

2020 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 2020 vintage created some unique challenges for the entire West Coast, most notably the wildfires that plagued Oregon and California. Thankfully, Willard Farms and the Columbia Valley was spared from the fires and experienced mostly only high level haze. However, poor yields, like Oregon, were the norm in the Columbia Valley too from a poor fruit set during the flowering in June. The resultant small fruit crop had extremely high quality, but we unfortunately were 40% off of average yields, so our wine production is down considerably for 2020.

Like in years past, 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 puncheon (500L) barrel, with the rest being settled and fermented in neutral French oak barrels and stainless steel barrels. The ferments took off easily this year and completed relatively quickly. The wines went completely dry this year, which is not always the case. Aging on the lees was kept to five months before being bottled, which is the typical amount for most other vintages.

The previous vintage L’Isle Verte was such an anomaly for us due to the early frosts, that we were very excited to see a return to the characteristics we know and love from Willard Farms. The 2020 wine aromatics screamed Chenin Blanc and had all the wooly and honeysuckle floral aromatics we adore. Electric mineral qualities of this grape and a nervy, but dense core lead the palate with chalk and peach skin most apparent. Long, gorgeous, mouth-coating acid coating the rich structure we’ve come to expect from Willard’s superb old-vine Chenin fruit give way to a classic Chenin Blanc finish. Only 178 cases this vintage, but they are truly worth stocking up!

Alc 13.0%, 178 cases produced

