

Grape Talk: Major influences in vineyard development in the Applegate Valley



BY DEBBIE TOLLEFSON

Southern Oregon is getting a lot of press lately about its ever-growing wine industry and substantial vineyard development. We are no longer the unknown wine region and national publications are taking notice. It seems like vineyards from small to large are popping up all over our area. So for this month's column I wanted to talk to some of the people most responsible for this trend.

Randy Gold

First, I talked to Randy Gold of Pacific Crest Vineyard Services (pacificcrestvine.com/about.html), who is also owner of Gold Vineyard in Talent. Since 1997 Randy has worked with Del Rio Vineyards in Gold Hill on their early development, along with Applegate's LongSword and Red Lily vineyards. During Randy's early experiences with vineyard development there were a lot of trial-and-error experiments.

Greg Jones

However, in 1997 a major contributor to southern Oregon vineyard development arrived in the form of Dr. Greg Jones, a Southern Oregon University professor in the Department of Environmental Studies. Dr. Jones was interested in the effects of climate and climate change on the grape industry, especially as it pertains to southern Oregon. His research not only helped his family (who owns Abacela Winery in the Umpqua Valley), but was also instrumental in the development of much of the information used by vineyards

and wineries in the Applegate, Rogue and Umpqua Valleys. Randy states that Dr. Jones' research and data, as part of his Reference Vineyard Project, has developed for growers a greater understanding of how to achieve quality grapes and greater production from the analysis of scientific data. Randy says he always recommends that Dr. Jones be included in the planning phase of any vineyard.

Dr. Jones' research has made him a sought-after consultant here in Oregon and internationally. When I talked to Dr. Jones, he stated that our region is one of the most diverse viticulture areas in the world with over 70 different varieties grown here. You can access more of Dr. Jones research on the viticulture of southern Oregon by visiting his website at sou.edu/envirostudies/jones.html.

When asked what changes he has seen in the type of vineyards planted and in varieties since he started his vineyard consulting business, Randy said, "Currently the boom is in cooler varieties, especially pinot noir planted on hillsides with good drainage." Dr. Jones agreed, adding that pinot noir gets a higher price per ton and that in southern Oregon you can achieve higher tonnage than the Willamette Valley.

Gold also sees more experimentation with varieties. When he originally developed his personal vineyard, most growers were planting merlot, of which he personally had eight acres. Now though, he

has grafted all but two acres to tempranillo, malbec and syrah. I was surprised to hear that his goal for a new vineyard is to have production at two to three years, which is much sooner than I had thought. He is getting about 1,800 plants per acre with a cost of \$20,000 to \$25,000 per acre, including frost protection and consulting.

This information from Randy emphasizes the economics of grape growing. Is growing grapes an expensive hobby or a viable commercial venture? According to Randy, the small vineyard (three acres or less) has the potential to be expensive and is merely pretty landscaping unless it goes the way of the "custom crush." More and more small vineyards are having a grower's label developed. There are a number of wineries in the valley including Wooldridge Creek, Plaisance Ranch and RoxyAnn that do these custom crushes for growers. With a grower's label bottled, you then have a retail product to market on your own website, in your tasting room or through local restaurants. If you sold your grapes and did all the work yourself, you would get \$2,000 per ton at the most. With a small vineyard, that payout barely covers the equipment needed and certainly doesn't pay you for your time. So from an economics standpoint, you either need to create a custom crush or you need to develop more grape tonnage by planting more acreage.

Herb Quady

After talking to Randy Gold I was excited to compare his information with Herb Quady, one of the foremost vineyard developers and wine makers in the Applegate Valley, who seems to be everywhere. Randy Gold said, "Herb has elevated the bar for all vintners in southern Oregon."

As wine maker for Troon and Quady North, Herb has a unique perspective on what's happening with growers and winemakers in our



According to Randy Gold, Herb Quady (above) has raised the standards for wine making.

valley; with his own company, Applegate Vineyard Management, he has a number of vineyards under his watchful eyes. When we sat down, Herb was in the middle of harvest time and was happy with the yields this year, up 20 percent from last year.

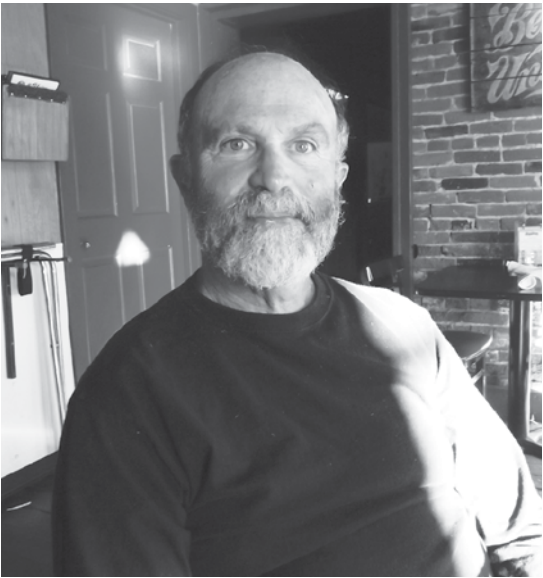
In the Applegate and southern Oregon, Herb said that the marketplace is determining what varieties are currently being planted. He described the relationship between grape growers and wineries as "very fluid with tons of grapes from many small and large growers being trucked all around our area." He added that even the big commercial farmers like Harry & David and Naumes are getting into the grape-growing arena. (Try Herb Quady's wines at the Quady North tasting room in Jacksonville or Troon Vineyard on Kubli Road in the Applegate Valley.)

The wine industry in the Applegate is evolving. You plant what you believe will grow well on a vineyard site based on scientific data. You also plant for marketplace demand. Herb is planting grenache, malbec, vermentino (Italian white) and viognier as well as cabernet franc, syrah, pinot noir and pinot gris because they all do well in our area. He believes that diversity is the key to vineyard development in our area; after that, let the marketplace decide.

From talking with these three influential forces in the southern Oregon wine industry, I learned a lot about the economics and diversity of our area's wine industry. Science and the desire to experiment are raising the quality of wines produced in southern Oregon, which are attracting national and international attention.

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Randy Gold, below left, and Dr. Greg Jones, below right, have been influential in the development of vineyards in southern Oregon. Randy also owns Gold Vineyard in Talent, Oregon; Greg Jones' family owns Abacela Winery in Roseburg, Oregon.





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