

# 2019 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 45 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.

The 2019 growing season was in some ways one of the greatest we’ve seen since taking over this block in 2013, but was also the most challenging due to a hard early frost and some snow in late September which completely destroyed the canopy. This meant the end of the growing season for our block and the need to immediately harvest the undamaged grapes. Unfortunately, we lost about of 40% of the normalized yield to both frost damage and/or low maturity that needed to be left or sorted out. What remained was fantastic in character and a throwback to the vintages of yesteryears!

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 pressed juice was split between the heart of the press, which went directly into a stainless barrel and an a single oak barrel, with the rest being settled and fermented in neutral and one year old French oak barrels. The ferments took off right away this year and completed very quickly and going completely dry, the first time in our experience from this site. With the acidity being higher this year, we extended the lees ageing time an additional two months and bottled the wine unfiltered and unfined in June of 2020.

Vintage variation is one of the greatest joys of how and where we work. Contrasting 2018, the 2019 L’Isle Verte shows the deliciously savory and mineral qualities of this grape and a very nervy backbone. Leading with salty notes and chalk, as well as a faint hint of cardamom, 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 zesty finish.

**Alc 12.4%, 210 cases produced**

