

## People, Place, And Story

An Interview with Mike Osborn, Chief Executive Officer, Willamette Valley Vineyards

**EDITORS' NOTE** In 2025, Willamette Valley Vineyards appointed Mike Osborn – founder of Wine.com and a trailblazer in digital wine retail – as Chief Executive Officer. A native of Southern Oregon, Osborn brings a wealth of experience in marketing, technology, and consumer engagement, positioning the winery for accelerated growth in both domestic and global markets. As the founder of Wine.com, Osborn revolutionized the way consumers discover and enjoy wine, building the nation's leading online wine retailer over nearly three decades.



Mike Osborn

**What excited you about the opportunity to lead Willamette Valley Vineyards and made you feel it was the right fit?**

There's only one Jim Bernau, and there's only one chance to follow a founder of his caliber. What drew me in was the alignment of values – integrity, innovation, community – and the shared belief that Oregon can produce truly world-class wines across multiple varieties. I was also inspired by the unique shareholder model and the legacy Jim built over four decades. As

I studied the brand, I saw a vibrant customer base that mirrored that of Wine.com – equally balanced across generations, which is rare in wine. That energy and potential made it clear this was the right place and time. Beyond the business model and Jim as a force in the industry, I had already had a connection to the brand, as it was one that I consistently revisited as I traversed through the wine industry at a young age – and is still at my table today.

**Will you highlight the history of Willamette Valley Vineyards and how the brand has evolved?**

Willamette Valley Vineyards was founded in 1983 by Jim Bernau, who had the foresight and commitment to help elevate Oregon wine, especially Pinot Noir, to international recognition. From the very beginning, the winery was

about collaboration, sustainability, and community. Today, the winery operates nine tasting rooms and is recognized as one of the most respected estate wineries in the Pacific Northwest.

A handful of components make Willamette Valley Vineyards exceptionally unique – firstly being its community ownership model. Jim pioneered this model, bringing thousands of wine lovers into the fold as shareholders. As one of the nation's only community-owned, publicly traded wineries, Willamette Valley Vineyards blends traditional wine values with a modern investor model, allowing a unique opportunity to own a part of a winery you love. This is more than an investment; it's a community. Our owners are invited into the heartbeat of the winery and this model has helped us uphold the values of community and collaboration we were built upon.

Among our community-driven ethos, we share a deep passion for the culinary arts and the profound intersection between wine, food, and the land. Throughout our nine tasting room properties, we have seven locations that have some form of culinary involvement. From our immersive Chef's Counter at the Estate to fully operating restaurants in urban settings, we pride ourselves on our casual fine dining experiences and are one of the first tasting rooms in Oregon to have a culinary program. A major part of our program is that we lean into the locality of each tasting room – focusing on seasonal, local produce

**WINERY BRIEF** Founded in 1983 by Jim Bernau with the dream of creating world-class Pinot Noir while serving as stewards of the land, Willamette Valley Vineyards ([wvv.com](http://wvv.com)) has grown from a bold idea into one of the region's leading wineries, earning the title "One of America's Great Pinot Noir Producers" from Wine Enthusiast Magazine. In addition, all the vineyards have been certified sustainable through LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology) and Salmon-Safe programs. With 1,000 acres under vine, Willamette farms its Estate winery in the Salem Hills, sparkling winery Domaine Willamette in the Dundee Hills, pioneering Tualatin Estate Vineyard near Forest Grove, and Elton Vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills. The winery has expanded recently to include nine tasting rooms in Oregon, Washington and California – growth made possible by the stock ownership of many wine enthusiasts.

**Will you discuss your career journey?**

I began my career in the software industry, but my passion for wine and entrepreneurship led me to found eVineyard, soon renamed Wine.com, in Portland, Oregon, in 1998. Over the past 27 years, I've grown the company into the nation's leading online wine retailer – an endeavor that required navigating complex alcohol laws, building robust marketing and technology, and serving a diverse and passionate customer base. Throughout this journey, I've stayed deeply connected to Oregon and the belief that wine is about people, place, and story. That has led me, most recently, to my position at Willamette Valley Vineyards as CEO – taking me back to my Oregon roots, deep love and appreciation for winemaking, and dedication to helping lead a winery that values sustainability, quality, and community.



Willamette Valley Vineyards



*Willamette Valley Vineyards Estate Pinot Noir*

sourcing, which changes based on each tasting room's location. The bond and marriage of food and wine is one that we consider sacred and instrumental to unleashing the potential of how you can experience wine.

**Will you provide an overview of Willamette Valley Vineyards' wines?**

Willamette Valley Vineyards is best known for producing elegant, terroir-driven Pinot Noir, but the portfolio also includes exceptional Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Riesling, and other cool-climate varietals. Each wine is rooted in place, made with a commitment to sustainable viticulture. What I love about the wines is how they reflect both Oregon's distinctive character and the care taken at every step – from vineyard to glass.

The beauty of our wines is that we have a multitude of sites to work with, each with distinct nuances which help in crafting expressive wines true to place. We look to reveal what each site can do, while bringing out all the best qualities of the vineyards, and through respect and care for the terroir, we are able to achieve this. Recent investments in the Walla Walla AVA have allowed us to expand into new varietals, including Syrah, Grenache, and Viognier in the distinctive Rocks District of Milton-Freewater, as well as Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and other Bordeaux varieties

in the high-elevation SeVein Vineyards. All of these vineyards are located within the Oregon side of the Walla Walla growing area and present an exciting opportunity to offer fresh and diverse options to our traditional Willamette Valley audience.

**What have been the keys to the strength and leadership of Willamette Valley Vineyards in the industry?**

I believe the strength comes from a few things: first, a visionary founder who stayed true to his values; second, a team deeply committed to quality and innovation; and third, a business model that empowers community involvement. Willamette Valley Vineyards has always led with transparency, sustainability, and a willingness to think long-term – which is why it's not just respected, but admired. I plan to keep the high profile of Willamette Valley Vineyards in the national markets and continue to raise the awareness of Oregon within the global wine industry.

**Will you discuss Willamette Valley Vineyards' commitment to sustainability?**

Sustainability is woven into the DNA of this company. From sustainable consideration of soil to bottles, Willamette Valley Vineyards has set the standard for environmental stewardship. Jim believed from day one that great wine couldn't come at the expense of the land – and that belief

continues to guide everything we do. We're constantly looking for ways to reduce our environmental footprint and protect Oregon's natural beauty for generations to come.

Many eco-conscious initiatives that fuse craftsmanship, quality, and an innate respect for the land are in place at Willamette Valley Vineyards. Most notably – and proudly – our Domaine Willamette winery and vineyards have been Demeter Certified since 2023. Demeter being the only certifier for Biodynamic farms and products in America, it was critical for us to be represented within this prestigious organization. Additionally, all of our estate vineyards are LIVE Certified and Salmon-Safe. We also utilize mason bees for natural pollination throughout our vineyard ecosystem and have constructed boxes for owls and kestrels.

**What has made the wine industry so special for you?**

Wine is unlike any other product – it's an experience, a connection to people and place. What's kept me passionate for over two decades is the community: winemakers, growers, customers, and colleagues who care deeply about authenticity, craft, and story. Wine brings people together in a way that few things do, and being a part of that – first through Wine.com and now through Willamette Valley Vineyards – is a privilege. ●