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This is the blog of wine journalist Jamie Goode, online since 2001. Feel free to nose around; your comments are welcomed.



Extended tasting note: Brooks Ara Riesling 2008 and Brooks Janus 2008, Willamette Valley, Oregon



Sometimes, short tasting notes don't really tell you all that much about a wine. So, in the past, I've tried to write the occasional **extended tasting note**, bringing in the context of the drinking experience and dwelling a little longer on the wine. I tried this sitting outside in the late evening yesterday, here at the **Brooks winery in Oregon's Eola-Amity Hills**.



Brooks Ara Riesling 2008 Willamette Valley, Oregon

A blend of two older vineyards, one on sedimentary soils and one on volcanic. I'm sitting outside the Brooks winery, drinking this, in the setting sun. It's just approaching 8 pm and the sun is about to dip behind the brow of the hill, here in the Eola-Amity Hills. The estate vineyard, which forms half the component of this wine, is east facing, and as I sit I'm looking out towards the Cascade mountain range in the far distance. Visible are Mount St Helens, with its missing top, and Mount Hood, which is the largest. There's also another to the right of these, which I can't identify. The eagles that were soaring earlier in the thermals are nowhere to be seen, and all I can hear is birdsong, and the faint hum of the winery air conditioning in the distance.

Brooks are Riesling specialists. But with a ceiling on Riesling prices of around \$25, it's Pinot Noir that pays the bills round here. The latest release, 2014, saw some 14 different Riesling bottlings. This is awesome. It's bonkers commercially, but wonderfully bonkers. This is their flagship Riesling, and the one I'm drinking has almost eight years' bottle age. How is it?

Well, first of all, it is fabulous to be drinking the wine in situ. I'm staying here tonight, in the farmhouse, and by this stage of the evening, the busy tasting room has closed and all the winery employees have gone home. So on a peaceful, warm, blue-sky evening like this, it's the perfect time to be drinking this wine.

The nose is aromatic, with a mix of bright citrus notes (lime, lemon, grapefruit), some pithiness, and a fusel oil sort of intensity. There's also a hint of toast. The palate is dry with a faint touch of sweetness, and complex flavours of grapefruit, honey, lime zest and buttered toast. This wine has some development, but it also has a youthful personality still. Complex and quite intense, it has a bit of mint on the finish. Such detail and focus.

This is recognizably Riesling, but I haven't had enough Oregon Riesling to be able to comment on how well it expresses place. This is an interesting debate: if a wine is complex, interesting and compelling, is there a need for the taster to recognize place? Surely, one part of terroir is the identification of sites that are able to yield interesting wines, irrespective of whether those sites are immediately apparent in the wines. After all, this wine is a blend of two distinctive terroirs. These terroirs together have fashioned something compelling. That neither may be immediately identifiable in the wine doesn't detract from the quality of the wine.

So how do I score this wine? I'm really enjoying it. On the latest sip, I'm getting some tangerine characters quite distinctively, along with pink grapefruit. Like many excellent wines, it is changing in the glass. I am changing as I consume it, too. This is the nature of wine: we interact with it, and our perception is a result

of that interaction. It's not a perfect wine: there's a slight grip here; it's not obtrusive, but it limits the wine's potential, I reckon. That said, it is really good, and I am enjoying it a great deal. I will give it 93/100.



Brooks Janus Pinot Noir 2008 Willamette Valley, Oregon

So, I'm still sitting outside at Brooks Winery, and at 2015 the sun has set over the west brow of the hill. To the east, sunlight still bathes vineyards and farmland in the distance; Mount Hood, capped by snow, looms ever larger, taking on a slight pink hue in the late evening sun. The temperature has dipped a little, and the breeze is dropping. It will be cold tonight with no cloud cover. The diurnal temperature shifts here in the Pacific Northwest can be huge; this is one of the reasons why the wines retain good acidity, even with ripe fruit flavours.

This Janus is a blended Pinot Noir from Brooks. It was first made in 1998, and it's the definitive Pinot from this estate, even though it's not the most expensive. Sourced from a few vineyard sites on this hill in the Eola-Amity Hills, it's named after the goddess of new beginnings (the month of January was named after her, too). The soils here are volcanic.

So, here we are, almost 8 years after vintage, looking at a New World Pinot Noir. Many of the top New World Pinots taste great on release, only to age quite rapidly. How has this wine fared?

Before I answer that, I take a pause to breathe in the scenery. The Oregon view: gently rolling hills, leading down to a plateau. Vineyards dotted around, not wall to wall, as in some wine regions. It's so rare that we sit outside of an evening.

We lose the connection with nature and our environment by being stuck in boxes with electronic heroin (television) distracting us, and losing the natural rhythm of day, evening, night, morning.

Back to the wine. Age has given this a lovely savoury character. There's some red cherry and plum, but also a slightly earthy, spicy savouriness. The balance between the sweet fruit and the savoury, citrusy, quite mineral characters is lovely. Fine herbs, a hint of beetroot, and some rhubarb notes. Some crunchy raspberry too. Alcohol is just 13.4%, and you can tell this from the lack of mid-palate sweetness. This allows the wine to hold a mid-palate tension. Drinking really well now, this has focus and definition and it's showing the first signs of maturity. I wouldn't hold it for a lot longer, but there's no hurry to drink it up. Do wines have to be able to age in order to be considered fine? This is a question that needs to be answered with a sizeable essay. But, in short, if you are charging a certain amount for your wine, then the customer expects to be able to cellar it. For New World Pinot, it's fine to be delicious. But if you want to charge \$\$, then it needs not to fall over with a few years in bottle. This wine has passed the test, and it's delicious. 93/100

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