

# Wine Spectator

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## Tastes of Italy

SIGNATURE WINES AND  
FOODS FROM EVERY REGION

## California Pinot Noir

THE 2023 VINTAGE:  
A 96-POINT STUNNER

Assisi, in Italy's  
Umbria region





## Frescobaldi in Oregon

Napa Valley was the first place Lamberto Frescobaldi considered when his family's wine company, Italy's Marchesi Frescobaldi, went winery shopping in the United States. Frescobaldi studied viticulture and enology at University of California, Davis, in the 1980s, just as Napa was booming. It was an exciting time in California wine and Frescobaldi wanted to be part of it.

That aspiration never came to fruition, but more than 30 years later, Frescobaldi found what he was looking for: Oregon and Pinot Noir.

"There is something magic about this place and Pinot Noir," Frescobaldi said as he stood on the deck at Domaine Roy & Fils and looked out on a brilliant green landscape of the Dundee Hills in Willamette Valley. Founded in 2012, Domaine Roy was acquired by Frescobaldi in 2023, and the family has methodically made adjustments to the winemaking, the vineyards and the winery, which was completed in 2015.

"We now have more tanks and space in the cellar and can become even more precise about keeping separate every lot possible," Frescobaldi said. "Because how can you get to know a location if you don't select, select, select? Only then can you make the blends."

I've been reviewing Domaine Roy Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays since the first vintage release in 2015 and every bottling has earned an outstanding 90 points or higher on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale. Italian winemaker Jacopo Canciani from the Frescobaldi team took over winemaking in 2023.

Jared Etzel was the original winemaker when he joined with Marc-André Roy (and a group of investors) to launch Domaine Roy. They are the sons of Beaux Frères founders Mike Etzel and Robert Roy, respectively. The partnership did not always run smoothly. "There were 28 friends originally but after 10 years, they were a little bit less friends," a tactful Frescobaldi explained.

The path to Willamette Valley for Frescobaldi was a long one. "I have a soft spot for California because of my Davis experience," he said. "Napa is definitely an amazing place to grow beautiful Cabernet Sauvignon. We got very close to a winery in Coombsville, but unfortunately it didn't happen."

After what he described as "endless visits to Napa," Frescobaldi was not finding what he wanted. "I always thought that



*A friend told the Italian vintner about Domaine Roy, and Frescobaldi knew he'd finally found his place in America.*

in Napa, it would have been very difficult to have the return on investment in a reasonable time. That was always scaring me," he said. "To produce a good wine, what does it mean? It means that you never have to cut corners, and when there is a financial constraint, which happens quite often, you start cutting corners."

Finally, a friend suggested Oregon. Frescobaldi was skeptical. "Pinot Noir is a damn difficult variety to deal with," he argued. That, and most Oregon wine is consumed in Oregon, not around the world. "But honestly, I was just talking without knowing."

His friend connected him with Marc-André Roy, and in a matter of days Frescobaldi knew he had found his place in America. As Frescobaldi talked about the future of Domaine Roy, he emphasized the importance of patience. The plan is to grow slowly and incrementally rather than quickly expand production.

"Historically, we have always been landowners. That is most probably why we are able to be so patient," he said. "Our philosophy has always been to grow the grapes for the wines we bottle. It is very different in this part of the world, where many wineries buy fruit on the market."

The winery has two estate vineyards: Iron Filbert is located at the Dundee winery and has 13 acres of Pinot and 2 acres of Chardonnay; Quartz Acorn is a few miles away in Yamhill-Carlton and consists of 21 acres of Pinot Noir and 3 acres of Chardonnay. This year and next they plan to add 20 more acres at Quartz Acorn.

"A wine has to be good, but it also needs to have a soul, an identity, that you're able to capture by focusing on the vineyard year after year," Frescobaldi said. "You want people to recognize the site rather than the person who made the wine, and that is what we are trying to do also here."

Frescobaldi is wise enough to know the challenges that lay ahead, especially in the current wine market. He is slowly expanding Domaine Roy's distribution in America and around the world. A few pallets sold quickly in his native Italy recently, and there is interest in Vietnam, Japan and Canada.

"This world is about patience. You will have ups and downs, and hopefully you'll have more ups to balance the downs, but there are always downs," he said. "It's all about taking the long view."

Senior editor Tim Fish has been with *Wine Spectator* since 2001.