

produce 25,000 cases of wine each year. The five acres, with row upon row of grape vines, stretch endlessly under an open sky. Manager Angela Bennett said that the landscape is even more beautiful in the summertime when the hills are in bloom. They host a Labor Day Celebration, recently renamed from Jazz on the Vine to accommodate a larger variety of music, in the natural grass amphitheater.

Bennett and I moved to a room painted deep red. With a crackling fire and long wooden tables, the room was reminiscent of a great hall from the days of King Arthur. Then she led me on the tour.

We walked through the cellar doors, where the thick, sweet smell of balsamic vinegar overwhelmed me. Stainless steel vats holding 8,000 gallons of wine towered over us. After "crush," wine lingo for harvest, the wine is temporarily stored in plastic vats, then moved to the stainless steel containers, which regulate their temperature while they ferment. The Muscat vats are so cold, they're covered in a thick layer of frost.

In another room, French oak barrels, which hold enough wine to fill 26 cases, were piled 40 feet high. The wine sits in the barrels for ten to 18 months. The French oak adds the necessary flavor to the wine, but the process is costly: Each barrel costs \$600 to \$800 and lasts only six years.

Brian Wilson, the winemaker, looks like a young Harrison Ford with glasses and gray hair. He was up at the top of the barrels on his forklift tasting the wine, a process they call "quality control."

Then Scott Frietas, the brew master, appeared from somewhere among the barrels. Frietas was also working on "quality control," using a small beaker with a tube in it called a "thief" to take a little wine from each barrel and test the contents. It was already time to move on. I waved goodbye, with the sweet taste of their dessert Gewürztraminer on my lips, ready for my final stop.

As we drove up the long curving driveway to **King Estate**, the tiny building at the top of the hill grew larger until its castle

walls loomed over us. By far the largest of the three wineries, this 110,000-square foot building modeled after a French chateau looks out over 820 acres, 250 of which are planted vineyards. Owned by the King family, the winery is 100 percent certified organic, meaning no pesticides, herbicides or fungicides are used to grow any of their grapes.

The tasting room is quaint. In 1992, when the winery was built, the family didn't expect anyone to travel that far to taste their wine, so they didn't build one. Now the winery gets so many visitors, King Estate is building a 7,000-square foot visitors' center to accommodate them. It should be finished in May.

The tasting room attendant poured a glass of Nouveau for me. "I call it flash wine," she said. The whole grape cluster (stems, leaves and all) goes into the holding tank, which gives the hot-pink wine its spicy taste.

Mary Bellando met me in the tasting room after a few minutes. She poured a large glass of wine, put it into my hand with a smile and motioned me to a place where giant steel vats reached up towards the ceiling in endless aisles. I sipped my wine and gawked at the immensity of the vats. We walked through the cavernous cellars, narrow staircases, stone arches, tiny hallways, barren rooms, offices that still smelled of construction and new carpet, and older rooms filled with the musty scent of antiques.

Somewhere in the middle we stopped in a large conference room, where the winery conducts competitive tastings after each crush. Wines from other vineyards are brought in and placed alongside their own wines with brown bags over each bottle so the King Estate staff don't know what they're tasting. Then they rate each wine. "King Estate always ends up first or second," Bellando said.

It was getting late and I had taken in all the wine and info I could handle for a day. I left my castle tour feeling warm and happy about all I had learned — or maybe that was the wine talking. **EW**

To find out how you can visit the wineries of Lane County, visit www.winesnw.com, or call the individual wineries to set up wine tasting appointments and tours.

Benton-Lane Winery: 23924 Territorial Rd. Monroe, OR (541) 847-5792

High Pass Winery: 24757 Lavell Rd. Junction City, OR (541) 998-1447

Pfeiffer Vineyards: 25040 Jaeg Rd. Junction City, OR (541) 998-2828

Rainsong Vineyard: 92989 Templeton Rd. Cheshire, OR (541) 998-1786

Eugene Wine Cellars: 255 Madison St. Eugene, OR (541) 342-2600

Territorial Vineyards & Wine Co.: 907 W. 3rd Ave. Eugene, OR (541) 684-9463

Iris Hill: P.O. Box 137 Lorane, OR (541) 345-1617

Lavelle Vineyards: 89679 Sheffler Rd. Elmira, OR (541) 935-9406

Secret House Vineyards: 88324 Vineyard Lane Veneta, OR (541) 935-3774

Briggs Hill Vineyards: 27127 Briggs Hill Rd. Eugene, OR (541) 341-3974

Silvan Ridge/Hinman Vineyards: 27012 Briggs Hill Rd. Eugene, OR (541) 345-1945

Saginaw Vineyard: 80247 Delight Valley Rd. Cottage Grove, OR (541) 942-1364

King Estate: 80854 Territorial Rd. Eugene, OR (541) 942-9874

Chateau Lorane: 27415 Siuslaw River Rd. Lorane, OR (541) 942-8028

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www.lavelle-vineyards.com

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