FRIDAY FEATURES

Photo by Paul Hribernick

Oregon wines rival southern cousins

By LORA CUYKENDALL
Of the Emerald

The Napa and Sonoma Valleys lie carefully trimmed, green and rolling just north of San Francisco in California. Early spring days are warm and sunny and by summer the patternwork of vineyards which crisscross the hills are loaded with grapes. Early in September those ripe grapes are plucked and their juice carefully fermented to make wines with names dating back to the early Franciscan monks who settled the region and first started the wineries.

In contrast, the hillsides near Roseburg are still brushy and a little wild. Spring brings as much cold rain as warm sun and even in summer and early fall there is a nip in the air.

But more and more the same patternwork of vineyards that color California valleys are appearing in southern Oregon and the northern Willamette Valley as what is promised to be a burgeoning wine industry starts to take hold.

Long overshadowed by wines of California, Oregon wines have recently been recognized as legitimate choices for the wine drinker — and as the wine industry in Oregon grows, the California pastime of wine tasting also blossoms. You who have visited wine growing regions know that for the price of a few minutes spent on a tour of the facilities, the visitor can usually taste the winery's best output.

Oregon offers a wide variety of wineries and wines to sample. A visit to one of several of these would make a pleasant day or weekend trip.

Closest to home are the Hillcrest and Bjelland Vineyards near Roseburg. The Hillcrest Vineyard is the first vinifera — the name of the strain of grapes used to produce table wines — vineyard established in Oregon in recent years. Located off Garden Valley and Elgarose Roads just north of Roseburg on I-5, the winery is open daily 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and offers tours, tasting and wine sales.

Owner Richard Sommer, originally of California, first planted the vines in southern Oregon in 1961 and went into wine making which was just beginning in the state.

In fact, the whole wine making resurgence in Oregon has its roots in California — the University of California at Davis specifically. It was at that university's large school of enology (wine making) that one of Sommer's professors counseled his class to look to Oregon for good wine growing land. He compared Oregon's climatic conditions to those of the Burgundy Region in France and emphasized the area's clay soil, which he said would produce strong and hardy plants. Oregon's rain and its sometimes uncertain weather produces wines for vintages because the taste of the grapes is influenced by each year's unique weather.

Sommers' primary plantings are White Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon, but the vineyard also produces some Chardonnay, Gwertztraminer, Semillion, Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel and Pinot Noir.

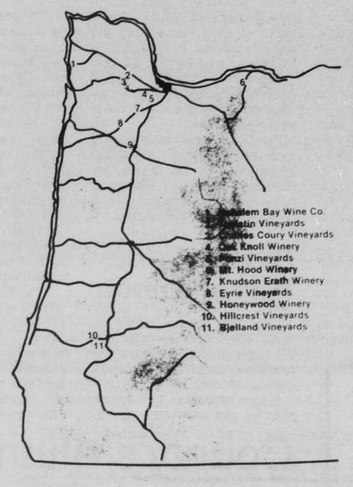
While in the southern part of the state, the wine taster can also plan a stop at the Bjelland Vineyards located off Highway 42 near Tenmile. (A good route to follow is to take the Winston exit off I-5 just south of Roseburg.) Mary and Paul Bjelland, owners of the winery, welcome visitors from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Tuesday and invite tasters to bring a lunch and enjoy the winery's picnic facilities.

To get a taste of Oregon fruit and berry wines, Honeywood Winery in Salem is an excellent stopping point. Honeywood is Oregon's oldest operating winery and was established in 1933. The winery is located on SE 14th Street in Salem and is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

As the wine taster travels north there is a host of wineries from which to choose. The Eyrie Vineyards in McMinnville offers tours and tasting for groups or individuals if prior arrangements are made. This winery is named for the eyrie of red-tailed hawks which live in the vineyard located in the Red Hills of Dundee. To make arrangements for a tour, write The Eyrie Vineyards, 935 East 10th, McMinnville, 97128.

Slightly farther north and just 2½ miles west of downtown Dundee is the Knudsen Erath Winery. Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and White Riseling are featured in the tasting room, which is open weekends from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and weekdays by appointment.

From Dundee, the winetaster can go north to the Ponzi Vineyards located just 4½ miles south of Washington Square in Portland. The newest and smallest of the valley craft wineries, the Ponzi's first planted vines in 1970. Tours can be arranged by appointment and there are picnic areas for visitors.



Also near Portland is the Oak Knoll Winery on Burkhalter Road in Hillsboro. Founded in 1970, the winery produces both variety grape and fruit and berry wines. The winery has a large selection of semi-sweet fruit and berry wines including raspberry, strawberry, loganberry, blackberry, boysenberry, rhubarb, red currant, gooseberry, cherry and concord. Tasting and sales rooms are open Thursday and Sunday from 2 to 6 p.m. and Saturday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. They are open by appointment on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

From the Oak Knoll Winery, the taster can travel west to Charles Coury Vineyards off David Hill Road in Forest Grove. Affectionately known as "Wine Hill," grapes grew here at the turn of the century which produced a wine that won a silver medal at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. Before prohibition closed them down, the area supported eight wineries with over 300 acres of vineyards. Tours of the winery are conducted regularly and Chardonnay, Riesling, Sylvaner, Gewurtztraminer and Pinot Noir are featured in the tasting room.

Just a couple miles away, the Tualatin Vineyards offer wines including a White Riesling, a Gewurtztraminer and Rose of Pinot Noir. Tours and tasting rooms are open on weekends from noon to 6 p.m., although group tours are welcome anytime by appointment. The winery is located on Seavy Road northwest of Forest Grove.

For adventuresome souls who want to blend wine tasting with a trip to the coast, the Nehalem Bay Wine Co. offers fruit and berry wines. The winery building is one of the original Tillamook cheese factories and has a storage capacity of 20,000 gallons. The tasting room is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Mt. Hood Winery, which makes fruit and berry wines from the produce of the Hood River Valley, is located on 24 acres bordering the east fork of the Hood River. Most of the fruits and berries the winery uses are grown right on the winery property. The tasting room is open Tuesdays through Saturday from 1 to 5 p.m.

For more information on Oregon wineries, contact the Wine Growers Council of Oregon, Route 1, Box 220M, Dayton, 97114.

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Coastal trip makes for cheesy tours

A drive along the Oregon Coast can overwhelm the visitor with natural wonders. But pass on to through the Coquille Valley and it's easy to view what Oregonians can work with their hands.

There, the Coquille Valley Dairy Farmer's Co-op produces Bandon cheese. Located on the southern third of the Oregon coast route, U.S. 101, the factory sits at the northern end of the downtown area on Second Street.

And there milk is trucked in from farms where it is stored overnight in tanks until it is transferred to gallon vats where the culture develops and ripens at 88 degrees. After the enzyme rennet is added, the custardy substance is cut into curds of 14 inch slabs. Then, the cheese goes through an acid development test, the liquid is drained off and salt is added. Compressed into chunks, the product goes to a storage area where it is aged from two months to several years.

Cheese, too, uses a coloring process which comes from the tropical Annatto Tree. After two or three months, it is designated mild, another three months and it becomes medium. Sharp cheese means it has been aged a year or more.

But watching cheese being made at the Coquille co-op is also a lesson in Oregon history. Cheese-making came to the area in the 1800s as local dairy farmers began looking for ways to make a profit from excess milk. By the early 1900s there were 15 small producers of cheddar cheese in Coos and northern Curry counties. Most of the cheese went to San Francisco via steamboat.

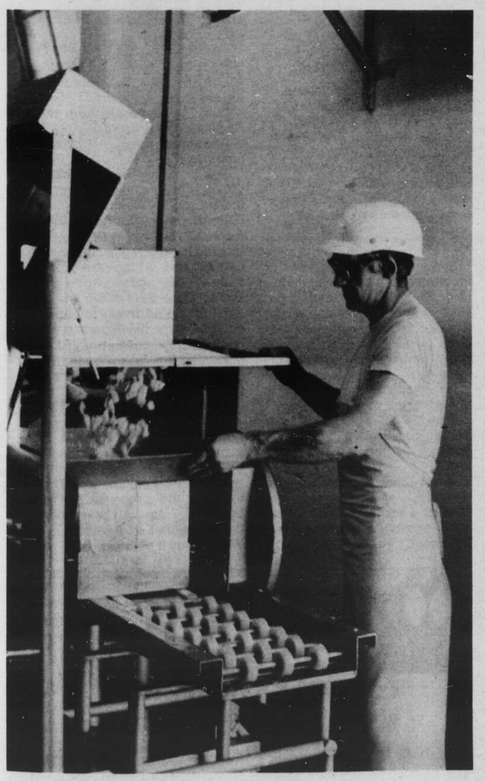
But the factory, which now produces 175,000 pounds of butter and two million pounds of cheese annually, had to go through a major fire to become the Coquille Valley Co-op. In 1936, the original plant was destroyed, along with the rest of the city.

When the town was rebuilt, a new factory rose out of the ashes but things changed.

"After the fire, methods of transportation began to change around here and other places," recalls longtime employe and payroll clerk Edith Van Leuven. "So, the cheese wasn't shipped to San Francisco after about 1936."

But apparently there was enough business in Oregon to keep the factory going, as well as support other cheese factories in Reedsport and Tillamook. The Coquille Co-op business is going well enough, in fact, that it paid out about $1,000,000 to its co-op members last year.

To get to the Coquille Valley co-op, take I-5 to Highway 38 which runs through Drain and on over to the coast or take Highway 42 at Winston which goes directly to Coos Bay.



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