



Near the North Fork of the Nehalem River on the logging road also known as Highway 53 between Nehalem and Wheeler is an anomaly in the Oregon wine industry. It is called the **Nehalem Bay Winery**. Why an anomaly? What else would you call a winery located 50 miles from the nearest other winery, that is set in an area better known for tree cutting than wine tasting, has tracks running through their backyard that allow a train from Geribaldi to pull up to the front door, is visited by the former "leader" of the Merry Pranksters and that throws parties featuring bands like the Crackpots? Anomaly City.

Founded in 1973 as the sixth or seventh winery in the state, depending on whose opinion on the matter you care to regard, Nehalem Bay has survived a bumpy 20 years and is in the process of continuing to become a more visible and visitable place. If you think that wineries are predominantly haunted by paté-eating, Lexus-driving, Wall Street Journal-reading yuppies, you haven't been reading this column enough. Another way to discover that wineries can be laid back is to visit the Nehalem Bay Winery. Nehalem Bay has managed to leave the "ordinary" by the side of the road and is roaring away from it in a big, multi-colored school bus.

It is somehow appropriate that Ken Kesey, noted Oregon recluse and author of just a few famed books, including *Sometimes a Great Notion* (a personal favorite), would pay an annual visit to this winery in his legendary bus "Furthur." (For those of you not familiar with 60's counter-culture history I suggest picking up a copy of Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*). Kesey came last year and he is "scheduled" to make an appearance again this summer. For at least one generation Kesey represented the pinnacle of the anti-establishment way of life. Kesey wasn't the writer everyone in the publishing world wanted him to be after achieving great success with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. He was different, he was more than a writer or an acid-taker, or an anti-establishment guru. He was Kesey. In a smaller, but not insignificant way, the people at Nehalem Bay are doing with their winery what Kesey did with a portion of American thought.

The location itself is something to behold. From the steps of the winery you can see the massively scarred hills in the background. Not a tree on them. If you are crazy enough to drive 53 to get to the winery you will go through basically one continuous stretch of clear cuts hacked out of the Coastal Range. The scene on that road is appalling. Highway 53 is almost a distinct boundary. North of 53 the towns are tourist and/or community oriented, culminating in Cannon Beach. South of 53 the towns have obviously been timber and/or agricultural towns. While towns like Manzanita hold promise for a bright economic future, towns such as Tillamook have uncertain prospects in the face of diminished timber supplies and land on which to cut. Nehalem Bay Winery is appropriately placed, in the grand scheme of things, on this boundary between two distinct pasts and futures.

Ray Shackelford and Carmen Quintana now oversee the winery. Nehalem Bay has been through a lot over the years. There have been times, even as early as the late 80's, when it was poorly tended and badly managed. This has changed. Ray and Carmen are carving a niche for this coastal winery that is going to allow it to prosper as a unique attraction, winery and community spot. They don't have a vineyard on sight to attend to. Growing wine grapes is tricky enough without the complexities of the Oregon coastal weather patterns to wrangle with, so their vineyard is over the mountains in Rickreall.

Nehalem started out in the 70's producing solely fruit wines. They have since expanded their varieties, doing less fruit wine for the past several years. They still do some of what Ray likes to call "hot tub wines," one of them being a pretty nice blackberry wine. Their other wines are your standard Oregon fare: Pinot noir, Chardonnay, Pinot blanc, White Riesling and Dry Gewurtz. They also do a blended wine (Pinot noir, Marechal Foch and Cabernet Sauvignon) called Nehalem Red ("a good spaghetti wine") and a Sparkling Brut which is a fine

example of Oregon *methode champenoise*. For the most part the only place you can find Nehalem Bay wines are at the winery, which does make them more expensive than wine from other Oregon wineries, so you've got to go there to get them.

If you go at the right time you may find that the wine is almost secondary to the winery itself. The specialty of the Nehalem Bay Winery is fun. It is their *raison d'être*. Ray says, "We may not make the best wine in the state, but we have more fun than any other winery." No arguments there. I went to one of their (pretty much) monthly events, a barbecue and band weekend. There were oysters and other munchies cooked outside on the grill, snacks inside, all the wines available to be sampled, three trash cans full of ice cold beer if you weren't a wine drinker and lots of dancing. If that doesn't sound like standard winery bashes (especially the Budweiser) it's because it was not standard. But it was, without question, an excellent party. Other events they do are a Mother's Day brunch with a string quartet, Father's Day Open House (this month) and a weekend full of events on July 4th including barbecues, bands, dancing, daily visits by the train, The Fun Run Express (for info on the train schedule call 355-8108), culminating in a big old pig roast.

The Zen of Nehalem Bay struck me full force at this party. I had recognized, just by chatting with Ray, that this place was different, but being there with the folks at this event made me realize that something special was taking place. I realized this place could just be some bar on Highway 53 that served cheap beer, burgers and buffalo wings to a steady clientele and your occasional ambitious tourist. The thing is, it's not. It is a winery that produces 6,000 cases of wine each year. It's certainly not Chateau Lafite-Rothschild, but Nehalem Bay may be performing a task as difficult as producing fine wine. They are, in their own way, attempting to create new attitudes. From years of work with environmental and social justice groups I know that to be one of the most difficult things to do.

The crowd at the winery the night I was there consisted mostly of locals. It was April. Not a tie to be found. People were dancing until they were really sweating. While standing outside to cool off Kathy and I overheard a conversation between a couple that made me think. "What kind of wine do you have," said one. "I've got the White Reisling. I think it's pretty good," replied the other. The conversation went on briefly from there. No sophisticated wine terminology was used, and it was clear the couple's experience with wine was, at best, limited. The thing was they could have been talking about anything. They were articulating their enjoyment of a (perhaps) new experience. That's what made the conversation so poignant. An introduction was being made that was significant. An understanding that did not previously exist in this universe was born.

Maybe Ray or Carmen told them that crab meat would go nicely with that wine and the couple decided to buy a bottle to try that out. Who knows? If not these two people, most likely, especially having seen Ray work a crowd, two other people. I have no doubt that someone there learned something that night. This winery may be an important cultural phenomenon as there is in Nehalem if only for this simple reason: They offered people a great time at a good price, welcomed people in a way that made them feel like they belonged and at the same time taught some people about some of the many positive aspects of wine drinking.

If you are on the coast or planning to go there I recommend stopping by the winery which is located less than a mile down Highway 53 off 101. Buy a bottle of wine for the beach or the hot tub or just to have so you can show it to people who have never heard of this place before. Give them a call at 368-9463 and find out when their next event is. Tell them you read about them in *The Edge*, too.

Recommended Wine Tour for June: Kind of an off month being between Memorial Day Weekend and the insanity that comprises July 4th. A good bet though is **Amity Vineyards'** Summer Solstice Festival on the 18th and 19th. The bands Tall Jazz plays Saturday and Myrtle Brown's Destiny plays Sunday. For \$7 you get the music, a glass of wine and you get to keep the glass. Amity Vineyards is located in Amity just off 99W atop a hill that overlooks the entire Southern Yamhill Valley. They have excellent wine, notably Pinot noir, including an Eco-Wine, made entirely from organically grown Pinot noir grapes, produced without sulfites and bottled in recycled bottles. For more information call them at 835-0850.

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