

Oregon WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE OF WINE IN OREGON WINEPRESS

Oregon Wine Press
PO BOX 727
McMinnville, OR 97128
Ph: 503-883-6266
Fax: 503-472-9151
info@oregonwinepress.com



COMMENTARY

Guest Column

Grand Adventures in Pursuit of the Oregon Wine Trail

Initial impressions from a former California resident

By Dixie L. Gill

Two months ago my fiancé, Patrick, and I spent the night traveling on I-5 in pursuit of a better life. Earlier that day, we'd swept our way out of our small San Francisco apartment, piled our neurotic Doberman and feisty tabby into the back seat of the Jeep, and said some final "until next times" to friends.

Our pets whined as we rounded the many corners in the mountain ranges, wondering why we were subjecting them to a grueling 12-hour sleep-deprivation exercise. They were much more concerned with maintaining their routines than with our desires to own a home and live in a beautiful, adventurous area that just so happens to produce the country's best Pinot Noir!

Our friends in the Bay Area were equally perplexed by our seemingly hasty decision: "But you just visited during Super Bowl weekend! How have you already bought a house? What about the endless MLS searches, multiple offers and bidding wars?"

We'd actually been seeking a less hectic lifestyle for some time, so when Patrick's company offered a transfer to Vancouver, Wash., we eagerly planned a scouting trip.

Our plane into PDX that chilly February weekend was significantly delayed. We arrived at the rental-car counter out of breath and annoyed. The evening manager greeted us with a smile, quickly processed our paper work and handed us the keys.

Dumbfounded, I responded, "Wow! That was easy. Is everyone here this friendly?" He chuckled, "This is Oregon. Everybody is nice!"

Throughout the weekend, I joked that Patrick's company had planted "nice people" all throughout the area to "aid" our decision-making process. We encountered welcoming smiles as we explored in the best way we knew how: eating and drinking our way throughout the area.

There were delightful meals at ten 01 in Portland, where Elizabeth selected for us a stunning bottle of Cristom, and at Roots Restaurant in Camas, Wash., which offered friendly service. We soaked up the view over a bottle of Anam Cara Riesling atop Portland City Grill and enjoyed a relaxing nightcap with friends at Henry's Tavern. Only our Realtor was allowed to interrupt our culinary tour, entertaining us with excursions into the hills overlooking the Columbia River and Portland's city lights.

A month later, I was greeted by a beautiful sunrise on I-5 near the Willamette Valley, less than one hour away from my new home. Those last 50 miles were both exciting and somewhat nerve-wracking; we were running late for our closing. In the final stretch of I-205, we caught our first awe-inspiring glimpse of an area gem—Mt. Hood, which immediately erased the evening's trials with its morning glow.

It's been six weeks since the move, and we already love the Pacific Northwest! There are obvious contributors to our happiness: the lower cost of living, plentiful outdoor activities and a more relaxed lifestyle. But the real pleasure has been in discovering the unknowns that have made my experience rich thus far, both personally and professionally.

There's McMinnville with its cute downtown and nearby (very impressive) Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum. The Dundee Hills with phenomenal views of the environs, wineries I've long admired, like Archery Summit and Domaine Drouhin, and recent additions to my list such as Torii Mor and DePonte Cellars. And a host of "new" regions to explore like Columbia Gorge, Walla Walla Valley and everything else in the Willamette Valley.

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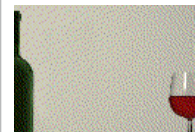
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As a wine industry veteran who has recently started a consulting firm to provide strategic guidance to wineries and related businesses regarding marketing, sales and finance, I've spent these first few weeks introducing myself to new colleagues and listening to their thoughts on the area.

Northwest wineries have experienced phenomenal growth over the last decade—Oregon alone is now home to over 400 wineries! The state has incredible potential for further growth and increased recognition given its delicious and distinct bottlings, beautiful and diverse geography, and a plethora of delights for tourists. That its promoters, writers and winemakers have been so welcoming to a newcomer like me reveals perhaps the industry's most promising aspect—its genuine nature. Oregon is truly refreshing. And it's a pleasure to be here! ♦

Dixie L. Gill, proprietor of Trellis Wine Consulting, LLC, can be reached at 360-210-5551. Or for more information, visit www.trelliswineconsulting.com.
