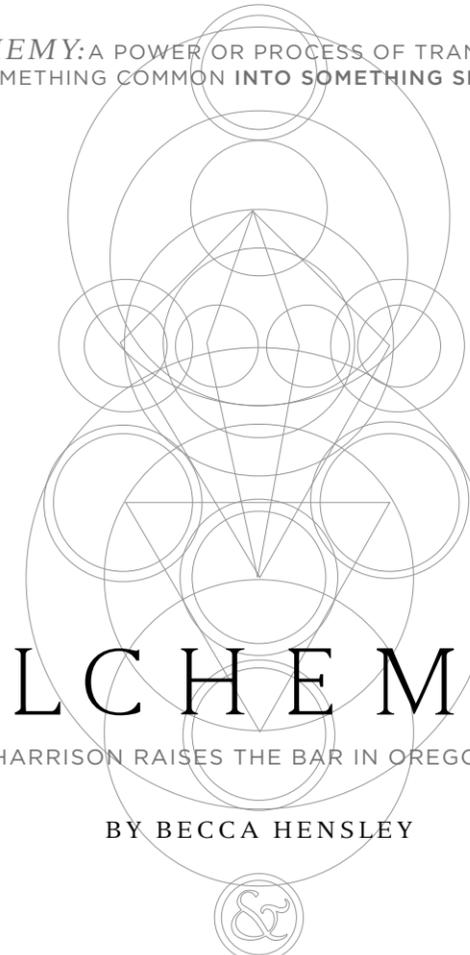




ALCHEMY: A POWER OR PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING
SOMETHING COMMON INTO SOMETHING SPECIAL



THE ALCHEMIST

WINEMAKER MAGGIE HARRISON RAISES THE BAR IN OREGON'S WILLAMETTE VALLEY

BY BECCA HENSLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE SCHMELZER

A

ntica Terra winemaker Maggie Harrison can't stop herself. She starts to cry.

Harrison is pouring wine for 10 rapt oenophiles in an oak barrel-lined tasting room near Dundee in Oregon's Willamette Valley. As she speaks, they listen around a rustic wooden table, their glasses empty, some with their faces still in contemplation. "Wine is a lifelong pursuit," Harrison says. "All I can do is be present, to be completely in the moment. I simply ask myself: What is the most beautiful thing I can do right now? That's all I have. One chance. Once a year—to make beautiful wine." Then Harrison laughs and flits around the table, her corkscrew curls bouncing as she moves. She pours generous inches of rosé wine. It smells of strawberries newly fallen from the vine and glazed by the warmth of the sun. "Drink," she says. "I'll stop talking now."



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Words like alchemist, sprite, and ethereal come to mind when describing Harrison, who cut her teeth making wine at Central California's Sine Qua Non, perhaps the sanctum for those who worship at the altar of intuitive, idiosyncratic Rhone-style wine. There, under the tutelage of Austrian Manfred Krankl, she planned to stay forever, raise a family, tend to Sine Qua Non's barrels, and delve into her own label of California syrah, Lillian.

But a trip to the pine-studded Willamette Valley, an hour's drive southwest of Portland, changed all that. Three friends wanted to buy a vineyard, and

they hoped Harrison would craft their wine. She refused, but they lured her to Oregon in 2005 to simply take a look and proffer an opinion. Within seconds of rifling through the fossil-filled, rocky earth, feeling the tickle of cool wind, and touching the strangely stunted, hill-sited vines, Harrison bit. Now she belongs to this "demented land," as she describes it.

Nearly a decade later, the vineyard, set apart from the winery in the Eola-Amity Hills, has expanded to 11 acres. The vines still look funky. Sitting atop slabs of stone, they can't root in, and, though well tended, they have a feral presence. "This land is a geological anomaly. There is no soil," Harrison says. "It's a farming challenge." Like a sentry, she peers this way and that. She caresses the smaller-than-normal berries, looking for flaws and assessing ripeness. "Every decision in winemaking feels so intensely personal," she says. "I am connected to this vineyard on such a primal level." She sighs. Bites

her lips. Kneels down to touch the earth. "Truly, I am so indecisive. I am not the right person for this job."

The experts would tend to disagree. Harrison's wines, her methodology, and her magic garner rave reviews. She's the genius who transforms scrappy landscape into soulful wines. "I am not exaggerating

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when I say—often—that I place Antica Terra firmly in my top 20 wineries in the world," exults Ian Burrows, lead sommelier and wine director at San Francisco's Atelier Crenn. "There are vigneronns with whom you can chat about their wine, and

you realize that they are operating mentally on a different plane from others. You feel their understanding of the universe is so fine that they have an almost unreal control over the quality of their products."

WILLAMETTE VALLEY, which boasts more than 300 wineries, occupies the 45th parallel, like Burgundy in France. Fertile, but more volatile and less forgiving than California's winelands, the hilly area has a truncated growing season—and farmers work hard to harvest before the rains prevail. The region looks nothing like the better-known Napa Valley, where rows and rows of vines mark the land like neatly plaited ponytails. Here the vista unravels to present lilac fields, filbert orchards, vegetable farms, eccentric small towns, and a rushing river. The wineries are downscale, casual affairs: barnyards, farmhouses, garages, or graffiti-covered, aluminum-sided, quasi-converted warehouses. Signage is virtually nonexistent. Along back roads, vineyards wedge into nooks and crannies and hide along hillsides.

Yet, it is here, in this most unpretentious of wine regions, where pinot noir, one of the world's most vaunted grapes, thrives—thanks to volcanic soil, mild weather, and gentle hills. Its yield is berry-toned, tobacco-scented, mushroom infused, and long down the gullet. "Pinot noir is a lens that gives terroir great clarity," Harrison says. Given this temperamental land, "That can be very good—or very bad."

Harrison succeeds by creating balanced, complex pinot noirs that stand out

PAGES 38-39 WINEMAKER MAGGIE HARRISON IN ANTICA TERRA'S WINE CELLAR. **OPPOSITE PAGE** GENTLE HILLS MARK OREGON'S WILLAMETTE VALLEY. **THIS PAGE, FROM TOP** LACK OF SOIL LEADS TO SMALLER GRAPES; HARRISON'S 2012 LINE INCLUDES CHARDONNAY, PINOT NOIR, AND ROSÉ.



WANT TO TIPPLE?

■ **2013 AURATA CHARDONNAY** Small-lot explosion of citrus and caramels

■ **2012 ANTIKYTHERA PINOT NOIR** Meditative, a peppery umami, cranberry feast

■ **2012 BOTANICA PINOT NOIR** A mysterious plunge into succulence that tastes of wild rose and cherry jam

■ **2012 CERAS PINOT NOIR** A ripe berry, stone fruit discharge with earth tones

■ **2012 ANGELICALL** Flirty but bold, suspender grabbing—citrus meets plum and berry

WANT TO TASTE?

Harrison offers private, seated tastings Wednesdays through Sundays. The morning tasting at 11 am provides five tastes and thin slices of Jamón Ibérico de Bellota. At 1 pm, Harrison doles out nine tastings, which include wines she makes plus a selection that inspire her—and food pairings from foie gras to chocolate.

WANT TO LOOK?

Partnering with like-minded Portland boutiques, Antica Terra has launched Wine by

Design. Visitors to the tasting room can purchase wine glasses, linens, and other wine-ware to complement Harrison's wines. This year features simple, beautiful, functional goods from CANOE, and next year Alder & Co., a chic, kitchen-centric boutique, will display their wares. And, don't forget, even Antica Terra's bottles are true works of art, with metaphorical names and labels conceived by Harrison along with the commercial art firm Heroist. anticaterra.com



in a valley that excels in them. “Her pinot noirs make me rethink what Oregon is capable of,” muses Star Black, wine director of Clyde Commons and Olympic Provisions in Portland. But capturing even more acclaim is Harrison’s success with

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other varietals for the boutique Antica Terra. “I feel like Oregon is such a young winemaking region,” she says. “Still, the vision around here is mostly about pinot; the rules are set in stone. That’s not me. I just want to chase the possibilities.” So, she’s been willing to experiment. “Every year we look forward to seeing what else is possible. Some grapes may fail, but I have to try.”

DABBLING WITH CHARDONNAY, a grape Harrison calls “a monster,” she successfully produces small-lot, barely oaky wine with a caramel candy body and intermittent bursts of citrus. “Her whites—roussanne and chardonnay—are as compelling as her reds, so complex and polished with a fine-grain texture,” says Ian Burrows.

And her sexy, unconventional rosé, Angelicall, brings even those who eschew pink wine to their knees in homage. “It snaps your head to attention,” Black says.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT THE AGING PROCESS; HARRISON’S COLLECTION OF CORKS REPRESENTS THE FRUITS OF HER LABORS; DECANTING THE PINOT; READY FOR THE PRESS. **THIS PAGE** HARRISON EARNS PRAISE FROM THE CRITICS FOR THE COMPLEXITY OF HER WINES.



Kept in the barrels almost to the point of becoming a red wine, Angelicall is more than a picnic wine. It is dark salmon-hued, grounded with minerality, and redolent of rich plum, grapefruit, and dried strawberry. “Her rosé is not shy—it’s assertive enough for hearty fare off the grill,” Black adds.

Heidi Turzyn, the wine director at New York’s Gotham Bar and Grill who touts Harrison for “thinking outside the box,” always includes Antica Terra wines—white, rosé, and red—on her list. “I enjoy Maggie’s wines very much, especially her rosé,” she says. “It’s different. It’s fun. The juice sits on its skins for an extended period of time, leading to a fuller-bodied rosé that is mineral driven.”

Turzyn is quick to cite Harrison’s singular touch: “Maggie’s wines are great because they evoke Maggie. I see her as an artist. She knows how to express her

vision by eliciting the grapes and the land simultaneously.” Dustin Wilson, wine director of the Michelin three-star institution Eleven Madison Park in Manhattan, agrees. “You feel her touch, but without losing sense of terroir,” he says.

Reserving a few acres of the vineyard for experimental plantings—grapes like the godello from northwest Spain—Harrison continues her quest to discover which grapes might flourish in the emerald Willamette. Ever curious and restless, Harrison continues to seek out more obscure grapes from Europe and to partner with master winemakers around the world. This makes her vineyard and winery a sort of vintner’s laboratory. “We are all pioneers here in this valley,” she says magnanimously. “And I have undying curiosity. I just can’t stop leaning in.”

Lean on in, Maggie. There are empty glasses to fill. ●