

Bledsoe, McDaniels buy Hope Well Vineyard in Oregon's Eola-Amity Hills

By [Eric Degerman](#) on September 24, 2021



Drew Bledsoe, left, and winemaker Josh McDaniels relied on Ribbon Ridge fruit for their first bottlings of Oregon Pinot Noir, but they recently purchased Hope Well Vineyard in the Willamette Valley's Eola-Amity Hills from Mimi Casteel. (Photo by [Mark VanDonge Photography](#)/Courtesy of Bledsoe Wine Estates)

It is not often these days in the Pacific Northwest wine industry when a vineyard of renown is sold to a family-owned winery operated by Northwest natives, but that's the case when Walla Walla-based [Bledsoe Wine Estates](#) purchased [Hope Well Vineyard](#) in Oregon's Eola-Amity Hills.

The transaction announced Thursday marks the first vineyard purchase in the Willamette Valley for retired NFL great Drew Bledsoe and winemaker Josh McDaniels, who both grew up in Walla Walla, Wash., and learned many of the ins and outs of the wine industry from Chris Figgins of Leonetti Cellar fame.

[Bledsoe | McDaniels Winery](#) is one of three brands under the Bledsoe Wine Estates umbrella, and their first two vintages — 2018 and 2019 — sold out quickly. Bledsoe impressed critics with his inaugural bottling of [Doubleback](#), a Figgins-crafted 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon from the Walla Walla Valley that ranked No. 54 on [Wine Spectator's Top 100 wines in 2010](#).

"We are 100 percent committed to Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, and this investment in the future of Bledsoe | McDaniels is another big step in our plans for a greater presence in the Willamette Valley," Bledsoe stated in a news release.

Casteel's holistic farming adds to site's appeal



Mimi Casteel sparks discussion during the 2015 Oregon Chardonnay Symposium, which featured moderator Rajat Parr, far left, and panelists, left to right, Jason Lett, John Paul, Craig Williams and Thomas Bachelder. (Photo courtesy of [Andréa Johnson Photography](#))

Thursday's announcement also signaled a bittersweet transition for [Mimi Casteel](#), a second-generation winegrower with a passion for regenerative farming. Her family at [Bethel Heights Vineyard](#) remains a beacon for the Oregon wine industry, credited with pioneering work and helping to raise the profile of the Eola-Amity Hills northwest of Salem.

In her "[Letters from the Edge](#)" post she shared with supporters on July 6, Casteel indicated that Hope Well Vineyard had been sold, a move prompted by the demands of her intensive viticulture practices, brokering grape sales and making wine while raising a young family during a pandemic. The vineyard sale, terms of which were not disclosed, will allow her to spend more time with her children and focus on winemaking under her Hope Well label.

"I have found the next stewards of the place I have called home since 2014," Casteel wrote. "I have confidence in their intentions and their commitment to the community and to the health of the land. It is more than I hoped I could find for the next watch, and it makes this much easier on my heart."

McDaniels confirmed to Great Northwest Wine that he and Bledsoe learned this past spring of Casteel's desire to find a buyer for the vineyard [she began planting with Pommard clone Pinot Noir](#) several years before leaving her family's winery to focus on Hope Well.

"Drew and I first walked the property together in May of this year and got very serious after that," McDaniels said via email. "We have been looking for the right piece of property for some time now — not in a hurry — but we sped things up after speaking with Mimi and experiencing the site first-hand. It really is a unique piece of ground."

Bledsoe | McDaniels set to release '19 Pinot Noir



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Josh McDaniels, director of winemaking and CEO for Bledsoe Wine Estates, brings in fruit from the 2021 vintage off McQueen Vineyard in the Walla Walla Valley. (Richard Duval Images)

Bledsoe | McDaniels worked primarily with historic [Ridgecrest Vineyard](#) and adjacent [Wind Ridge Vineyard](#) on Ribbon Ridge for their 2019 Pinot Noir, a nine-barrel lot that produced 222 cases and was completely allocated prior to its release later this fall. McDaniels's winemaking from the 2021 vintage now will include 4 acres of contracted fruit that Casteel has continued to farm this fall.

There are 29 acres planted across the parcel that spans 80 acres, and neighbors include [LS Vineyard](#) (Larry Stone of Lingua Franca), [Jerusalem Hill Vineyard](#) (Domaine Serene) and [Elton Vineyard](#) (Willamette Valley Vineyards).

McDaniels said it was no coincidence that their 2019 Pinot Noir — not yet released but already sold out — included fruit from the vineyard owned by Stone, a Master Sommelier from the Bay Area.

“Mimi’s reputation was certainly a driving factor in our interest in the vineyard and our want to continue farming in that regard,” McDaniels said. “One important piece of this acquisition is that we know that the property was cared for with a lot of attention and sustainable/regenerative decisions that bring confidence in us making it our new home in the Willamette Valley. That organic ‘foundation’ that she established paves the way for us to continue to try and make improvements and transfers into our wines in really unique ways.”

It also means that Bledsoe, his wife, Maura, and McDaniels now farm nearly 100 acres of vineyards across two states, which help them produce about 3,500 cases under the Doubleback brand and twice that amount for Bledsoe Family Winery.

“In Walla Walla, we own six different pieces of property that cover a little over 400 acres that includes wheat, apples, grass seed, our bio areas and about 70 acres of vineyard,” McDaniels said.

Three of their four vineyards are on the Oregon side of the Walla Walla Valley, and Bledsoe Family Winery opened a tasting room in the booming Central Oregon city of Bend in 2019. (Maura’s uncle, [the late Bill Healy](#), founded Mount Bachelor Ski Resort.)

The focus of Bledsoe | McDaniels will remain on Pinot Noir and Syrah from their two Walla Walla Valley sites — Flying B and LeFore. At some point, Bledsoe and McDaniels will announce a new name for their vineyard in the Willamette Valley. They also plan to sell Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc grapes going forward. Casteel’s clients have included cult producers Antica Terra, Failla along the Napa Valley’s Silverado Trail and Lingua Franca.

“The name *Hope Well* was important to Mimi and to her brand continuing, and we want to respect that,” McDaniels said. “We want to continue to work with and honor the existing fruit contracts in place. There are some tremendous people purchasing fruit from the site, and we want them to have confidence in the transition and that we want to see them be successful also.”

And the new owners have not ruled out building a vinification facility and hospitality center on the Eola-Amity Hills site for Bledsoe | McDaniels.



About Eric Degerman

Eric Degerman is the President and CEO of Great Northwest Wine. He is a journalist with more than 30 years of daily newspaper experience and has been writing about wine since 1998. He co-founded Wine Press Northwest magazine with Andy Perdue and served as its managing editor for a decade. He is a frequent wine judge at international wine competitions throughout North America and orchestrates 10 Northwest competitions each year.