

# Ste. Chapelle Winery is the largest in Idaho

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**  
For the Capital Press

SUNNY SLOPE, Idaho — Sitting atop a high hill, the beautiful Ste. Chapelle Winery overlooks fertile orchards and farms of Sunny Slope in southwestern Idaho.

The Symms family started a wine business in Emmet, Idaho, then moved it to Sunny Slope to build the current winery in 1978. It was designed by Boise architect Nat Adams and named after the 13th century La Sainte Chapelle in Paris that inspired its structure.

Originally intended to be a small family operation, the winery quickly grew to meet customer demand as Idaho's winegrowing region was gaining a reputation for fine wine.

In 2012 Ste. Chapelle became part of Precept Wine's Northwest family of wineries. Today it is the leading winery in Idaho in production and sales volume, with approximately 130,000 cases per year.



Courtesy of Ste. Chapelle Winery

After spending 11 years as the quality control supervisor and enologist and another stint as assistant winemaker, Maurine Johnson was promoted to head winemaker at Ste. Chapelle in 2011.

The 2013 Special Harvest Riesling made by winemaker Maurine Johnson recently won best of category in the 2015

Sunset International Wine Competition.

Johnson started working in the lab in 1987.

"I moved up to become assistant winemaker 11 years later, and have now been the

head winemaker for 4 years," she says.

But she hadn't planned on a career in wine. "It just happened. I love animals, and when I went to college I got a degree in animal science. I

## Ste. Chapelle Winery

Founded: 1975 by the Symms family

Location: Sunny Slope, near Caldwell, Idaho

Winemaker: Maurine Johnson

wanted to become a veterinarian, but I didn't get into vet school. After graduating from college I needed a job. There was an ad in the paper for a lab technician at Ste. Chapelle so I applied, and it went from there," she says.

Working in the wine lab was a great fit and she enjoyed it. "I love this job. All those years in college, I'd taken chemistry, biology and microbiology, and it was really easy to transition into winemaking. Almost everything else I know about wine, I've learned on the job, though I now have a certificate for winemaking for distance learners, from UC-Davis, after took their online course. Now I'm official!"

As wineries go, Ste. Chapelle is not as big as a lot of California wineries, but is by far the largest in Idaho. "We do a wide variety of wines.

Riesling is the most commonly planted, but our soft series that includes the soft red, soft white and soft huckleberry are probably our most popular wines," she says.

"We also make all the usual wines — like Chardonnay, Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah. We do the soft wines and two styles of Riesling," she says.

The winery's tasting room is a popular place, with its high cathedral-style windows, vaulted ceilings with wooden beams and stained glass grapevine window.

"We also have an upstairs banquet room and a 2-acre park at our facility. We rent these out for parties and weddings. One of the unique things we do is hold concerts during the summer in the park. These are held on Sunday afternoons and attract a lot of people."



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