

It's not all about California

WINES from Washington and Oregon are relative newcomers, and are made in such small quantities that they're often expensive. The stateside wine-making style provokes much discussion—our European palates are accustomed to a more discreet style, so American wines can seem brassy. But at a recent annual tasting of Washington and Oregon wines, there were some delicious examples worth tracking down.

Oregon's most promising variety is Pinot Noir. The Drouhin family makes first-class Pinot in Burgundy, and has taken this expertise to Oregon. The **2005 Domaine Drouhin Pinot Noir Willamette** is testament to the area's winemaking potential. The Willamette Valley, situated below the Cascade Mountain Range, has a cool climate perfect for this capricious variety, and the result is a smooth, raspberry-imbued wine with sweet, lasting tannins.



Western wonders

2005 Domaine Drouhin Pinot

Noir Willamette (£22.95, Berry Bros & Rudd)

2006 Eroica Riesling (£19.99, Whole Foods Market, 020-7368 6100, www.wholefoodsmarket.com; The Sampler, 020-7226 9500, www.thesampler.co.uk)

2004 L'Ecole No. 41 Cabernet Sauvignon (£22.95, The Wine Treasury, 020-7793 9999, www.winetreasury.com)

Ernie Loosen is Germany's superstar Riesling winemaker, and he joined forces with Château Sainte Michelle in Washington to make **2006 Eroica Riesling**—a flinty and classically shaped Riesling with juicy undertones of white peach and melon. It's no coincidence that two of my favourite wines at this tasting were made by Europeans.

For an authentic introduction to Washington red wines, turn

to L'Ecole No. 41, which has a loyal following. Keep your eyes peeled for its bright and distinctive kindergarten-style labels. My favourite was the **2004 L'Ecole No. 41 Cabernet Sauvignon**, Columbia Valley, but it requires a few years in a cellar in order to mellow. The 2003 (£19.99, Noel Young Wines) is still available—try drinking it with classic British roast beef for an impressive transatlantic food and wine alliance.