Wines are handcrafted in small lots in an old world style with fruit sourced from some of the best vineyards in Oregon.

Jay Christopher Somers wanted to be a rock star. As the 4-year-old Jay listened over and over to John Fogarty’s wailing guitar solo in “Heard it Through the Grapevine,” he knew that’s what he wanted to do. And yet, rooted somewhere in that song, another message planted itself in his subconscious. Something about grapevines.

Jay eventually did get a guitar — today he has quite a collection — and learned to play with great skill. In terms of careers, however, he did what any college grad with a degree in philosophy would do: he made beer. (Although today Jay plays lead guitar for the Portland band Poncho Luxurio.) After several years as a brewer for McMenamins, he met a beautiful woman named Ronda. Ronda liked Jay, but didn’t care for beer. Making two of the best decisions of his life, Jay married Ronda and got out of the beer business, deciding to focus, instead, on his latest passion: wine.

In the years leading up to the launch of his own winery, Jay had the great fortune to work with Don Kautzner at Adelsheim Vineyard in Oregon, Neil McCallum at Dry Creek Vineyard in New Zealand, and John Paul at Cameron Winery in Oregon. From Don, he learned that it was possible to make Burgundian-style Pinots in Oregon. Through Neil, he gained a passion for white wines. And in John, he found a lifelong friend and mentor. Jay bottled his first J. Christopher vintage in 1996, using the Cameron facility and fruit purchased from the neighboring Charlie’s vineyard. (Side note: Jay is the first and only winemaker ever to make wine from this excellent vineyard.) His first vintage, like many to follow, sold out in less than a week.

In 2004, an opportunity arose to help the shorthanded crew at the Dr. Loosen winery in Germany’s Mosel Valley. A big fan of German Rieslings, Jay pounced on it. Over many bottles of wine after long days of work, he and winemaker Ernst Loosen discovered that they had a mutual taste and passion for Pinot Noir. Ernie had long dreamed of owning vineyards in Burgundy, but, turned off by the price, had begun thinking about the second best place in the world to grow Pinot Noir: Oregon. Over many more bottles, the two hatched a plan, and soon began making a collaborative Oregon Pinot called Appassionata. In 2010, they formalized their partnership, bought a 40-acre property on Chehalem Mountain in Newberg, Oregon, and began building a new J. Christopher winery. Jay continues as the winemaker for the partnership, while Ernie provides Old World expertise and financial support.

J. Christopher 2010 ‘Lunatique’ Chardonnay, Willamette Valley - 12/750ml  Net $180
When Jay first produced this fresh, clean Chardonnay with no oak or malolactic fermentation, some called him a lunatic. But its local popularity proves that he wasn’t so crazy after all.

J. Christopher 2010 Sauvignon Blanc, Willamette Valley - 12/750ml  Net $180
Sauvignon Blanc is a specialty at J. Christopher. Although not widely planted in Oregon’s Northern Willamette Valley, Sauvignon Blanc is ideal for the area’s climate, as this wine proves. Made in the clean, fresh style of France’s Loire Valley, this wine is fermented in stainless steel and does not go through malolactic fermentation. The result is a classic, highly aromatic Sauvignon Blanc with perfect ripeness and excellent acidity.

J. Christopher 2009 ‘Sandra Adele’ Pinot Noir, Dundee Hills - 6/750ml  Net $240  WA 94
The J. Christopher Sandra Adele Pinot Noir is a cuvée named for Jay’s mother, Sandy. Typically it is a blend of fruit from two outstanding vineyards in the Dundee Hills AVA: Abbey Ridge and Charlie’s Vineyard. In 2009, however, Jay added a bit of fruit from the Bella Vida Vineyard, also in the Dundee Hills. This wine is the elegant, feminine counterpart to the bigger, more masculine wine from Le Pavillon. It shows the delicate mineral and floral aroma that is characteristic of the high-elevation Abbey Ridge vineyard, with just a hint of the darker depth from Charlie’s and Bella Vida.
J. Christopher 2008 ‘Sandra Adele’ Pinot Noir, Dundee Hills - 12/750ml  Net $360
The J Christopher Sandra Adele is a blend based upon fruit from Abbey Ridge- a vineyard considered among Dundee hills’ Grand Cru. The fruit from this site is known for its more feminine structure. The Sandra Adele reflects its origins by showing a bright and high toned aroma of rich strawberry, lavender, leather, and tumbleweed. The oak is restrained, only lending a subtle smoky hint. The palate is unctuous with elements of mocha spice, beet root, sweet rainier cherries with a smoky black tea finish.

J. Christopher 2009 Pinot Noir, Le Pavillon Vineyard, Dundee Hills - 6/750ml  Net $240  WA 94
Power and grace personified, this highly concentrated wine comes from a spectacular old-vine site in the heart of the Dundee Hills. It has deep aromas of dark raspberries and violets, and big, rich flavors of spicy black cherries and freshly turned earth. Great acidity and tannin structure ensure this wine’s ability to age.

J. Christopher 2008 Pinot Noir, Le Pavillon Vineyard, Dundee Hills - 6/750ml  Net $216
The J Christopher Le Pavillon is full of strawberry compote and Porcini mushrooms. There are the usual spicebox traits of cinnamon and clove that one associates with good French oak, but there are also more exotic spices to the nose. Facets of ginger, camphor and sandalwood make this nose distinct and provocative.

J. Christopher 2009 Pinot Noir, Charlie’s Vineyard, Dundee Hills - 6/750ml  Net $240  WA 93
J. Christopher is the first and only winery ever to make wine from this excellent vineyard. One of the great sites of the Dundee Hills, the three-acre Charlie’s Vineyard has produced great wine for J. Christopher since 1996. The 2009 offers aromas of dark fruits, leather and earth, with an expansive palate of even more dark fruit, balanced by a harmonious structure of tannin and acidity. Truly excellent wine.

J. Christopher 2008 Pinot Noir, Charlie’s Vineyard, Dundee Hills - 12/750ml  Net $360
Aromas of dark fruits, leather and earth, with an expansive palate of even more dark fruit, balanced by a harmonious structure of tannin and acidity.

J. Christopher 2009 Pinot Noir, Abbey Ridge Vineyard, Dundee Hills - 6/750ml  Net $240  WA 94
If Oregon had a vineyard classification, Abbey Ridge would unquestionably top the list of “grand cru” sites. It lies high up in the Dundee Hills and always produces the most distinctive wines in Oregon. Jay has been working with a parcel of this vineyard for years, but this is the first time he’s bottled any as a single-vineyard wine. This is pure Abbey Ridge: delicate, floral and a firm minerality.

J. Christopher 2009 Pinot Noir, Dundee Hills Cuvée, Dundee Hills - 12/750ml  Net $360  WA 94
This cuvée is a blend of selected barrels from several excellent vineyard sites in the red Jory clay of the Dundee Hills AVA. It shows the depth and power that are typical of this area, and makes a very interesting comparison to the “Nuages” cuvée from the rockier soil of the Chehalem Mountains AVA. The 2009 vintage includes barrels from Bella Vida, Baptista Maresh, Charlie’s, Abbey Ridge and Le Pavillon vineyards.

J. Christopher 2009 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley - 12/750ml  Net $240  WA 90
The Willamette Valley Pinot Noir is the flagship J. Christopher wine. The 2009 is blended from excellent vineyards in three of the Willamette Valley’s AVAs: Dundee Hills, Chehalem Mountains and Eola Hills. Made with native fermentations and up to 18 months of barrel time, this is classic Oregon Pinot Noir.

J. Christopher 2009 JJ Pinot Noir - 12/750ml  Net $180
J.J” is the little brother of the J. Christopher wines that Jay is making at the new winery on Chehalem Mountain in Newberg. It is a fruit-forward, easy-drinking Pinot Noir that’s affordable for everyday enjoyment. This value cuvée is a cellar selection of barrels that have been declassified from the main production, mostly because they didn’t have quite the mineral intensity and textural focus that Jay demands for the J. Christopher wines. The result is an easy-going, fruitier style of wine that works very well as an introduction to Oregon Pinot Noir.