



High quality Bordeaux style wines are, to this writer's chagrin, not an easy find in Oregon due to our relatively cool and wet climate. But Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc can be made and made damn well in this state. So if you relish the deep, rich, complex flavors of Bordeaux reds and like to see the sun shine every now and then (it's June 15th and pouring rain as I write), allow me to introduce you to **Valley View Vineyard**. Located just outside of Jacksonville way down south, for those of you who failed your Oregon geography test, Valley View is set in the warm microclimate of the Applegate Valley. Yes, there are places along The Edge which are dry and hot. And at an elevation of 1600 feet this winery is perfectly situated to produce world class Bordeaux wines along with some of the finest Chardonnay in the state.

This area has a fascinating history of winemaking to go along with its sunny days. Given the way Peter Britt's name and image are virtually canonized in the Rogue Valley region you would think that the man invented western culture in this remote part of the world in the mid-19th century. Maybe he did. He started the state's first winery, Valley View, and founded a thriving wine industry in this part of Oregon. Vineyard acreage in the valley at the time virtually equaled the current acreage in the valley today. Wineries shipped their product up and down the West Coast to big cities like San Francisco and muddy outposts such as Seattle (see Timothy Egan's *The Good Rain*). Business boomed.

But something went wrong. Terribly wrong. The 18th Amendment. Prohibition. How a bunch of men in early Twentieth Century who were mostly practiced tipplers themselves got together and decided to outlaw the sale of alcohol is beyond me. If only we could send Bob Packwood and a box or two of his favorite wine back to those days. In any case, Prohibition wiped out the burgeoning wine industry of Oregon and Washington. Meanwhile, California continued to ship grapes and concentrate across the country to people for individual production and consumption of alcohol which was, and still is, legal. During the 13 years of Prohibition California's wine industry tripled in size. When the good old boys in DC realized that most everyone hated the law, no one was obeying it and businessmen such as Al Capone were getting rich in part because of Prohibition, they hoisted a few and repealed the amendment. California, of course, went on to become one of the great wine regions of the world while Southern Oregon's wine growing industry lay dormant for about 40 years.

In 1971 the industry, along with the name Valley View, was revived by the Winovsky family. The Winovskys moved from New Jersey to this area to grow wine grapes after choosing not to resettle to the Caribbean to grow bananas. One of the sons, Mark, now oversees the day to day business operations of this family winery. He showed us around and gave us the low down on from where the business has come and where it is going. Mark has the reputation of being THE person to talk to when it comes to wine in Southern Oregon. He's earned it, and not just because he's a good history teacher.

Valley View's tasting room, winery and their 26 acres of vineyards are located on Applegate Rd. at the entrance to the Applegate Valley. Songbird's melodies, presumably of the Western Meadowlark according to my orthonologically oriented wine tasting sidekick, Christian (his name, not his dogma), and the light white haze of Cottonwood seed fill the air. Patrolling the grounds is B.C. (Black Cat, not the dumb comic strip) who showed up at the winery a few years ago and decided to make it home. B.C. thinks it is great that all sorts of people show up every day between 11AM and 5PM to drink wine and pet him.

The business is compact. The tasting room is in the back of the winery and may have been an afterthought. It wouldn't hold a whole basketball team, but while 1/2 the team tasted the other half could play some half court on the adjacent makeshift court. Rumors, however, that beating the person pouring the wine on any given day in a game of one-on-one gets you a case of wine, are unfounded.

If you have to wait, the wine is worth it. Valley View applies some simple principles to their wine making that we here at The Upper Left Edge encourage everyone to work into their own way of life. The dominate one is "Less is more." Grape vines are interesting plants. Ideal growing conditions are not ideal. Perfect weather causes the vines to produce too many grapes. When this happens the quality of each individual grape suffers and the wine made from them ultimately lack distinction. Valley View endeavors to cull grapes from the vine throughout the growing season so that the grapes that are harvested are excellent. In an area that can easily produce 5 or more tons of grapes per acre, Valley View looks to harvest 1-3 tons per acre from their vineyard and the vineyards they purchase grapes from to make 10-12,000 gallons of wine each year.

Does Valley View's consistent drive for quality at their own expense make them a saintly business? No, it just means they're smart and worthy of a little ink, a little praise and some patronage by appreciative and like minded wine drinkers. Remember you don't need to make great, hell even good wine to become outrageously successful. Check out Ernest and Julio Gallo and some the the nasty stuff they produce if you aren't quite sure of that statement. Paupers they are not. Cutting grapes means a sacrifice in the amount of wine they could make and, most likely, sell. This is a philosophy not widely adhered to by many American businesses. Greed is a strange thing. It causes companies like IBM and General Motors who make hundreds of millions of dollars in profit in a quarter year to lay off employees because it is not enough. Quality and integrity take a back seat to the mighty dollar too often.

Valley View's wines reflect the care that is put into them, particularly their Anna Maria series. The term "Anna Maria" (in honor of their mother, how can you not love that?) is their classification for their highest quality wines. Two wines of particular note in this series are the 1992 Chardonnay and the 1990 Reserve. Their Anna Maria Chardonnay is exactly what this style of wine is supposed to be about, rich and soft in the mouth. The drawback to this wine is that if you drink chardonnay frequently, drinking this particular Chardonnay makes it difficult to go back. Even a good Chardonnay will seem pale by comparison.

Then there is the Anna Maria Reserve. It is called Reserve because it is a blend of Merlot (55%) and Cabernet Sauvignon (45%) and due to Oregon's wine labelling laws cannot be designated as either variety. They have limited quantities of this wine left so it is not available for tasting at the winery. The question that came to my mind when I tasted this wine (ah, the perks of being a writer) was, "Can a wine be so good that it would just kill you?" I made it through a taste and have added to my list of "Reasons to continue to Live" -- #143: Drink the bottle of Anna Maria 1990 Reserve. I will probably end up living a long time because Christian and I split a bottle and in 50 years I can easily picture the two of us, our shared boarding mentalities still going strong, knocking each other over the head with our walkers to prevent the other one from drinking it at less than the absolutely perfect occasion. It is sometimes hard to believe I have attained any position of responsibility.

Wines to look for that are still in the barrel but will likely become Anna Maria labels when they are bottled in the next couple of months are the 1992 Merlot, 1992 Cabernet Sauvignon and the 1993 Fume Blanc. Valley View also offers a Jazz label series of Chardonnay, Cabernet, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc and a blush that are all very good day-in and day-out table wines at attractive prices. A "Barrel Select" label, which is the level between their Jazz and Anna Maria series, will soon be phased out thereby raising the quality of the already solid and unique Jazz labels.

"Oregon's strength is in its diversity." Not just a political statement that makes Lon Mabon back up little phlegm bunnies. It is a principle that Valley View Winery believes applies to the wine business as well as the human business. Currently, Pinot noir is marketed as and therefore is known as "Oregon's Wine." Pinot noir is done in truly outstanding form in this state. However, no wine region in the world survives on the merit of one wine. Valley View's production of Bordeaux varietals enhance the value of Oregon as a wine region. It comes at a risk to Valley View as the Bordeaux grapes tax the boundaries of the area's growing season increasing the possibility that bad things might happen. And, of course, they don't get to ride the "Pinot Gravytrain" that is currently in full swing. They will prosper in spite of these risks. A business, or even communities, states or nations, will benefit when they are able and willing to serve a diverse population.

So go to the sun. Take I-5 south for about 5 hours out of Portland and discover one of Oregon's outstanding wineries. Their wines are hard to find outside of Jackson County since they sell about 70% of their wine right there and none outside the state. Sorry, all you out-of-staters with subscriptions to The Edge, you'll just have to plan a vacation here (see the add on this page to do just that). Valley View does do mail orders though. Call them at (503) 899-8468 for information. Laurel's Wine Shop and the Wine Shack in Cannon Beach both carry some of their wine and the larger Freddy's usually have some as well. But take a weekend to experience Valley View Vineyards first hand. Buy some wine and tell them The Upper Left Edge sent you.

Recommended Winery Tour for July: Give the residents of Cannon Beach a bit of a break and head south. Southern Oregon is an amazing land filled with some amazing towns. My folks, 20 year residents of Maine, were so enticed by the area they had to pull up the tent stakes and move out of the tundra to resettle in Ashland exactly one year ago. There are 5 wineries in the region to explore. Aside from Valley View there are **Ashland Vineyards** and **Weisinger's Vineyards** within the city limits of Ashland. These three wineries make for a very nice tour. Further west in and around Cave Junction are **Bridgeview Vineyards** and **Feris Vineyards** (look for a remarkable 1992 Merlot). Take a weekend down there to camp, hike, see great theatre, catch some rays and drink some of the state's "other" wines.

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