

WILLAKENZIE ESTATE

BERNARD AND RONNI LACROUTE

Bernard and Ronni are co-owners of WillaKenzie Estate. They met as graduate students at the University of Michigan, and after many years of living on the East Coast and in California, they bought the property that became WillaKenzie Estate in 1991. They have since divorced, but continue their collaborative business partnership, actively guiding all aspects of grape growing and winemaking at WillaKenzie Estate.

BERNARD LACROUTE

Bernard grew up in a small village on the eastern edge of Burgundy, France, where he developed an early taste for Pinot Noir, instead of milk. After a classical education with much Latin, mathematics, some Shakespearean English and vast quantities of bad Pinot Noir, he graduated with master's degrees in physics and electrical engineering from the French school system. Committed to more esoteric stuff and more bad wine, he went off to study plasma physics with a NASA fellowship at the University of Michigan, where he met Ronni, improving his skills in spoken English (no more Shakespeare), and surviving more bad jug wines. After a successful career building computers, then computer companies, and with a taste for progressively better Pinot Noir, Bernard decided to close the loop and return to his roots. WillaKenzie Estate is his dream to make great Pinot Noir in an environment relatively unencumbered by bureaucracy, where tradition can be blended with innovation.

RONNI LACROUTE

Ronni grew up in the suburbs of New York City and Washington, D.C., and then finished high school in Switzerland, which is how she first learned to drink wine and to think in French. After earning a bachelor's degree in French at Cornell University, she completed a master's degree in romance languages at the University of Michigan. Several subsequent years of life in France included graduate degrees at the Sorbonne, much thinking in French, and a better selection of wines. The next stage of her life began with a return to the United States, 14 years of teaching French in Massachusetts, much thinking in French, occasional wine drinking, and then a momentous move to the West Coast. Next there were 14 years in Silicon Valley, California, with occasional teaching, much organic gardening and thinking in French, and a strong focus on tasting fine wines. After visiting many vineyards in California and in France, Ronni dreamed of creating a high quality, family wine estate. It was also in California that Ronni became devoted to yoga and the growing of fruit trees (while sometimes thinking in French). In 1997, Ronni became an Oregonian and is proud to reveal that she now can think in Oregonian as well as in French.

THIBAUD MANDET, WINEMAKER

Thibaud was born in Auvergne, France, a land of mostly extinct volcanoes, great cheeses, world famous rubber treads (Michelin tires), but not much local wine. He earned a degree in chemistry, then moved on to study the more interesting field of wine chemistry in Bordeaux, where he completed his graduate diploma at the University of Enology of Bordeaux. He then moved on for more chemistry and a postgraduate degree in bubbly winemaking from Reims in Champagne. So he learned how to make red wine, sparkling wine, eat cheese, then traveled to Corsica and Texas to see if he could help make wine to accompany stinky cheese, before landing at WillaKenzie in the spring of 2000. Thibaud is passionate about Pinot Noir and a perfectionist about balance, aromas and mouthfeel in wines. He shares the WillaKenzie commitment to the highest quality standards both in the vineyard and the winery, as well as gentle nurturing of the wines to achieve the best expression of the WillaKenzie terroir, but he has yet to learn about making cheese!

