

Puget Sound's wine region

Established in 1995, the Puget Sound American Viticulture Area (AVA) is unique in that it has a temperate maritime climate. More than 60 percent of the wine produced is red with Pinot noir being the most planted variety.



By SHERYL HARRIS
For the Capital Press

Washington State has 14 federally recognized American Viticulture Areas, but only the Puget Sound AVA is on the western side of the Cascade Range.

Established in 1995, the Puget Sound AVA reaches from the Canadian border on the north to just below Olympia on the south, and east into the foothills of the Cascades and to the west including the islands and mainland adjacent to Puget Sound.

The region's 92 vineyard acres produce only about 1 percent of the state's

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Puget Sound AVA comes of age

"It is often necessary to log a property first, and that takes a lot of money, especially for a sole proprietor."

Mike Lempriere, Perennial Vintners owner

wine grapes.

Puget Sound AVA's 45 or so wineries are a small portion of the state's more than 900 wineries. Most, such as Perennial Vintners, and many other wineries on Bainbridge Island and throughout the Puget Sound AVA, use locally grown grapes for at least a few estate-grown wines, although they may purchase grapes from Eastern Washington or elsewhere to produce other wines.

AVAs are wine grape growing regions defined by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau and established at the request of wineries or other petitioners, according to the Washington State Wine Commission.

It takes in-depth research to define soil types, climate, and whatever it is that makes a proposed AVA unique. Some soil types produce different types of wine. Others are affected by the number of hot days and the amount of rain.

Within the Puget Sound AVA, the climate has "long, mild and dry summers." With an average of 15 to 30 inches of precipitation per year, however, there is sufficient rainfall that, unlike vineyards of the state's arid to semi-arid eastern areas, growers don't need to irrigate.

While it does freeze in winter, it is seldom cold enough for long enough to



Sheryl Harris/For the Capital Press

Mike Lempriere talks about his wines as he pours for visitors at the Perennial Vintners tasting room on Bainbridge Island.

endanger the plants. The climate and the long daylight hours of this latitude — 46 degrees North, the same as France's Loire Valley — also help the vineyards thrive.

In this area, you can't always just run out and plant a vineyard, no matter how many acres you have.

"It is often necessary to log a property first, and that takes a lot of money,

especially for a sole proprietor," Perennial Vintners owner Mike Lempriere said, pointing to a densely forested portion of his property.

The predominant varieties planted in the Puget Sound AVA are Madeleine Angevine, Siegerebbe and Muller-Thurgau.

Lempriere has all three, plus Zwiagelt.