

WILLAMETTE VALLEY

VINEYARDS

Press Release

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Bill Fuller, Award-Winning Oregon Wine Pioneer and Visionary Winemaker, Celebrated for More Than 50 Years of Innovation, Passes Away at Age 88

Willamette Valley Vineyards Mourns the Passing of Longtime Consulting Winemaker

SALEM HILLS, Ore., Dec. 16, 2025 – [Willamette Valley Vineyards](https://www.willamettevalleyvineyards.com) is deeply saddened to share the passing of its consulting winemaker and longtime collaborator, Bill Fuller, whose legacy helped shape Oregon's wine industry.

Bill passed away peacefully on December 14, 2025, at the age of 88.

With more than 50 years of experience in the industry, Bill's impact spans generations of winemakers, iconic vineyard plantings and historic global recognition for Oregon wines. As an award-winning wine pioneer whose career shaped the future of cool-climate winemaking in the Pacific Northwest, Bill leaves an undeniable mark on the industry as a whole and those who had the pleasure of working with him.

"We lost a great one – a great partner to his wife, Connie, a great friend, business partner, winemaker and Oregon wine industry pioneer," said Jim Bernau, Founder and President of Willamette Valley Vineyards. "Bill made wine and coached our team up until his passing at 88 years of age. The merger of his winery with ours in 1997 set us on the path of living our dreams together ever since. Please raise a glass of Oregon Pinot Noir in his honor."

Bill moved from California to Oregon in 1973 with his family, vine cuttings and a bold vision for cool-climate Pinot Noir. At the time, he was the only practicing professional winemaker to make this leap. His background included lab work at Italian Swiss Colony, a Master's degree in enology from the University of California, Davis, and nine years as winemaker at Louis Martini Winery. Shortly after arriving in Oregon, Bill partnered with Bill Malkmus to develop a 65-acre site northwest of Forest Grove, naming it Tualatin Vineyards, now one of Oregon's historic vineyard sites.

Throughout his career, Bill achieved numerous industry firsts and earned international acclaim. His Pinot Noir and Chardonnay captured Best of Show honors in both the red and white categories at the 1984 London International Wine Competition, presented by the Queen, an unparalleled achievement in the event's history. In 1989, his Chardonnay became the first Oregon wine ever selected for the *Wine Spectator* Top 100 list.

In 2025, Bill celebrated the release of his 50th Oregon vintage as a consulting winemaker at Willamette Valley Vineyards, where he continued to innovate and mentor. Among his most enduring testaments is the Old Vine Pinot Noir he planted over five decades ago. These self-rooted vines still produce fruit today, a testament to his foresight and dedication.

A true leader and advocate for the Oregon wine industry, Bill co-founded the Oregon Winegrowers Association and served multiple terms as its president. He also served on the Board of Directors for the American Society for Enology and Viticulture, helping guide technical and educational advancement in winemaking. Together with his first wife, Virginia, he played a key role in establishing Oregon's blue winery directional signage program, which remains an essential resource for wine tourism today.

Bill retired following the merger of Tualatin Vineyards with Willamette Valley Vineyards in 1997, but his passion for winemaking never waned. In 2013, he returned to craft limited-edition wines and to share his techniques and philosophy with a new generation of winemakers. His collaborations continued into recent years, selecting fruit from his favorite blocks at Tualatin Estate Vineyard to produce his Vintage Series wines, sharing stories of his early years and bringing friends to the vineyard tasting room for wine releases.

In an interview between Bill and Oregon Wine History Archive in 2015, he reminisced, "I was retired for ten years and then Willamette [Valley Vineyards] comes along and wants to know would I make wine again, and you know, you don't do something as long as I did it and as intensely as I did it without missing it when it's gone. It just leaves a big hole right there and so, it's good for an old guy's ego to get called back."

In 2022, he partnered with Director of Winemaking and Vineyards Terry Culton to produce a trio of Alsatian-style wines, including a Dry Gewürztraminer sourced from his original Oregon plantings, a grape that was one of Bill's favorites to work with.

"Right to the end, he had an amazing palate," Terry said, recalling a recent tasting where Bill noticed a bottle of his first Pinot Noir from 1975 sitting nearby. Bill mentioned more than once, 'We really should open that.' "I told him, 'I can't open that, but you can,'" Terry said.

Fifty years after making the wine, Bill took a corkscrew and opened the bottle. The wine, Terry recalled, "was still holding up and still tasting amazing."

A celebration of life will take place this summer at Tualatin Estate Vineyard. Details are to come.

[Link to photo folder](#)

A few milestones from Bill's remarkable winemaking journey:

1973: Moved from California to Oregon with his family and vine cuttings, becoming the only practicing professional winemaker at the time to do so, with a vision for cool-climate Pinot Noir.

Early 1970s: Co-founded Tualatin Vineyards with Bill Malkmus near Forest Grove, now one of Oregon's historic vineyard sites.

1984: Earned global recognition when his Pinot Noir and Chardonnay both won Best of Show (red and white) at the London International Wine Competition, an achievement unmatched in the event's history.

1989: His Chardonnay became the first Oregon wine selected for the *Wine Spectator* Top 100 list.

1997: Merged Tualatin Vineyards with Willamette Valley Vineyards, helping shape the future of our winery. With the merger, Tualatin Vineyards became Tualatin Estate Vineyard.

2013: Returned from retirement to craft limited-edition wines and mentor our winemaking team.

2025: Celebrated the release of his 50th Oregon wine vintage, continuing to consult and innovate until the end.

About Willamette Valley Vineyards

Founded in 1983 by President Jim Bernau with the dream of creating world-class Pinot Noir while serving as stewards of the land, Willamette Valley Vineyards 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 9 tasting rooms in Oregon, Washington and California – growth made possible by the stock ownership of many wine enthusiasts.

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