

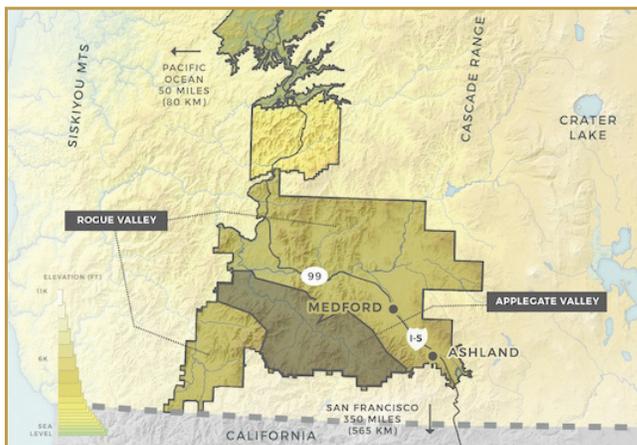
It's an old story. A wine region becomes established, bottle prices rise, land values follow, and young or less flush producers get pushed to the fringe.

That may be a gross exaggeration, but it's at least a viable approximation of what happened in Burgundy, Napa Valley, and other blue-chip appellations. And it's a blueprint for what's beginning to transpire in Oregon.

The last two decades have witnessed a surge of interest in Pinot Noir. That, plus a generational pivot toward a leaner style of wines, has resulted in the skyrocketing popularity of the Willamette Valley. This excitement has manifested in several ways: in a slew of articles praising the high quality of the area's output; the recent investments by multiple top-tier Burgundy producers....



THE SOUTHERN SOUTH-Rogue Valley AVA (1991)  
Irvine & Roberts in Bear Creek Valley (Photo credit: Oregon Wine Board)



Not surprisingly, this has sent a number of producers scouting farther afield. The Columbia Gorge has received considerable attention, but... Southern Oregon is far more important in terms of volume (at 22%, it is second only to Willamette), and the quality of its wines has risen sharply in the last few years.

Though its northernmost fingers brush against the Willamette, the climate and geology of these two overarching appellations are considerably different. . . many parts are higher in elevation, and the region as a whole is more mountainous in feel. . . Rainfall is also moderate, as the Siskiyou create a substantial rain shadow.

In terms of soil, variation is the rule. The confluence of the three mountain chains and multiple rivers make for a jumble of bedrocks and topsoils. . . Many of the higher elevation sites feature decomposed sandstone and granite, with granite outcroppings especially common in the foothills of the Cascades. As the region's many valleys trace either ancient or active river paths, their floors are rich in gravel. Alluvial deposits are found across the region and volcanic material is sprinkled throughout. . . .

...outsiders with impressive resumes began trickling in to the Rogue and the Umpqua. Vince Vidrine of Irvine & Roberts came straight from Domaine Serene in the Willamette...

## IRVINE & ROBERTS

The highlights of the Irvine & Roberts portfolio are their Pinot Noirs, of which they produce several. The entry-level 2015 Rogue Valley Pinot Noir is made from their youngest vines. This feels like a warmer-climate Pinot Noir, but though the fruit is big, rich, and dark, the wine retains enough freshness to avoid feeling heavy. The individual clone bottlings were fun, and in keeping with the known profile of their scions. The 2016 777 Block was pure black cherry juice, with a lush texture and creamy tannins. The 2015 115 Block was much brighter, offering a big hit of acid, redder fruits, and superior energy. The 2016 Pinot Meunier (a still red wine) was also enjoyable. It was particularly savory, with a nose of blood and crushed flowers, a coating palate, and a finish evocative of spiced citrus.

Excerpts taken from [https://www.guildsomm.com/public\\_content/features/articles/b/kelli-white/posts/southern-oregon](https://www.guildsomm.com/public_content/features/articles/b/kelli-white/posts/southern-oregon)