

Home > Blogs > Harvey Steiman At Large

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Rynders Straddles Oregon, Washington

New venture links up with Suncadia Resort

Posted: Aug 18, 2009 12:35pm ET

Give Tony Rynders credit for thinking outside the box. The former Domaine Serene winemaker's latest project, Swiftwater Cellars, has him consulting on a 7,000-case winery on the 6,400-acre Suncadia Resort 80 miles east of Seattle. This might be the only American winery, and certainly the only one in Washington, in a resort. It breaks ground Friday.

So now we have an Oregon winemaker consulting on Washington wines, but he's also adding a Pinot Noir from Willamette Valley to complete the picture. It's not unusual for Oregon wineries to supplement their Pinot Noir-centric bottlings with a few Bordeaux varieties or Syrahs made from Washington grapes. But few Washington wineries bottle Pinot Noirs from Oregon.

"I see a lot of Washington grapes coming to Oregon, but not too much going the other way," says Rynders. He's putting the idea into practice at Swiftwater.

The first wines, made in Walla Walla, will be released in about a year. They are expected to include a Columbia Valley Bordeaux blend and Syrah made in 2007, and a Columbia Valley Semillon-Sauvignon Blanc and a Willamette Valley Pinot Noir made in 2008.

The resort is in Cle Elum, near Roslyn, in the Cascade Range nowhere near any grapevines. That hasn't fazed dozens of wineries in the Seattle area, which make some of Washington's best wines from grapes grown even farther away.

Rynders has had an interest in Washington since his days as a winemaker at Hogue. Even while at Domaine Serene, he made Syrah using grapes purchased from vineyards in Walla Walla under the Rockblock label, also owned by Domaine Serene. Technically they were from the Oregon side of the AVA, but most of the grapes from the Seven Hills Vineyard went to Washington wineries.

Swiftwater was founded by Don Watts, whom Rynders met at Hogue. When Watts sold his 20,000-acre vegetable operation, among Washington's largest, to ConAgra in 2008, he kept his 300-acre Zephyr Ridge Vineyard, planted in 1994. For years he sold his grapes to various wineries. Now Zephyr Ridge, in Washington's Horse Heaven Hills AVA, will provide some of the grapes for Swiftwater.

After leaving under icy circumstances from Domaine Serene, where he made the wines for 10 years, he hooked up for his first gig as consulting winemaker at Grand Cru Estates. Laurent and Danielle Montalieu's idea with Grand Cru is to sell memberships, each good for up to one barrel of wine made to the member's specifications at the winery, plus other benefits. Grand Cru is about to christen its new winery at the vineyard not far from WillaKenzie and Shea Cellars near Yamhill, Ore.

Rynders also owns Octave Vineyard in Walla Walla and a piece of land outside Carlton, Ore., where he hopes to harvest Pinot Noir for his own planned winery.