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## The History of Oregon Pinot Noir Clones

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# The History of Oregon Pinot Noir Clones

Some of the following information was excerpted from an article titled, "Mothers & Clones," written by Jason Lett in the *Oregon Wine Magazine* 2004.

The story of Oregon's quest to import suitable Pinot Noir clones is at the heart of the this state's wine industry success. The clonal selection chosen for producing Pinot Noir along with the soils, microclimate and viticulture are crucially important in determining the resultant flavor profile of the wine. A clone is a separate vine genetically identical to its mother plant. It has the same growth habit, flavors and ripening time compared to the vine it originated from. Clones are propagated by taking cuttings from a mother vine. Seeds cannot be used since after pollination, the new seeds will not be genetically identical. In the early 1960s, there was only one non-virused University-certified clone of Pinot Noir available in the United States. It was imported to University California Davis from Burgundy, but certified in Switzerland at Wädenswil (UCD 1A and 2A). All Pinot Noir clones and selections planted in North America originally came from France.

David Lett brought a carload of Wädenswil clone (UCD 1A ) cuttings from University California Davis to Oregon in 1965. With time, this clone has proven its metal in Oregon. Lett's 1975 Eyrie Vineyards South Block Reserve Pinot Noir was vinified solely from UCD 1A and won international acclaim.

The Pommard clone UCD 4 was brought to Oregon by Dick Erath and Charles Coury. It produced a flavor profile that was complimentary to the Wädenswil clone and is the most widely planted Pinot Noir clone in Oregon. Coury sold cuttings from his nursery that purportedly were Pommard and became known as the Coury clone, but these cuttings, which are widely planted in Oregon vineyards are not the same as Pommard clone, probably represent one or more suitcase selections brought into the US by Coury from Alsace, are not a true clone.

In the early 1970s, three Pinot Noir clones were available from Davis: Wädenswil, Pommard and a third minor clone mislabeled as Gamay Beaujolais. There were also a few suitcase selections such as the Coury "clone." Early Oregon Pinot Noirs were often a blend of Wädenswil, Pommard UCD 4, and Coury "clones."

Serious viral infestation in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in France in the 1960s led French officials to start a clonal trial program that led to the discovery of what are now known as the "Dijon" clones. In order to acquire some of these newer clones from Europe, Oregon growers enticed Oregon State University to obtain an import permit from the USDA so that clonal material could be sent directly to Oregon from Europe. Initially they were only able to get low quality Pinot Noir clones.

In the 1980s, Dr. Raymond Bernard, one of the developers of clones in Burgundy and regional director of the Office National Interprofessional des Vins (ONIVINS) in Dijon, France, became sympathetic to Oregon's cause. He had spent time with David Lett in 1964. In 1984, Bernard sent Pinot Noir clones 113, 114, 115, and in 1988, 667 and 777. The laboratory technicians at Oregon State University nicknamed the imported cuttings "Dijon clones" after the return address on the shipping container, and the name has become part of viticulture lexicon and widely accepted. Together they became known as the "Dijon" clones and all are descended from individual plants that grow in vineyards belonging to Jean-Marie Ponsot of Morey-St.-Denis. Dr. Bernard's donation had a significant influence on the success of Oregon and New World Pinot Noir. Today, there are well over 200 clones of Pinot Noir (some have claimed as many as a 1,000). 50 of the

clones are certified and 15 are significantly propagated. The controversy continues over which makes the best Pinot Noir, a wine from a single clone or a blend of clones. In addition, there is an ongoing argument about which is better, official clones or “indigenous clones” from individual vineyards known as *selection massale*.

The latest Dijon clone to appear in Oregon is 828 and its success is unproven. Most recently, certain heritage clones from California have been planted in Oregon vineyards to add to the clonal diversity that is prized by a number of producers.

In summary, the clones and selections planted in Oregon now mirror those in California and include UCD 2A (Wädenswil), UCD 23 (Mariafeld), UCD 4 and 5 (Pommard), Dijon 113, 114, 115, 667, 777 and 828, and various suitcase and heritage selections. California has considerably more plantings of heritage clones and selections including UCD 37 (Mt. Eden), UCD 9, 16 (Jackson), UCD 97 (Swan), UCD 32, 33, 41 (Roederer) Calera, Chalone, Rochioli, and Wente.

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