



A Taste of Oregon Wine

From the very beginning, the story of Oregon wine has been one of momentum and innovation. Despite challenges and setbacks along the way, Oregon winegrowers have persevered, collaborated, and invented, propelling Oregon wine to international acclaim and earning it a special place in the hearts of Oregonians.

This exhibit explores the story of Oregon wine and some of the moments that make up its history. The narrative spans over 150 years, from the pioneers who brought grapevines on the Oregon Trail to the winegrowers who blazed a new trail in the 1960s, and from the seasonal workers who support an entire industry to the innovations happening across the state today. While wine and its meaning have evolved for Oregonians over the years, what has remained constant is the dedication of people who have grown, made, and embraced Oregon wine, contributing their hard work and passion to ensure that this treasure would be shared not only with family and friends but also with the world.

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Early Growth:



Oregon Historical Society Library, 024257

The First Oregon Vines

- Wine grapes are not native to the Pacific Northwest, so the earliest winemakers also introduced the plants to the area. The Hudson's Bay Company planted the first recorded vineyard in Oregon Territory at Fort Vancouver in the 1820s. The vines were likely brought by ship from England. Maintaining a vineyard allowed the company to produce a supply of wine for their own consumption rather than relying on overseas shipments.
- By the 1840s, an influx of pioneers from the Oregon Trail was expanding the territory's population. Pioneer Henderson Luelling brought over 700 fruit and nut plants, including grape vines, by wagon in 1847. Although his plan to bring the plants on the long journey from Iowa was met with skepticism, Luelling refused to listen to critics. His careful tending of the plants during the trip paid off, and he and his brother Seth quickly established Oregon's first nursery.
- Some of the earliest winemaking in Oregon occurred in the southern part of the state. Peter Britt was already a renowned photographer when he opened Valley View Vineyard, the first commercial winery in Oregon, in the 1850s. Britt was a Renaissance man who also worked as a miner, banker, meteorologist, and beekeeper. The winery functioned until Britt's death in 1906. Today, Britt Festivals, a popular concert series, is held on his beautiful estate.

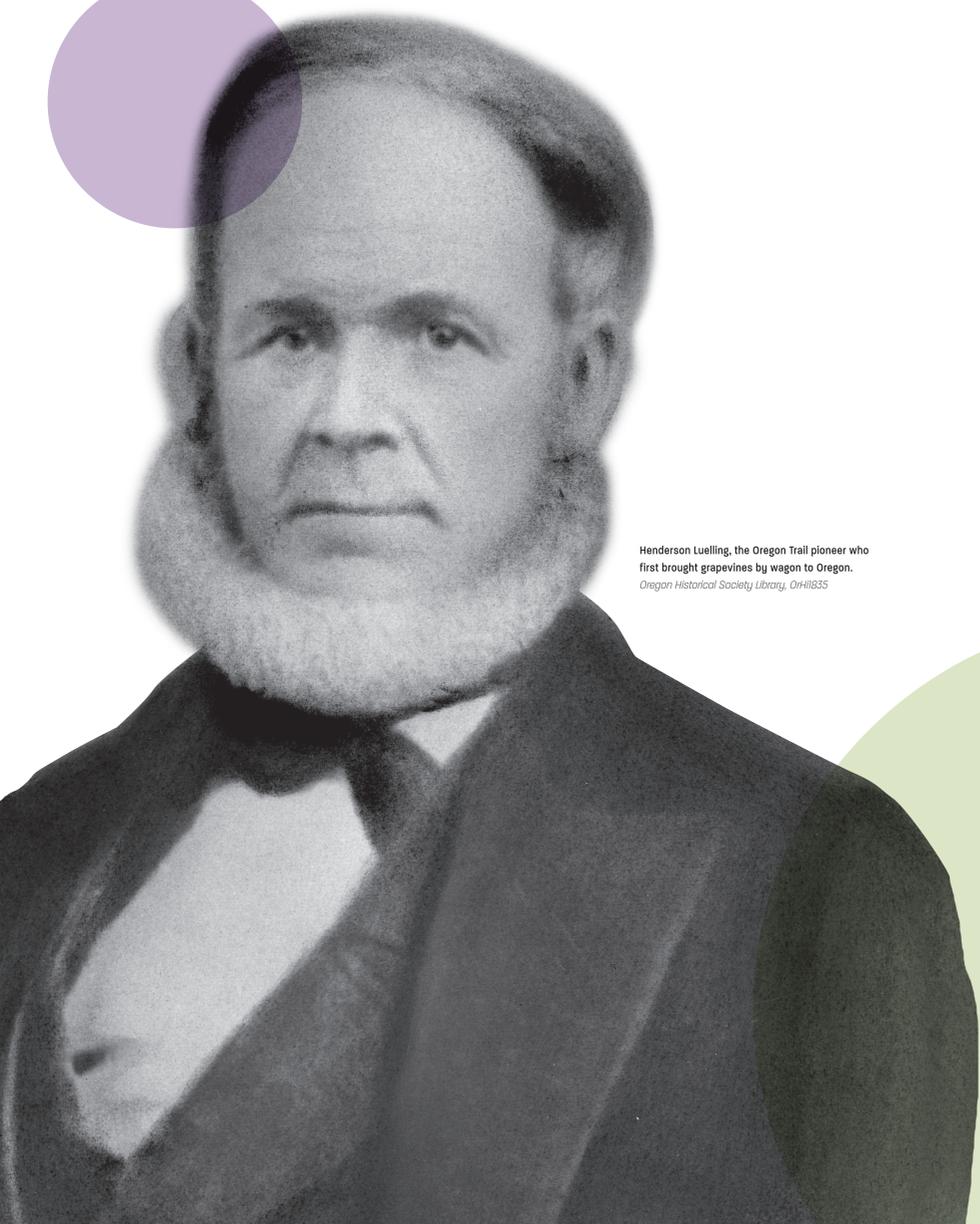


Fort Vancouver, circa 1855. The small field on the upper left may be a vineyard. Oregon Historical Society Library, 008579



Peter Britt, 1858. Britt found success as both a photographer and a winemaker. Oregon Historical Society Library, 000266

Henderson Luelling, the Oregon Trail pioneer who first brought grapevines by wagon to Oregon. Oregon Historical Society Library, 0111835





Prohibition agents dump confiscated alcohol into the sewer, circa 1921. Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-103257

Prohibition:

1915-1933

The fledgling Oregon wine industry began to prosper by the late nineteenth century. German immigrants Edward and John Von Pessls and Adam Doerner were finding success in southern Oregon with Riesling and Sauvignon wines. In the Columbia Gorge, Italian settler Louis Comini nurtured Zinfandel vines still in use today. One of the earliest Willamette Valley winemakers, Ernst Reuter, even won a silver medal for his white wine at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.

Just as the wine industry in Oregon was experiencing early successes, another movement was gathering steam: temperance. The temperance movement, urging the prohibition of alcohol, was so influential within Oregon that alcohol was made illegal four years before the 18th Amendment banned production and sale nationwide. For the wineries, Prohibition spelled disaster. Most vineyards throughout the state pulled out vines and halted production.

But Prohibition did not mark the end of winemaking in Oregon. While wineries closed, many farmers continued to grow grapes and ferment wine in basements and bathrooms. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture census figures, wine grape production in Oregon actually increased from 1,421 tons in 1919 to 2,668 in 1929.



A barn in Portland with bottles of alcohol seized by the police, 1931. Courtesy of The Oregonian



Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-9834



Crime surged during Prohibition as scores of people, some with no criminal past, illegally produced and sold alcohol. The ladies in this 1923 photo were convicted as moonshiners in Portland. Courtesy of The Oregonian



Less than 100 years ago, access to quality drinking water in Portland was limited and many turned to drinking alcohol to quench their thirst. To discourage this practice, businessman Simon Benson donated funds for public drinking fountains, nicknamed "Benson Bubbblers." Courtesy of The Oregonian



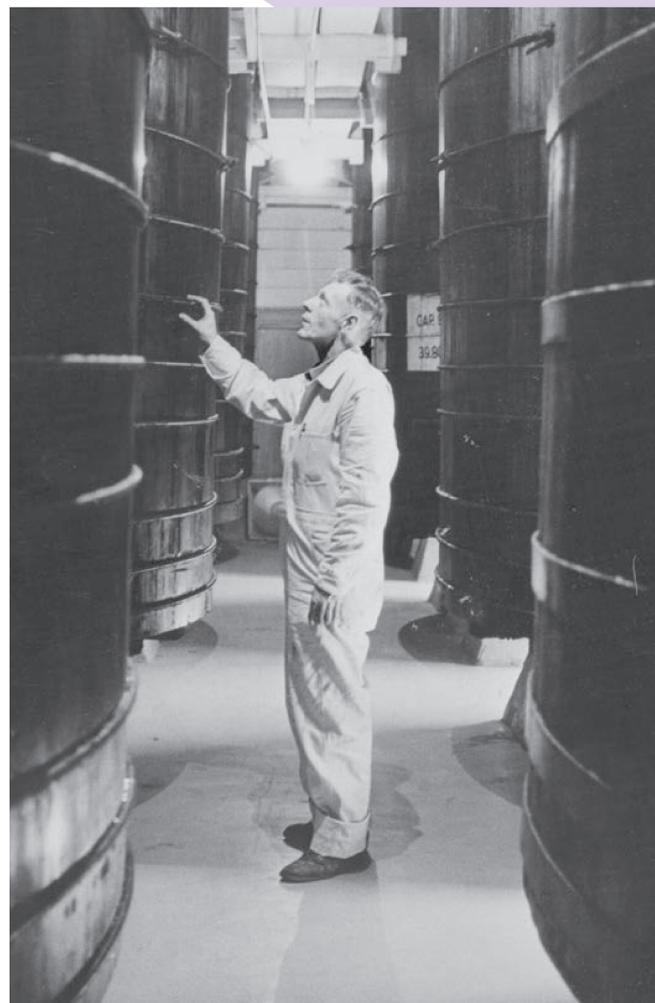
An Italian-American woman in Portland draws muscatel wine from a barrel to celebrate the Allied victory in Italy, September 1943. Recent European immigrants often brought their wine traditions and even made their own wine, but the majority of Americans had little interest in these European traditions. *Courtesy of The Oregonian*

Farmer Wineries & Cocktail Culture

In March 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Cullen-Harrison Act, permitting the legal sale of wine and low-alcohol beer. The 21st Amendment was passed later that year, effectively ending Prohibition throughout most of the country. Oregonians wasted little time in re-establishing their wine industry, and by 1938, there were 28 licensed wineries in the state.

Many of the new wineries established in Oregon following Prohibition were considered “farmer wineries.” These operations grew their own fruit and produced and sold low-alcohol table wine on the premises. The wines were not limited to grape varieties, however, and other fruits such as apples, pears, and berries were also commonly used.

The tastes of the nation did not immediately trend toward wine after it again became legal to produce and sell the product. Cocktails had become popular during Prohibition as bartenders looked for creative ways to mask the taste of poor quality bootleg liquors. Mixing drinks rose to an art form over the next few decades. With the exception of champagne, wine was looked down on as a low-quality option, more often associated with sweet jug wines than with fine European varieties. Despite the post-Prohibition surge, most Oregon wineries had closed by the 1950s, and the future looked uncertain for Oregon wine.



Of the 28 wineries licensed after Prohibition, only Honeywood Winery in Salem remains. Here, winemaker Richard Miller checks barrels containing fruit and berry wines during the 1960s. *Courtesy of The Oregonian*

Cocktail Hour

WHERE SMART
PEOPLE MEET





Charles Coury (Ernest Reuter) House, Forest Grove, Oregon, 1967. David Hill Vineyards is still producing Pinot Noir from vines planted by Charles Coury in the 1960s. The site was also home to one of Oregon's earliest wineries, operated by the Reuter family from the 1880s until Prohibition. Erath Winery Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College

The Pioneers of Wine



In 1961, Richard Sommer became the first student from the University of California-Davis to strike out for Oregon with plans to grow wine. Sommer and his fellow students had been told by their professors that *Vitis vinifera*, the European wine grape, could never be grown successfully in cool, rainy Oregon. In a pattern that would become familiar for early Oregon winemakers, Sommer saw potential that his professors did not. He took a chance, purchasing land in southern Oregon's Umpqua Valley and planting a vineyard he named HillCrest.

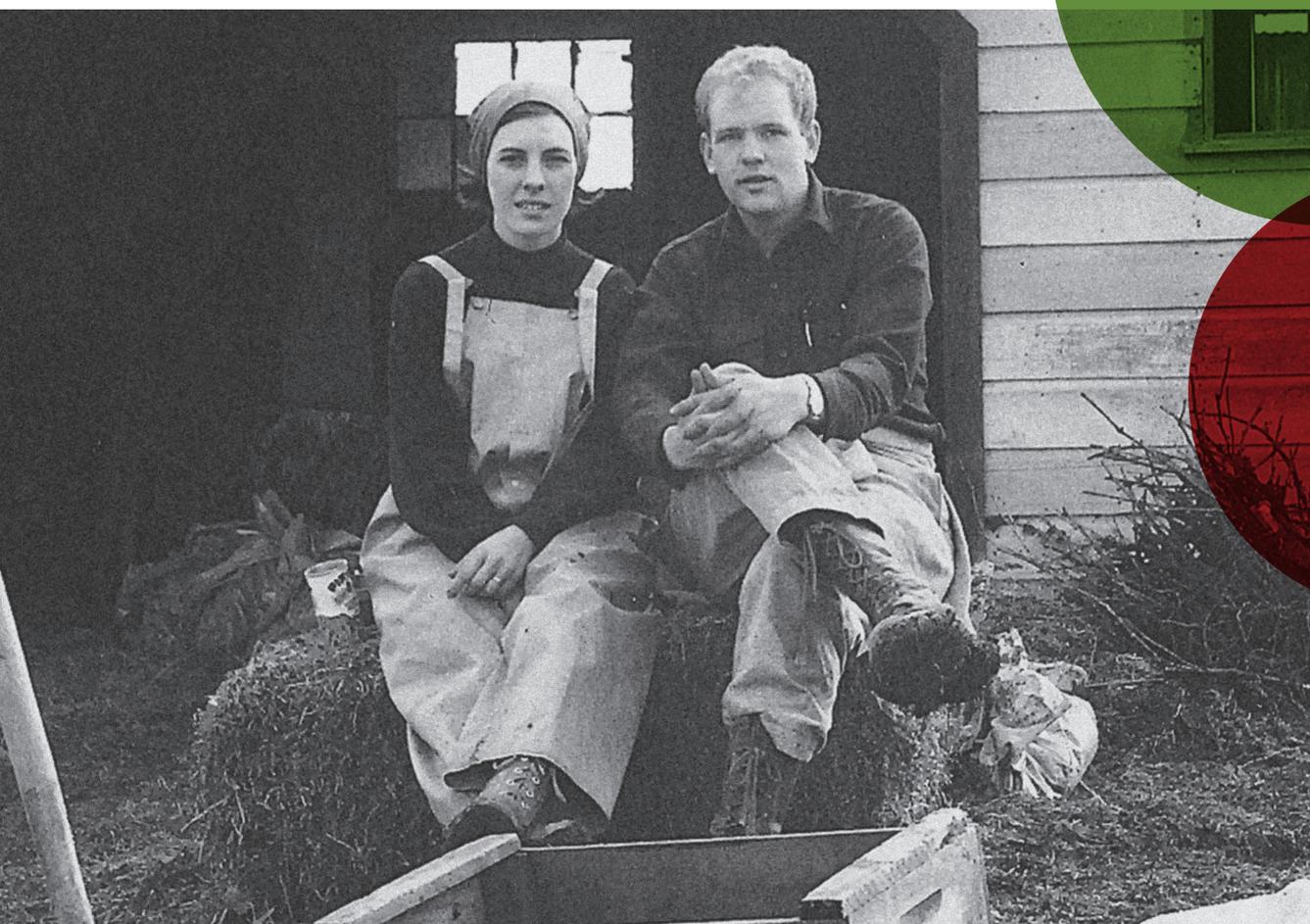
Now considered the "Father of Oregon Wine," Sommer planted over 35 varieties of wine grapes at his vineyard in Roseburg and produced Oregon's first Pinot Noir. Two more UC Davis students, David Lett and Charles Coury, made the move to Oregon in 1965. David Lett planted wine grapes at a rented plot near Corvallis before moving north with his wife Diana in 1966 and founding The Eyrie Vineyards with plantings of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and America's first Pinot Gris. Coury moved to the northern Willamette Valley, planting Pinot Noir and Alsatian grape varieties at David Hill, previously the site of Ernest Reuter's pre-Prohibition winery. As the decade drew to a close, another UC Davis student by the name of Dick Erath came looking for the best West Coast location to grow wine and fulfilled his wish in the Dundee Hills in 1968.

Not only were these young winemakers successful at growing grapes in Oregon, but soon they would produce wines to rival the best in the world. The Oregon wine revolution had begun.

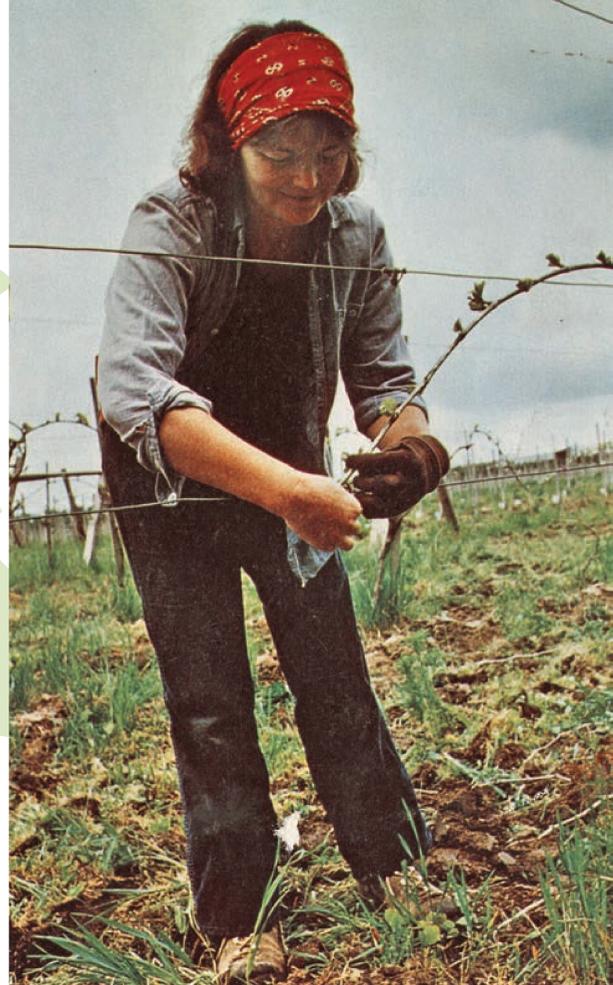


Richard Sommer at HillCrest Vineyard, Roseburg, 1960s. Courtesy of HillCrest Vineyard

Diana and David Lett at The Eyrie Vineyards, 1966. The Letts spent their honeymoon in 1966 transferring vines from a site in Corvallis to their winery, The Eyrie Vineyards, in the Dundee Hills. The Eyrie Vineyards Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College.



Coming to Fruition



Nancy Ponzi tending grapevines, 1970s Ponzi Vineyards Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College.

By the late 1960s, tastes had begun to change. Americans were traveling to Europe and experiencing hand-crafted food and wine. Hippies were drinking wine to rebel against their cocktail-drinking parents. And winemakers in California were producing wines on par with the best in Europe. The result was an astounding 40 percent increase in U.S. wine consumption between 1968 and 1972.

Adventurous winemakers continued to migrate to Oregon during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although many arrived with bucolic images of life as a winegrower, the early years were often a struggle. While some had training in viticulture and enology, many had left previous professions to try their hand at winegrowing and were learning through trial and error. Because there was no existing wine industry, there were also no seasonal workers with grape-harvesting skills, resulting in many winegrowers working the fields and using their families as free labor. Considering that most were trying to grow Pinot Noir, notoriously one of the fussiest and most delicate of the *Vitis vinifera* grapes, it is a testament to their perseverance that they not only endured but were quickly producing excellent vintages.

Although Oregon vintners were already creating outstanding wines by the late 1970s, the world had yet to take notice. Then, in 1979, attention came from an unlikely place: the prestigious Gault-Millau Wine Olympiades in Paris. In a stunning upset, a 1975 Pinot Noir from The Eyrie Vineyards placed among the category's top ten. Intrigued, French winegrower Robert Drouhin organized a follow-up contest pitting premier French Burgundies against the Eyrie wine. This time, Eyrie clinched second place. The press trumpeted the story to the world, and Oregon wine was on the map.

Janis Checchia and Myron Redford, co-owners of Amity Vineyards, harvesting grapes, 1974 Amity Vineyards Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College.



Dick Erath during the planting of his vineyard, 1969 Erath Winery Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College.





Winegrowers meet with Governor Vic Atiyeh, 1981. Eroth Winery Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College

The Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

From the early days, modern winegrowers in Oregon banded together, sharing information and helping each other as they forged into unknown territory. With only a few fledgling wineries, there was no one to ask for advice. The young winemakers shared what they were learning, recognizing that “the rising tide lifts all boats” and believing this collaboration would benefit all.

Acts of cooperation were as informal as sharing equipment or information but winegrowers also formed organizations and programs that have been a guiding force in Oregon wine. This spirit of cooperation continues even today.

Oregon Winegrowers Association

Recognizing that legislation was needed to support and grow their businesses and protect the young industry, winegrowers in southern Oregon and the Willamette Valley separately founded winegrowers' associations in the 1970s. Quickly realizing that working together was the only way to pass legislation, the organizations combined to form the Oregon Winegrowers Association.

Oregon Wine Board

Oregon winegrowers traveled across the country in the 1970s, finding that the only way to market their wines successfully was to band together. In 1983, they formed the Oregon Wine Board to take over promoting, marketing, and researching Oregon wines.

Oregon State University Viticulture and Enology Program

With a great deal of foresight, Oregon winegrowers passed legislation to tax themselves and use the funds to support a research position at Oregon State University. The position expanded into a degree program that also provides valuable training for winemakers and grape growers.

Steamboat Pinot Noir Conference

In 1980, winemaker Stephen Cary organized a gathering of Pinot Noir producers to taste new wines, share information about grape growing and winemaking, and socialize with peers. Over the years, the annual conference held at its namesake Steamboat Inn on the Umpqua River has played a crucial role in improving Pinot Noir around the world.

International Pinot Noir Celebration (IPNC)

To celebrate the budding success of the Oregon wine industry, winegrowers, restaurateurs, and wine-lovers came together to plan an event. In 1987, the first annual IPNC was held in McMinnville. Each July, 50 guest chefs create culinary masterpieces using local ingredients to pair with the best Pinot Noir wines. Winemakers and enthusiasts from around the world descend on Willamette Valley wine country to experience the food and wines that make Oregon special.

Founding members of the Yamhill County Wineries Association, 1983. Kneeling, left to right: Joe Campbell (Elk Cove Winery), David Adelsheim (Adelsheim Vineyard) Standing, left to right: Bill Blosser (Sokol Blosser Winery), Don Byard (Hidden Springs Winery), Myron Redford (Amity Vineyards), Dick Erath (Erath Winery), Fred Arterberry (Arterberry Winery), Fred Benoit (Chateau Benoit Winery), David Lett (The Eyrie Vineyards), The Eyrie Vineyards Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College



Harvesting Dreams:

Seasonal Workers and Oregon Wine



Vineyard worker Seferino Flores. ISalud! Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College.

By the time a bottle of Oregon Pinot Noir or Chardonnay reaches your hands, an untold number of dedicated and hardworking individuals have participated in each step of the process to produce it. Among the people integral to the production of fine Oregon wines are the large numbers of vineyard workers who carefully tend the plants and harvest the grapes.

Approximately 96 percent of Willamette Valley vineyard workers are Latino and most have migrated from Mexico. Many are undocumented.

Mexican field workers make up a large percentage of migrant farm workers because they come from rural agricultural areas where they learned fieldwork skills that are in high demand. Some stay throughout the year, spraying and tending the vines, but most arrive only for the fall harvest season, a short period of intense work picking grapes before the rains begin. Migrant workers often move throughout the West, starting in southern California and moving up the coast, harvesting a variety of crops in season.

A small number of Latino workers are able to secure permanent jobs at wineries, working throughout the year in various aspects of the winemaking process from tending vines to bottling and storing wine. Many migrate from one job to the next, a demanding lifestyle with little stability and hundreds of miles separating them from their loved ones. While some programs provide necessary services for these workers, there is still much to do in improving the lives of the people who play such a crucial role in American agriculture, including Oregon wine.



A vineyard worker picks grapes during harvest. ISalud! Collection, Oregon Wine History Archive, Linfield College.

Photo courtesy of Carolyn Wells-Kramer (CWK Photography)





Alejandra Navarrete and Morgan Curtis, OSU graduate students, learn in the field at Stoller Vineyard. Courtesy of Oregon Wine Research Institute

Students of Wine

While certain regions of Oregon bear a resemblance to European wine regions like Burgundy and Bordeaux, the state is still unique in climate and terroir; thus, other wine regions' philosophies may not hold true. In the early days of winegrowing, Oregon vintners could only guess at the best varieties of grapes to grow, successful growing methods, and ways to improve the process. To fill this knowledge gap, winegrowers founded a research board in the 1970s, agreeing to tax themselves to fund it. As the Board evolved into a research and marketing organization, winegrowers increased their tax to \$25 per ton of grapes, the highest in the world at that time.

The taxes allowed the winegrowers to fund a position at Oregon State University (OSU) focused solely on viticulture (the study of grapes) and enology (the study of wine and winemaking). The research results were shared through workshops and publications. The tiny department expanded and in 2003 the program became one of only three in the country offering degrees. Five years later, the Oregon Wine Research Institute was founded as a partnership among OSU, the wine industry, and the USDA. Over the years, the research gathered at OSU has helped winegrowers significantly improve their product and, as a result, raised the profile of Oregon wine.

As the wine industry has developed, so have the number of wine-focused programs across the state. Chemeketa Community College, Umpqua Community College, and Treasure Valley Community College offer courses that enable students to learn their craft in the midst of the state's major winegrowing regions. And if the momentum of the industry is any indication, it is likely that more educational opportunities will follow.



Barney Watson, the first viticulture and enology researcher at OSU, testing wine, c. 1985. P57 acc. 9156. Courtesy of Oregon State University Archives

Southern Oregon Wine Institute students Tim Hennessey (left) and Melanie Pierce (center) sort grapes with SOWI Associate Director and Instructor Dwayne Bershaw. Courtesy of Southern Oregon Wine Institute



OSU Viticulture Extension Specialist Patty Skinkins evaluates grape clusters. Courtesy of Oregon Wine Research Institute





The LEED Gold testing room at Stoller Family Estate Winery, Dayton. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certifies buildings at levels of Certified, Silver, Gold, or Platinum based on points for green features. Courtesy of Andrea Johnson Photography and Stoller Family Estate Winery

A Natural Leader

Oregonians have a long history of making environmentally friendly practices a way of life, and Oregon winegrowers are no exception. Over the past few decades, the state wine industry has quickly risen to a position of leader in sustainable winegrowing. In a nutshell, sustainable winegrowing involves methods that do not deplete or destroy natural resources. With an impressive number of innovations and widespread environmentally friendly practices, Oregon wineries have found many ways to conserve natural resources and improve their communities. Here are some examples:



Owls and other raptors help wineries naturally control rodents and birds that like to feast on wine grapes. Courtesy of Willamette Valley Vineyards

Sustainable farming

Cattrall Brothers Vineyards in Amity planted their organic vineyard in 1972. Today, over 47 percent of Oregon's vineyards are sustainably farmed, the highest rate of any state.

Sustainable certification

LIVE (Low-Input Viticulture and Enology) was founded in Oregon in 1999. The non-profit certifies vineyards and wineries across the Pacific Northwest using international standards and manages the Carbon Reduction Challenge to inspire businesses to reduce greenhouse gases.

Cork recycling

Willamette Valley Vineyards was the first winery in the world to use Forest Stewardship Council-certified cork, verified as harvested in a sustainable and socially responsible way. Additionally, the Cork Forest Conservation Alliance in Salem leads the country with its cork recycling and education programs.

LEED certification

In 2002, Sokol Blosser's barrel cellar became the first winery building certified by LEED, a program that recognizes best practices and strategies in green building. Stoller Vineyards achieved the honor of first American winery with LEED Gold status in 2006.

Salmon-Safe

The non-profit program has certified over 70 Oregon wineries as using practices that protect and restore streams, keeping salmon and other species safe.

Refillable containers

In 2013, Oregon became the first state to pass a law allowing wine to be sold in refillable growlers. Selling in refillables helps wineries such as Springhouse Cellars in Hood River reduce their carbon footprint. A growing number of wineries also refill wine kegs for restaurants.

Founder Jim Bernau on his biodiesel tractor at Willamette Valley Vineyards, Turner. Courtesy of Willamette Valley Vineyards



Solar panels provide energy at Bethel Heights Vineyard, Salem. Courtesy of Bethel Heights Vineyard





Solēna Estate, the first Oregon winery purchased by Jackson Family Estates. Photo courtesy of Carolyn Wells- Kramer (CWK Photography)

A Jewel in the Crown:

Outside Interest in Oregon Wine

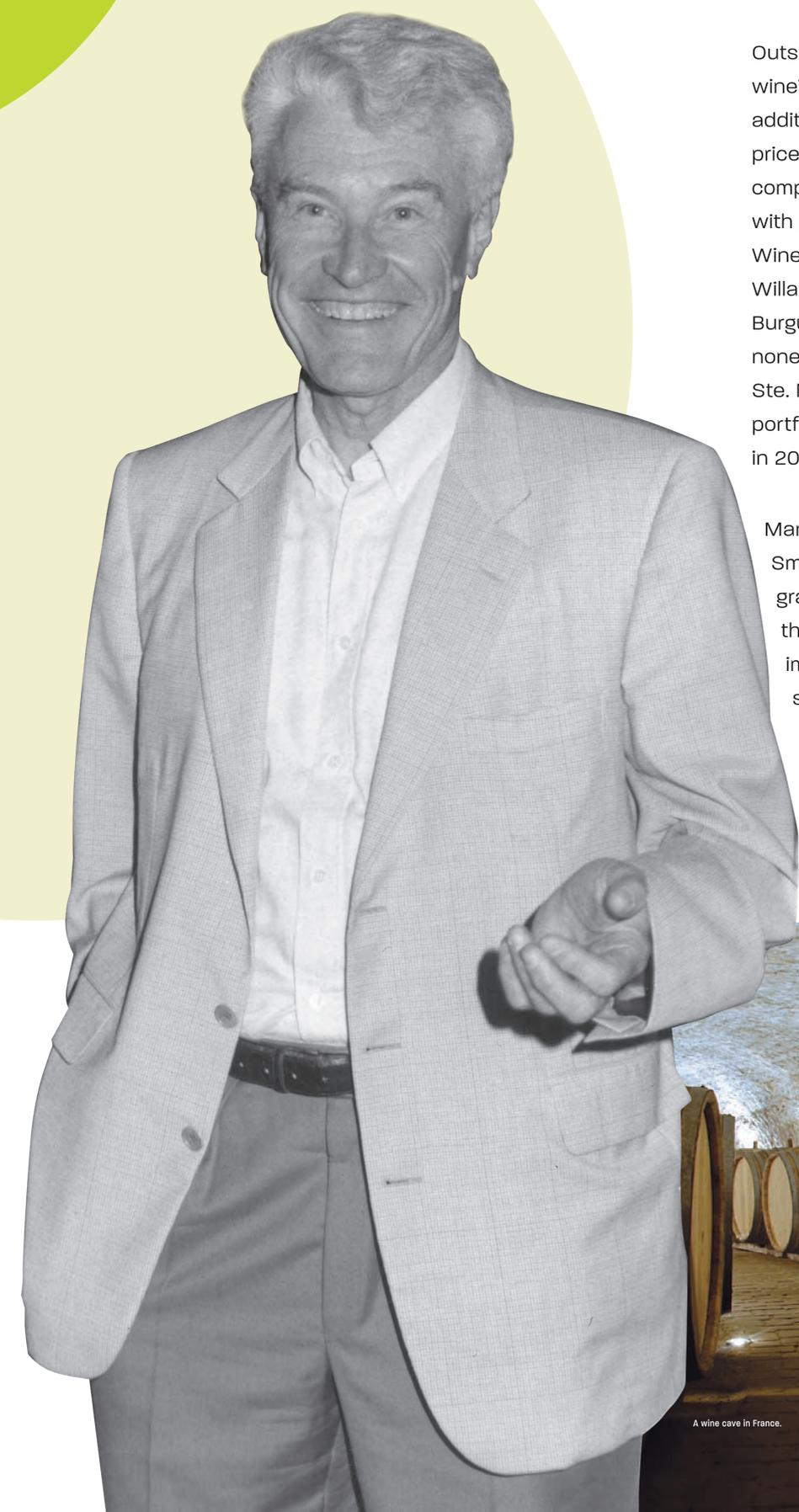
For Oregon wine, the year 2013 was a significant one. During those twelve months, yet another sign of the industry's powerful momentum emerged: the largest influx of outside investment to date.

Robert Drouhin became the first foreign investor to purchase vineyard land in 1987 after witnessing The Eyrie Vineyard's victories during blind tastings. Head of a respected French wine family of Burgundy, Drouhin's stamp of approval gave Oregon wines an unprecedented boost.

Outside investors trickled in over time, but by 2013 Oregon wine's growing prestige created a tipping point fueled additionally by the state's plentiful water and reasonably priced land. The Pacific Northwest's largest private wine company, Precept Wine, invested in 30 acres near Newberg with plans for future growth. California's Jackson Family Wines, known for their Kendall-Jackson line, bought 1,300 Willamette Valley acres. Maison Louis Jadot, another pillar of Burgundy wine, acquired a small amount of acreage that is nonetheless symbolic in what it portends. And early in 2014, Ste. Michelle Wine Estates added 150 Oregon acres to their portfolio, which includes pioneering Erath Winery, purchased in 2006.

Many are divided as to what this might mean for Oregon. Smaller wineries raise concerns about less availability of grapes as larger producers control more land. Others feel that attention brought by well-known companies can only improve Oregon's standing. The impacts remain to be seen, but one thing is for certain: Oregon has achieved a new level of respect in the wine world and the state's importance is only growing.

Robert Drouhin, head of Burgundy's Maison Joseph Drouhin from 1957 to 2003 and founder of Oregon's Domaine Drouhin. Photo courtesy of IPNC



A wine cave in France.

Of Wine and Weather



Photo by Stephan Ridgway

As temperatures rise, winegrowers in Oregon may replace cool climate varieties like Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with heat-tolerant grapes like Syrah and Merlot.

Climate change is already affecting weather patterns and temperatures around the world. As levels of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere rise due to automobile and factory emissions, the Earth is warming, resulting in impacts such as melting glaciers, extreme heat events, severe storms, drought, fires, and rising sea levels.

Oregon could be affected by all of these consequences of climate change. Our state has already seen a rise of at least one degree in average temperatures over the past century.

Wine grapes grow in narrow zones of climate and are greatly affected by changes in weather patterns. Few grapes have more specific climate needs than Pinot Noir, the wine that has become Oregon's signature varietal. Climatologists predict that the Earth will warm three degrees by 2050, a warming trend that could bump Oregon into temperatures too high for growing Pinot Noir, a grape that thrives in mild conditions. While climate change may not spell an end to the wine industry, it could change the face of Oregon wine as growers out of necessity shift to warmer climate varieties such as Merlot and Syrah.

If part of the result of my work is that the region grows, gains recognition as a fine wine-producing region and people are successful, then I have succeeded in being a scientist.

— Greg Jones, Professor and Climatologist at Southern Oregon University, 2009



Greg Jones, Professor and Climatologist, 2009. Photo courtesy of Greg Jones

When Greg Jones decided to study climate through the lens of viticulture in the mid-1990s, he was the only researcher in the world following that path. Through his groundbreaking research at Southern Oregon University, he has focused on identifying the best areas for growing grapes and learned how climate variation and change affect the growth of vines and wine quality. Over time, he has helped improve the quality of wines in southern Oregon and provided new information about the best grapes to grow there. His work has also influenced some growers to switch to warmer weather varieties as he tracks climate change and its influence on Oregon wine.

Photo courtesy of Carolyn Wells-Kramer (CWK Photography)