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Washington's New Destination Winery

Is this the future for wineries outside traditional wine country?

by [Paul Franson](#)



The 46,000-square-foot Swiftwater Cellars is located high in the Cascade Mountains.

Cle Elum, Wash. -- A fancy new winery opening in Washington on Sept. 10 may show the future of American wineries -- or the antithesis of what many consider a traditional winery.

[Swiftwater Cellars](#) is a capacious, 46,000 square-foot edifice, home to the Hoist House restaurant, a wine tasting bar, private dining rooms and extensive lounge area overlooking a golf course at the Suncadia Resort, high in the Cascade Mountains 80 miles east of Seattle. A 14-room B & B and 22 shared-ownership cottages are planned for the future.

The winery structure resembles an old mountain lodge, crafted of concrete realistically textured and painted to look like wood. Its distressed new wood beams and steel interior supports also aptly suggest an old mine. Swiftwater Cellars is near the historic coal-mining town of Cle Elum,

and it sits atop an abandoned coal mine, No. 9. Nearby Roslyn served as the model for the quirky TV series "Northern Exposure," and "Twin Peaks" also was filmed nearby.

The building contains a large winery basement with a capacity for 12,000 cases, and it will produce 4,500 cases of wine this year from grapes grown in Eastern Washington and Oregon. At an altitude of 2,000 feet, the site is too high to grow grapes reliably, but vines may be planted as landscaping. At any rate, in Washington it's common to transport grapes from remote vineyards to wineries.

The Swiftwater winery contains barrel rooms and other cellar areas for parties, and a private bottle storage cellar with faux stone walls for its club members.

Nashville recording band Lonestar will play at the grand opening party Sept. 11 and entertain Swiftwater Cellars' Black Diamond club members during a VIP meeting before the show.

Suncadia is an upscale golf- and family-oriented resort that is reportedly suffering from the economic downturn, but it boasts a lounge, inn, restaurants and many other amenities as well as public and private golf courses.

Owner Don Watts, who farmed 25,000 acres of vegetables until he sold to ConAgra in 2008, sees the facility as a destination, but he's also serious about the wine.

He plans to produce two Cabernets, Syrah and a Sémillon-Sauvignon Blanc blend from Washington, plus two Pinot Noirs from Oregon's Willamette Valley. He will probably augment that with other wines. He anticipates that his former production of 2,500 to 3,500 cases may be inadequate.

To make the wine, he hired former [Gundlach-Bundschu](#) director of winemaking [Linda Trotta](#) from California as associate winemaker to manage daily winemaking operations and work with consulting winemaker Tony Rynders.

Trotta joined Gundlach-Bundschu in 1989 and during her time there completed harvests at Santa Monica Winery in Chile's Rapel Valley and at Rupert & Rothschild in Paarl, South Africa. Originally from Southern California, she graduated from the University of California, Davis, with a bachelor of science degree in fermentation sciences. The cellar includes top equipment including many small fermentors.

As a destination winery, Swiftwater is what many vintners in areas with relatively little winemaking tradition and attractions might aspire to build. Ironically, such facilities are outlawed in Napa Valley, where county regulations consider agriculture, not tourism, the best use of the land. Napa County bans inns, restaurants and many potentially profitable uses such as hosting weddings and corporate events unrelated to wine marketing.

Of course Kittitas County, Wash., doesn't already have hundreds of wineries, and Washington wine-centric cities like [Prosser](#), Pasco and Walla Walls are activity seeking tourist-oriented facilities and attractions. [ShareThis](#)



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