

# 2018 Division-Villages “l’Isle Verte”

## Chenin Blanc

### Columbia Valley AVA Willard Vineyard

One of the fastest growing and diverse American wine growing regions of the past 40 years is the Columbia Valley, a wide swath of land that reaches from the northern border of Oregon to well into the northeastern parts of Washington State. Within this region is a is the Yakima Valley, home to our old vine Chenin Blanc at Willard Farms. This Chenin vineyard has over 40 years of own-rooted development at the highest elevation in the north central Yakima, which helps insulate the vines from the year to year climate variation.

The Willard Chenin vines are planted on soils formed from volcanic Miocene uplift against basalt bedrock with the primary topsoil being made up of quartz and lime silica, overlaid with the mixed glacial sedimentary runoff of Missoula floods that makes the soils in the region so dynamic and unique. We adore this particular site, as it is one of the last remaining old vine Chenin Blanc sites in the Pacific Northwest, has demonstrated a unique and interesting terroir influence in the wines, and is farmed by an excellent, albeit quirky, farmer named Jim Willard who has a deep understanding of the soils and region.

Taking a page from the books of some of our favorite domaines of the Loire Valley, we make multiple picking passes (typically two in the year) to pick both vibrant and lively earlier acid driven grapes, and the more fruit concentrated and complex flavored later picked grapes. During the past three growing seasons, we have worked extensively with the shoot positioning and yield and canopy management to improve Chenin’s notorious variability in ripeness. The cumulative results have been clearly beneficial with our most even and healthy harvest yet in 2018. As the weather cooled and stayed dry, the ripening slowed and we were able to accumulate some nice hang time on the vines before the primary 2nd pick, which dominates the “l’Isle Verte.”

We created a pied de cuve (early native ferment) with a small amount of grapes from the vineyard to build a strong yeast population from the native flora. The second pick juice was split between the heart of the press, which went directly into a stainless barrel and the rest being split into mostly neutral and one year old French oak barrels. The ferments took off quickly this year and completed quite quickly going completely dry, the first time in our experience from this site.

Vintage variation is one of the greatest joys of how and where we work. Contrasting 2017, the 2018 L’Isle Verte shows the deliciously savory and mineral qualities of this grape. Leading with salty notes of beach sand, toasted coconut, lime, and a faint hint of mushroom, this wine is truly “clawed from the earth”. Long, gorgeous, mouth-coating acid, and the structure we’ve come to expect from Willard’s superb old-vine Chenin fruit give way to a lime zesty finish.

**Alc 13.7%, 261 cases produced**

