

**Sweet Cheeks Winery****2007 Reserve Pinot Gris
(Willamette Valley)****Pre-release review**

Nothing's easy about tasting a barrel sample, especially if you are expected to write intelligently about it. Some wine buyers, and lots of winemakers, taste wines from the barrel every day — and make some very important decisions based on their sips from the "wine thief." For the most part, I would say better them than me. But Sweet Cheek's Reserve Pinot Gris sample was different.

On a cool, sunny day last fall, Aussie winemaker Mark Nicholl (who arrived at Sweet Cheeks around harvest time) had tasted us through most of his 2006 wines, including the Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Estate Riesling and Chardonnay. I was impressed. These wines really seem to speak to what I could see was the terroir in fairly remote Crow, Oregon in the Willamette Valley. Crisp, clean fruit that gets right to the point — real, not a lot of unnecessary baggage hanging on. Unpretentious, like Oregon wine country.

As we left, Nicholl handed me an unlabeled bottle of his 2007 Reserve Pinot Gris, a barrel sample. I flew home with it and pulled the cork last month. What I found was an obviously young, aggressive wine, slightly cloudy, searching for its citrus tree fruit and high in acidity. The nose was so tight it almost didn't show any, but this wine will evolve over the next year to take its place at the front of Sweet Cheek's lineup. This is Nicholl's first Reserve Gris at the winery, and he feels it represents the best from his vineyard. From what I can taste in a barrel sample, I think he may be right. We'll stay tuned.

Reviewed April 30, 2008 by [Gregory McCluney](#).

THE WINE

Winery: [Sweet Cheeks Winery](#)

Vintage: 2007

Wine: Reserve Pinot Gris

Appellation: [Willamette Valley](#)

Grape: [Pinot Gris / Grigio](#)

Price: \$24.00

THE REVIEWER**Gregory McCluney**

Greg McCluney has been writing about wine since 1987 and has judged many competitions including the Atlanta International Wine Summit, Florida Suncoast Winefest, Northwest Wine Competition and the Dallas Morning News Wine Competition. His work has appeared in numerous regional, national and international publications including *Wines & Vines*, *AirTran Arrivals* in-flight magazine, *Atlanta Magazine*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Tampa Bay's Best*, Atlanta Wine School and the James Beard Foundation publications. He conducts wine education classes and consults on wine selections for retail and restaurant clients.