Visiting the Willamette Valley (Damn It!)

By Marisa D’Vari | August 16th, 2012 | Category: News, Oregon | No Comments »

... so one of the best things about going to #WBC in Portland, Oregon (wine blogger conference) is the pre-trips. You read yesterday about my opening day trip to the Yamhill Valley and the Evergreen Aviation Museum followed by a tasting at Johan vineyards and Left Coast Cellars.

So on Thursday we had a dynamic day exploring the Willamette Valley (it is pronounced like 'dammnit' and I have the t-shirt to prove it).

The first visit was to the Willamette Heritage Center which was easily the best non-wine visit of the trip.

The poster above is from the museum ... it has history buildings from the 1840s and the seemingly still working remains of a Mill that powered various factories.

Walking through the textile mile was a bit sad ... it was a gorgeous sunny day, yet picturing all the workers sitting in that factory day after day easily brought to light how good most of us have it today. Factory work was VERY dangerous. People, we were told, got caught up in the various wires used to turn the mill (actually stop the flow of water) on and off. The work itself was noisy and dangerous. In ten minutes, only an inch of woven fabric would be produced.

Below is a picture of men who dyed the cloth. Peter, the director of the museum, told us they just put the leftover dye in the river. Children playing in the river would have a "spotter" to see when the color was released or else they'd have to go to school covered in green dye.

After the Heritage Center, we went to Willamette Valley Vineyards for a tour, tasting, and lunch. Dan Shepherd, assistant winemaker to Don Crank III, was super helpful and explained a lot about the winemaking process for my MW studies while Don took the others into the fields. Don was super enthusiastic about his wines (and he should be).

The Pinot Noir was incredible quality ... I love the reds of Oregon in general, yet the wines here are very old world in style. During lunch, we tried a lot of the whites yet reds are my passion and I can't stress enough how elegant these Pinot Noirs are on the palate.

As an FYI, I was such a fan of the seafood soup they served to accompany the wine I bribed the chef to reveal the recipe (scroll below).

We stopped at Pluso Vineyard & Winery where the owner Sandee Pluso gave us one of the warmest welcomes in memory and told us her incredible life story that included crowing up in the Central Valley and always wanting to make wine -- but waiting until her children were grown and had their own families to take that risk (and we all know it is a risk). Her wines were excellent.

Last stop of the day was the E.Z. Orchards store famous for its Cidre and now shortcake. It is a fun store with lots of fresh fruit, great ice cream and cidre made in the French tradition.

That night we had a tasting of Oregon wines.

Okay, as promised, here is the recipe from the winery's executive chef Eric Nelson. He warns that it is not precise so just take the below as inspiration.