



DAVID EATWELL OF SPOONBILL WINES

A Passion for Pinot

BY DIANE ALT

Chris and David Eatwell

BURGUNDY, SONOMA AND OREGON'S Willamette Valley—pinot noir enthusiasts will quickly recognize the common thread of regions noted for their production of the finicky grape.

With an appreciation for pinot noir, retired mechanical engineer and native New Zealander David Eatwell of St. Louis certainly values these regions. Eatwell has traveled to two of them, Burgundy (at Domaine Chandon de Briailles) and Willamette Valley (at Domaine Drouhin Oregon), in his process to learn more about the art of making wine, turning his passion into a second career with Spoonbill Wines out of New Zealand. "For about 25 years, I had been collecting wine; and after retiring, I needed something to do," he explains. "I suppose my engineering brain got the better of me because I wanted to dig deeper to see what was really behind it all. I discovered that I love making wine and that I also love growing the grapes."

As an engineer, a professional opportunity brought Eatwell to the U.S. in 1980. He later met his future wife, Chris, a St. Louisan. With his extended family still in New Zealand, the couple purchased a home in 2000 in Marlborough, which is known for its sauvignon blanc. "Pinot noir is not as well-known in Marlborough; and prior to 2007, winemakers struggled with the grape," he recalls. "But I think the vines are getting older now and the wines are becoming very good. Marlborough is located in a valley—it's very similar to Napa Valley—and it's a cooler, maritime climate great for pinot noir." Eatwell says that he had the opportunity to make wine from

the grapes in a vineyard in Marlborough for two years prior to he and his wife buying it in 2008. "I realized how good the wine was, so we decided to purchase it. Pinot noir is truly my passion, and that's the majority of the grapes that we grow—we have 13 acres, and 11 of those are pinot noir."

The Eatwells' vineyard is named Rawiri, which translates to 'David' in Maori, the native language of New Zealand. Every year, the couple winters in Marlborough, where it's summer in the southern hemisphere. And then in April, Eatwell makes his wine under the Spoonbill Wine label, which, along with a pinot noir reserve and pinot noir reserve estate, also includes a pinot gris and sauvignon blanc. "Our house is located on the water, and we have a lot of birdlife, especially these spoonbills birds," Eatwell explains. "When we were trying to come up with a name for the wine, a very good friend of mine painted a watercolor of one of these birds, which led me to think it would be a good name. So the bird that you see on the label is actually his watercolor."

With production at some 500 cases annually, Eatwell enjoys having complete control of the process. "I love growing my own grapes because the wine is basically made in the vineyard—then it's up to the winemakers not to mess it up," he says. When asked to describe his pinot noir, Eatwell explains that it falls somewhere between New World (California) and Burgundy. "Because I'm crazy, I took my wine over to Burgundy, because the French will tell you exactly what they think—they're very

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passionate about their own wine," he says. "We had a blind tasting with my 2011 pinot noir, and they thought my wine was French! They thought it was actually from the Loire Valley! But some of the New World pinot noir is made so big, and they're not as heavy in color—they're quite different from the French. So I would say my pinot noir is somewhere in-between the two."

With regard to tasting notes, Eatwell lets the drinker decide. "It smells like a pinot noir, it tastes like a pinot noir, and it is a pinot noir," he laughs. "When I go into a grocery store and purchase a strawberry, and then bite into it, I don't say, *Oh, this strawberry tastes like a pinot noir!* I leave that up to the person drinking it to come up with their own ideas and their own perception of it."

On Sunday, Dec. 8, Balaban's Wine Cellar & Tapas Bar will host a wine dinner featuring David Eatwell and Spoonbill Wine. For more information, visit balabanswine.com.