



Cooper Mountain

Days of Wine and Roses

Oregon's Blossoming Wine Industry | by Hollyanna McCollom

In 2004, the surprise-hit movie *Sideways* shined a long overdue spotlight on the wine industry; it also gave an unexpected nod to Oregon's darling, the Pinot noir grape. Waxing poetic about the varietal, main character Miles says, "Only the most patient and nurturing of growers can do it, really. Only somebody who really takes the time to understand Pinot's potential can then coax it into its fullest expression."

Pinot noir is the hottest grape around these days, in part due to the attention it received from *Sideways*, but moreso because of the fertile Northwest ground which produces a grape that is fresher than its California counterpart, and because of the remarkable growth the Oregon wine industry has seen over the last few decades. According to the Oregon Wine Board, there are 72 grape varieties grown throughout the state, but only 15 of those varieties make up 97% of the vineyards in Oregon. At the top of that list is Pinot noir.

An original pioneer of the industry is David Lett, the founder of **Eyrie Vineyards** (935 NE 10th St, McMinnville, 888-440-4970, eyrievineyards.com), who planted the first Pinot noir grapes in the Northwest, thus sowing the seeds for Oregon's future as a heavy-weight in the wine industry. In 1975, Eyrie Vineyards produced the first Pinot noir to successfully vie for recognition alongside the long-recognized Pinots of Burgandy, France. With that recognition came the acknowledgement of Oregon as the New World home for Pinot noir. Lett's son, Jason, recently took over for his father as winemaker and vineyard manager, but his father and mother, Diana, are still very much a part of the process.

Another pioneering family in the industry is that of **Sokol Blosser** (5000 Sokol Blosser Lane, Dundee, 800-582-6668, [\[sokolblosser.com\]\(http://sokolblosser.com\)\). The clan has been a part of the Oregon wine fabric since its first planting in 1971 and Susan Sokol Blosser has been at the helm for most of that time. When she got started, the Oregon wine industry was a fledgling one at best, and those who committed to the region did so because they had an inherent passion for the business. "It is such an improbable story," she recalls. "Two liberal arts graduates with no farming or business experience, wanting to grow a grape that had never done well in the United States, in a region that had no wine industry." Years later, Sokol Blosser is still family-owned and going strong, receiving accolades for both their vintages and their commitment to sustainability.](http://sokolb-</p></div>
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Oregon as a whole is receiving nods for its commitment to sustainability, a characteristic that is at the heart of our environmentally conscious framework. More than 43% of Oregon wines are certified organic, sustainable or Biodynamic, and most others are committed to sustainability. Growers and consumers alike find the resulting vintages to be fresher, more palatable and more indicative of Oregon's distinct flavor. ▶



Eyrie Vineyards



Photo: Christopher McCollum

Wine By Joe

Cooper Mountain Vineyards (9480 SW Grabhorn Rd, Beaverton, 649-0027, coopermountainwine.com) is committed wholeheartedly to that endeavor. Since 1990, owner Bob Gross, a doctor, has sought farming methods that were in line with his homeopathic medicinal practices. When Gross set out on this endeavor, the term “organic” on a label might have deterred finicky buyers because the process of creating organic wines was delicate, and often poorly executed. But Gross was a pioneer and advocate of alternative farming

methods, and the industry grew to embrace organic wines as not only accepted but desired vintages. Says Gross, “We’re very proud of the advances we have made over the years, becoming the leader in both organic and Biodynamic farming at our vineyards and winery.”

Also at the forefront of the Oregon wine boom is Joe Dobbles, a self-made vino whiz kid who managed to turn only \$50,000 and a \$250,000 equipment loan into a major business. As savvy as he is knowledgeable, Dobbles knows that a big part of being successful in the wine industry is not only having a good product, but knowing when and how to market it. To that end, Dobbles created three labels to appeal to three very different markets, one of which is **Wine By Joe (240 SE 5th St, Dundee, 538-1141, winebyjoe.com)**, a no-nonsense label that produces high-quality varietals but never takes itself too seriously. As far as the local wine industry’s new allure, Dobbles thinks it’s due to a “perfect storm” of timing, growth and recognition from the medical community of wine’s health benefits. And Pinot noir, which is the varietal darling of the Oregon, is particularly hot. Says Dobbles, “It’s not a jaguar, it’s not a bulldozer; it’s sexier.”

Also making headlines are the very hip, very sexy wine goddesses of **Hip Chicks Do Wine (4510 SE 23rd Ave, 234-3790, hipchicksdowine.com)**. Laurie Lewis and Renee Neely are taking the industry by storm with their tongues planted firmly in their cheeks. The pair understand Portland; their attitude and their wine fit right into the city’s scrappy, creative niche. In their industrial southeast winery and tasting room, these hardworking chicks manage to produce 3,000 cases annually. With flirtatious selections such as Bad Girl Blanc, Drop Dead Red and their all-occasion Vin Nombriol or “Belly Button Wine,” and with pinup-style labels designed by local artists, it’s easy to see why Hip Chicks are so, well, hip.

Indeed, across the board, wine is hip these days. Oregon is already a giant in the industry and it is poised to grow by leaps and bounds in the next few years. The lush vineyards sprinkled around the state are becoming popular destination spots, and with talks of a hotel being built in Dundee, Oregon could become the next Napa Valley. Joe Dobbles, for one, thinks it’s about time: “Oregon is cool. Oregon is hip, and Oregon has paid its dues.”

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