 538. At a tasting of a range of Oregon Pinot Noirs in the fall of 1973, Coury amazed everyone with a very dark-colored wine made from a Pinot Noir clone whose identity and origin he would not reveal. I suspect it was clone 538. Oregon State University (OSU) received this clone in 1975, along with the clones of all the other Alsatian varieties. I do not know who ever planted it commercially."

Viticulturist Steve Price, formerly a professor at Oregon State University (OSU) and now the owner of a consulting company, Price Research Services, Inc. offering technical support for the wine industry in Oregon, California and Australia, related the following to me about Colmar 538. "When I arrived at OSU in 1983, Colmar 538 was already planted in two clonal trials first established in 1979 (as part of the Winegrower's Project). Also in those trials were UCD 4 and 5 (Pommard) and UCD 13 (Martini). My

understanding was that the Colmar clone came in with other clones direct from Espiguiette (Espiguiette 236 and 374) in southern France through the plant importation permit held by OSU at the time. Espiguiette was a test station in the French viticulture program where suitable clones were identified. The Colmar 538 clone (also known as CTPS 162) was planted on a small commercial scale in Oregon. It appeared to be a typical Pinot fin type in early trials but seemed to have larger clusters and was not considered particularly desirable. It was also included in a second round of Pinot Noir clone testing at OSU planted in 1989-1990.”

The program started by OSU and the Oregon wine industry in the mid 1970s known as the Winegrower’s Project was intended to introduce and evaluate a selection of virus-free Pinot Noir clonal material. Several clones were sourced from UCD and additional clones were obtained directly from France and indexed virusfree at OSU. Twelve vines of each clone were planted in 1979 (Colmar 538 in 1980) at two grower-cooperative sites in the Willamette Valley: the Knudsen-Erath Vineyard and Five Mountain Vineyard. Growth and production data were gathered from 1985 to 1987 and the results were presented at the Second International Symposium for Cool Climate Viticulture and Enology in Auckland, New Zealand in January 1988. Red wines were also produced from the clones in 1985 from the Knudsen-Erath Vineyard and in 1986 and 1987 from both of the grower-cooperator sites. Other than commercial industry standard clones UCD 2A (Wädenswil) and UCD 4 (Pommard), clones which rated high overall and had strong potential for the production of premium quality Pinot Noir were UCD 1 (Pinot franc), UCD 12 (Spain), UCD 29 (Jackson), and Colmar 538. Consistent patterns emerged among the clones regardless of site or season.

A second round of clonal plantings occurred in 1989-1990 in Alpine, Oregon, and the results reported in the Proceedings of the International Symposium on Clonal Selection in 1995. Twenty Pinot Noir clones including Colmar 538 were compared, all planted in 1989 with 1994 the first year of full production. The trial included clones from INRA, ONIVINS, and ANTAV in France and FPMS in California. Colmar 538 was considered a fertile group clone (large clustered, prostrate) based on 1994 yields and cluster weights. In comparison with the other clones, it showed low wine color intensity, low total phenolic content and low titratable acidity from berry samples and finished wine.

Colmar 538 came to FPS at University of California at Davis in 1987 from France from OSU Winegrower’s Project. Now deemed FPS 48, it is reported to be former INRA-CV-clone 538. Because the selection came to the United States before initiation of the official ENTAV-INRA trademark program, the clonal authenticity cannot be guaranteed. The official ENTAV-INRA clone number for the former INRA 538 is now ENTAV-INRA clone 162.

The “Coury Clone” Arrives in the New World

Dick Erath told me that when Coury returned to California from Alsace in late 1964, he brought in cuttings and had his father successfully root them for him in Carneros, California. This makes sense, since in Coury concluded in his master’s thesis that Carneros was the most suitable for growing Pinot Noir of all the subregions of the Napa Valley. The suitcase vines were subsequently shipped to Oregon and Coury apparently first planted them at his property in Forest Grove. Coury told Erath that the cuttings arrived in a dried out condition and he suffered losses. When Erath first saw the planting of vines from Alsace in October of 1967, they were struggling at best. He recalls that Coury made a barrel of Pinot Noir in 1970 from a secretive source (presumably the “Coury clone” as he would not identify its source), and it was a big, dark and extracted wine.

Among the cuttings Coury sent from California that were planted in David Lett’s initial nursery vineyard in Corvallis both for Coury in April, 1965, and later with Coury, there is no mention in Lett’s journal that the plant material came from Alsace. As noted, Coury had found a suitable location for his own nursery vineyard in Forest Grove in 1965, but did not plant his first vineyard there until 1966. There is no evidence to indicate that Coury planted any “Coury clone” vines in Forest Grove before 1966, so although Erath is not certain when the suitcase vines were first planted in Forest Grove, it is reasonable to assume it was 1966. According to Jason Lett, his father, David, provided Coury with significant amounts of cuttings from his stock of clones UCD 1 and UCD 18 which were presumably planted at Forest Grove as well.

Dick Erath was an early importer of Pinot Noir plant material into Oregon. He had enrolled in a course at UCD in 1967 and met Richard Sommer, who encouraged him to go to the Willamette Valley. One of Dick’s professors, Dr. Vernon Singleton, told him that Charles Coury and David Lett had gone to the Willamette

Valley to plant vineyards and make wine. Erath met Coury in 1967 at his vineyard in Forest Grove while interviewing for a job in Oregon.

Erath began to gather plant material for his own plantings in Oregon as early as 1967. He obtained Wädenswil (UCD 2A) from a Wente increase block planting in Arroyo Seco that had originated at the FPMS mother vineyard block at Davis, as well as cuttings from over twenty other varieties obtained through UCD including Pommard. He even introduced the Jackson clone of Pinot Noir, UCD 29, to Oregon which never achieved popularity. He planted his first vineyard, which included Pinot Noir, in the Chehalem Mountains in 1969 and released his first Pinot Noir under the Erath label in 1972.

Dick Erath and Charles Coury were partners in the Erath-Coury Nursery from 1970 to mid-1971. They obtained a range of registered vines grown from cuttings as well as mother vines from California. Some were from the Oki Nursery close to the University of California at Davis and included clones released from the UCD Foundation Plant Material Service (FPMS) heat treatment program run by Austin Goheen at the time. Goheen was a brilliant researcher working for the USDA at UCD where he put the heat treatment and virus indexing of grapevines in place after going through the entire mother block of vines at UCD. Erath recalls that when he visited the increase block of plantings at the Oki Nursery with Goheen, both heat-treated and less vigorous non-heat-treated clones of Pinot Noir were planted side by side and an employee, Clemente, stated they were not kept separate.

Among the clones brought into Oregon by Erath and Coury was Pommard. The oldest sources of the Pommard clone are two that were introduced into California by Professor Harold Olmo at University of California at Davis in 1951. One of the cuttings came from the walled vineyard at Château de Pommard and was designated Pommard 04 (UCD 4). Pommard 04 is the only selection in the FPMS program documented as originating directly from a producing European vineyard. Pommard 04 was registered in the FPMS program from 1963 to 1980, widely planted in California, but then removed because it tested positive for *Pugetris Stem Pitting* (RSP+). Pommard 05 (UCD 5) and 06 (UCD 6) (grouped together under the designation FPMS 103) were created from Pommard 04 using thermotherapy in 1964 and technically are one clone. They were both registered from 1967 until 1980 when they were also removed because they also tested RSP+. Recently, selection FPMS 91 was created from Pommard 04 using microshoot-tip culture. It became registered as the new Pommard selection in 2002 and UCD 4, 5 and 6 are no longer registered.

Pommard was introduced to Oregon through the FPMS program via multiple sources including the Oki Nursery in Davis. Erath brought Pommard (FMPS 103: row D4, vine 1) to the Willamette Valley in 1970. According to noted Pinot Noir historian and writer, John Haeger, there is confusion about whether the Pommard clone sold into Oregon was UCD 4 or its heat-treated cousin, UCD 5, or both, but Erath is certain that he brought in FMPS 103 (specifically F7V13: row F7, vine V13 of UCD 5). At the time, Erath, Coury and Lett were adamant about only importing certified root stock into Oregon. Although the Oki Nursery did not appear to make a distinction between non-heat-treated and heat-treated Pommard, according to Erath when he visited the nursery with Goheen, it is unlikely a certified nursery would misrepresent non-heat-treated plant material.

While partnered with Coury, Erath also introduced into Oregon, PN 3A (specifically G6V1, V2: row G6, vines V1, V2), one of three Pinot Noir clones sent to UCD by Werner Koblet from the research station in Wädenswil, Switzerland sometime before 1962. According to Adelsheim, it may be the same clone that is planted at Bethel Heights Vineyard, much later ripening than the clone planted by David Lett that he got from Wente in 1965, which is thought to be UCD 1A. Erath also brought in FPMS 104 (G8V3: specifically row G8, vine V3), the designation for the Martini clone of Pinot Noir at the time.

There were a number of factors that led to a relatively short partnership between Erath and Coury, but Erath told me the following. The partners had established their nursery in a greenhouse space in Portland. The quarantine against *phylloxera* required that imported vines initially had to be grown in a greenhouse. In 1970 and 1971 there was a frost in the winter with temperatures in the mid-20's. The vines were in gallon cans above ground and fully exposed and many suffered root damage. This was unfortunate timing, since a demand was developing by upstart winegrowers in Oregon for the Pommard clone. Because of the loss of stock, the Erath-Coury Nursery could not fill their many orders for May 1971 delivery. Erath wanted to send a letter out to those who had ordered vines explaining that the mother vines were slow to recover and could not be delivered in time for planting in 1971. Coury declined to do that, and the partnership was disbanded.

“Coury Clone” Disseminated in Oregon but is a Pommard Imposter

After the dissolution of the Erath-Coury Nursery partnership, Coury sold vines to growers in Oregon drawing upon the Pinot Noir vines from his venture with Erath and the suitcase cuttings he had brought from Alsace. He also bought large quantities of plant material from the Oki Nursery in Davis. This is where the mystery intensifies. According to Erath, the Erath-Coury Nursery never sold any of the vines that originated from Coury’s Alsatian suitcase cuttings. Coury did sell them later along with any number of clones including UCD 5 Pommard, UCD 13 (Martini clone), and clones UCD 1 and UCD 18 (from David Lett). Coury sold an assortment of clones under the guise of certified “Pommard clones.” This is corroborated by the following stories from Oregon growers.

David Adelsheim bought “Pommard clone” vines twice from Coury to plant in 1974. The first shipment was vines Coury had rooted over winter in the greenhouses at his vineyard. At some point, Adelsheim had reason to question whether they were really Pommard clone and so Adelsheim called the person, whose name was Clemente, at Oki Nursery in California, from whom Coury had obtained the cuttings. Clemente had a mother block of certified vines from the Foundation Plant Materials Service. When Adelsheim asked Clemente which clone of Pinot Noir was sold to Coury, he had no idea. He just knew that it was Pinot Noir. As I noted earlier, Erath told me that Clemente had both heat-treated and non-heat treated Pinot Noir growing side by side (which Austin Goheen showed him) and did not think that Clemente kept them separate.

In 1974, there were only two heat-treated clones of Pinot Noir available from the FPMS: UCD 5 (Pommard) and UCD 13 (Martini). Adelsheim believes that what he received from Coury in the first shipment was either entirely UCD 13 or a mix of UCD 13 and UCD 5. The wines made from that block are distinctly different from anything else produced at Adelsheim Vineyard and are bottled most years as a single-vineyard Pinot Noir called Quarter Mile Lane Vineyard. Cuttings from Coury’s first shipment are also planted at Adelsheim’s Boulder Bluff Vineyard.

Adelsheim’s second shipment was definitely UCD 5. He has taken cuttings from that planting and used them in many other vineyards and even sold them to friends in California when that clone was in limited supply there. Wines made from that block and its children definitely taste like Pommard.

Adelsheim points out that Coury sold vines to several others including Bill Wayne of Abbey Ridge and John Bauer of Goldschmidt Vineyard (now named Winderlea Vineyard and owned by Bill and Donna Sweat) about the same time as Adelsheim obtained his vines. He says, “To assume that everyone who purchased vines that year got the same thing, and that it should be called the “Coury clone,” cannot be supported. We alone got two different things from him that year. Who knows what others got. We refer to the vines planted from that first delivery in 1974 as Selection QM1, since it’s what’s planted in block one at our Quarter Mile Lane Vineyard. I have no idea if it’s at all related to what the Waynes or the Bauers received.”

Bill Wayne, the owner of Abbey Ridge Vineyard in the Dundee Hills also bought vines from Coury. Wayne and his wife Julia first planted Abbey Ridge Vineyard in 1977-1978 and is one of Oregon’s oldest producing vineyards. Wayne told me he bought some “Pommard” from Erath in 1978, and after a few years, he noticed there were some rogue vines mixed in including Gewürztraminer and some unusual, late ripening red variety. When he needed more Pommard vines to expand his vineyard in 1982, he obtained cuttings from Hyland Vineyard, because they were reputable growers and he assumed they did not have rogue vines.

Wayne rooted the cuttings and all seemed normal until about five years later when he noticed that the fruit from the 1982 “Pommard” plantings was not at all like the fruit from the “Pommard” block planted from Erath’s cuttings. The 1982 plantings had clusters that were smaller, ripened earlier, the leaves were different, and the canes were smaller. When he asked Jack Trenhaile, who had planted Hyland Vineyard along with the Kreimeyers, Markleys and Welches in 1971 and had managed it until 2007, where he obtained the budwood for the cuttings Wayne had bought, he said they had come from Coury’s vineyard near Forest Grove. Hyland Vineyard initially was planted exclusively to Coury “Pommard.

Some time later, Wayne asked Mark Teppola, who was farming the old Coury vineyard, about some “Pommard” that was atypical in his own vineyard. Teppola knew what he was talking about, but had no idea

of the origin of the budwood. Wayne also spoke to a friend who grew up with Coury's son, but by then Coury had left the grape business and was living in California. Finally, at a Christmas party, Wayne's friend asked Coury where he got the budwood for the atypical "Pommard" with the small clusters, and he confessed that he had "suitcased" the original budwood from a vineyard in Alsace and it was never Pommard. Wayne never did find out more about the origin, but, along with others, began calling it the "Coury clone," or "Coury Pommard."

Joel Myers is a veteran Willamette Valley viticulturist whose vineyard management company, Vinetenders, has managed Hyland Vineyard since 2009. The Myers family lived across the street from Charles and Shirley Coury and their two boys in Sacramento while Coury was studying at the University of California at Davis, finishing his master's thesis. Coury later confided in Myers that he brought suitcase cuttings into the United States from Alsace and planted them in Carneros where they did well. Coury said the clone was a wellperforming Pinot Noir clone in Alsace, but "was not identifiable as an Alsatian clone." He did not want to get into trouble so he did not disclose the source of the vines to anyone.

Myers said the morphology of the "Coury clone" planted at Hyland Vineyard is distinctly distinguishable from true Pommard, having smaller clusters and slightly less leaf veins. Myers does not believe the "Coury clone" is the same as Alsatian clone 538. In 2007, certified Pommard, Wädenswil, and Dijon clones were added to the mix at Hyland Vineyard, but the over 100-acre vineyard remains predominantly "Coury clone."

Winemaker Laurent Montalieu, one of the current owners of Hyland Vineyard, understood that the plant material from the Erath-Coury Nursery intended for Hyland Vineyard did not survive a severe frost. He believes Coury instead sold four families that planted Hyland Vineyard his Alsatian stock and it was rooted in 1971. Erath told me that Hyland Vineyard did plant some Pommard (FPMS 103) from mist propagated vines he supplied in 1971, but were planted late in the season because of the freeze damage to the mother vines. The timing of the breakup of the Erath-Coury partnership in mid-1971 coincided with the Hyland Vineyard initial planting, apparently confirming Erath's claim that the Alsatian stock was not sold during their partnership.

Coury sold vines to the Wahle family who began planting the original Wahle Vineyard in 1974, the first commercial vineyard planted in the Yamhill-Carlton District of the Willamette Valley. Mark Wahle, MD, the current owner and winemaker of Wahle Vineyards and Cellars, recalls traveling with his family to Coury's nursery in Forest Grove in the early and mid-1970s. Mark's father passed away in 2011 and eventually Mark hopes to sort through his father's records on those vine purchases. The vines were originally self-rooted and have been a prized one for the winery. Mark is now planting some grafted "Coury clone" from Duarte Nursery at a newer vineyard site (Holmes Hill) in the Eola Hills.

"Coury clone" vines are also at Abre Vert Vineyard (Chehalem Mountains), Battle Creek Vineyard (135 acres of Pinot Noir on the southeastern side of Salem, first harvested in 2002), Beran Vineyards (planted in 1972 and 1979, Chehalem Mountains), Coeur de Terre Vineyard (initially planted in 1998, McMinnville), Emery Vineyard (WillaKenzie Estate), Hawk's View Vineyard (Hawks View Cellars, planted in 1991, 1997 and 1998, Chehalem Mountains), Laurel Vineyard (11 acres planted in 1981 in Chehalem Mountains), Noble Knob Vineyard, Olson Estate Vineyard (Torii Mor, Dundee Hills, originally planted in 1972), Alexana Vineyard (planted in 2003, 2006 and 2007, Dundee Hills) and Trisateum Ribbon Ridge Estate Vineyard (planted in 2007, Ribbon Ridge). Undoubtedly, there are a number of other vineyards in Oregon to add to this list, especially those that were planted in the 1970s by Ponzi and others.

Morphology & Sensory Characteristics of the "Coury Clone"

It is impossible to specifically characterize the "Coury clone" since Coury sold various selections from his original plants including true Pommard clone and morphological signs such as cluster and berry size can be radically influenced by site. This was demonstrated when I asked several winemakers and growers about the appearance of "Coury clone" fruit. Most said the clusters were smaller than Pommard, but Lynn Penner-Ash, who has worked with vineyards that contained the "Coury clone" since moving to Oregon in 1988, told me she thought the clusters were larger with larger grapes. She confided, "I always thought the Coury plantings were a mixture of Pommard and Wädenswil to be honest!" Winegrower and winemaker Laurent Montalieu also told me that he thought the "Coury clone" was mid way between Pommard and Wädenswil.

Vine Morphology: usually smaller clusters; both large and small grape size reported, but more often small; less leaf veins.

Sensory Character of Wines made from “Coury clone”: good to great color; rich, fruity and intense wines; Penner-Ash describes the wines as lighter, spicier, fresh red fruit character with a wonderful texture. Amy Wesselman characterizes the wines from Abbey Ridge Vineyard from which she has made “Coury clone” Pinot Noir for 20 years as possessing a very distinctive hallmark that is hard to pin down, showing everything from lavender to savory herb to meaty to olive oil. She notes that it is always her most age worthy Pinot Noir, even though it has more finesse and elegance than anything else she bottles. Jason Lett describes a “funky, animal flavor.”

Conclusions & Summary: Mystery Unsolved

- 1) Charles Coury brought suitcase cuttings of Pinot Noir from Alsace into the United States in 1964, planted them in Carneros, and transplanted them to Forest Grove, Oregon. He never disclosed the clonal or selection type and this has never been determined.
- 2) Various selections from Coury’s original plantings have been replanted in Oregon and called “Coury clone” but there is no line from a single plant source other than material that traces back to its origins at FPMS. It is thus incorrect to refer to a “Coury clone,” as it is not a true clone.
- 3) The term “Coury clone” has become common parlance among wineries, winemakers and winegrowers to refer to the vines Coury sold from his nursery in the 1970s to growers and wineries in Oregon.
- 4) Pommard was brought into Oregon through the FPMS program via multiple sources but it is not a “Coury clone” other than it may have been included in some of his early material.

The Research Continues

The Alsatian suitcase material known as the “Coury clone” has never been submitted to FPMS for inclusion in their catalog. I contacted Neil Shay, Director of the Oregon Wine Research Institute at Oregon State University and Professor of Food Science & Technology and asked for his assistance. He is planning to obtain plant material from vines identified as the “Coury clone,” and send them for DNA sequencing to identify a possible clonal source. Several vineyards will be sampled. Joel Myers told me that the “Coury clone” vines are not virused. It is not known if they were heat-treated, but since they exhibit moderate vigor, it would be unlikely if they were not. If the plant material turns out to be unique, it could be sent to FPMS at UCD and considered for inclusion in their catalog. Stay tuned.
