



Rudy Marchesi, a partner at Montinore Estate, points to the vineyard on a map of the Oregon wine region.

Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Wine: Regional wine community refuses to be forgotten

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Montinore Estate in Forest Grove is one of the valley's wineries connecting communities like Astoria to the world-renowned vineyards on the other side of the coastal range.

After years of labor, months of preparation and weeks of in-house research — the estate hired a full-time laboratory position just to test the juices and determine exactly when to launch the picking — the accumulation of hot July and rainy September days pushed the estate into a harvest frenzy.

At Montinore Estate, that frenzy looked like 23 days of long hours throughout more than 200 acres of vines. Despite the company's mechanical grape harvester, they still brought on an extra 25 sets of hands just to handle the field work, which concluded on Tuesday.

Montinore is one of the regional vineyards that has made a splash among wine consumers in Clatsop County.

Sustainable products

The Astoria Co-op has focused on filling shelves with local, sustainable products. Their wine section is no different.

"They kind of have a sustainability slant to what they do, and I think people kind of recognize their label as a winery that is doing things a little bit differently than really large, household brands," Matt Stanley, the co-op's general manager, said of Montinore. "I think that's one of the reasons why we've always gravitated toward having them on our shelves."

The estate is among the largest producers of wines made from biodynamic grapes in the country, a historic agricultural practice



ABOVE: Driving a forklift, Barbara Cueille, an intern from the Champagne wine region of France, stores four large barrels of wine in the winery's cellar. BELOW: Sharon Gollery LaFournaise pours a glass of Almost Dry Riesling from 2018 in the tasting room at Montinore Estate.

that naturally "enhances the health and vitality of the farm," according to Rudy Marchesi, a partner at Montinore Estate.

"Often, people think of wine as the label and the bottle and what's in the glass and forget that it's an agricultural product," Marchesi said. "Really, 85% of what determines the quality and the character of the wine happens in the field ... It really is all about the agriculture."

Local consumers are also drawn to the co-op in search of uniquely local products. The fact that Montinore lies at the northwestern tip of the Willamette Valley, and therefore is one of the closest vineyards to Clatsop County, makes it a staple among local wine retailers and consumers.

Montinore wine is sold in seven countries, 45 states and numerous shops and



restaurants throughout Astoria. WineKraft currently carries Montinore's Sweet Reserve Riesling and Borealis White Blend. Brut Wine Bar, which plans on opening in downtown Astoria soon, has already promised to carry the estate's wine.

Back at the vineyard, the vines are now bare — the grapes all plucked, portioned

and placed in massive silver fermentation tanks. The work, however, is far from finished for the winemakers, and further still from reaching the glasses of Astorians.

Depending on the type of wine, the process of going from grape to glass can take more than a year. Astorians can expect to drink white wines made from this year's

harvest by next summer. They'll have to wait at least 18 months, however, before seeing any of the 2019 reds, such as the vineyard's signature pinot noir, which has just started the fermentation process and is quickly being moved to the estate's cool basement, where it will age in oak barrels imported from France.

Beer town?

In Astoria, a city known for craft beer, the regional wine community refuses to be forgotten. Rebecca Kraft, owner of WineKraft, has watched her business flourish throughout the past 4 1/2 years.

"A lot of people are coming in thinking this is a beer town," Kraft said. "I hope to do a little bit of different stuff to change that."

The riverfront business has diligent, regular cus-

tomers, an ever-changing wine list and a local wine club that makes the trip over to the valley regularly for tastings from wineries like Montinore.

But Kraft hopes to offer even more to the local wine community.

"We're talking about putting together a winery here," she said.

They're still in the planning phases, but Kraft said she and a wine business partner are on the hunt for a location on the North Coast that would be suitable for a full-sized winery.

The co-op also sees the benefit of bolstering their wine selection for local customers. What is now an 8-foot display of predominantly organic and regional wines will soon span up to 40 linear feet at their new location at Mill Pond.

"We're going to expand that section, and in doing so try to also grow these vendors that are doing things locally and or sustainably," Stanley said. "It lines up really nicely with our mission."

Stanley has lived in Astoria for more than a decade, and has watched the local wine culture evolve.

"Any time we have a wine tasting, it is well attended," he said. "I think everybody wants to learn about what they're consuming in the wine world."

Though the wine world is vast, local factors have major implications. The beverage is a function of the soil and climate that was shaped largely by the Columbia River and the coastal mountains.

"One of our goals is to create not only high-quality wine — it's also good, it's also expressive, it tells a story," Marchesi said. "The story is about where the vines are born."

Library: No more local fundraising events

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The City Council has not taken up the library issue since supporting the full renovation, facing a number of other pressing matters, such as finishing the Riverfront Vision Plan, a potential lease of the 17th Street Dock and the proposed sale of lots in the Mill Pond Village neighborhood.

Mayor Bruce Jones said he has not set a date for bringing up the library, nor

has the City Council had much discussion of alternative funding options.

"Because the city has hoped the foundation would be successful in meeting its fundraising goals, (it) has not pursued other options while that hope remained alive," he said in an email.

The library foundation is not planning any more local fundraising events, saying they don't make much after costs and have already attracted the avail-

able grassroots support. If the foundation has to accept a smaller renovation, it will, LaMear said.

But LaMear and David Oser, the secretary and treasurer of the foundation, cautioned against scaling back the project. They argue the library, while having a significant local economic impact, has been mostly untouched since the 1960s, with outdated utilities and a lack of accessibility for people with disabilities.

"It provides, month in and month out, about \$200,000 of value, and that's just people using materials," Oser said. "There have been many different studies in many places — cities, states, counties, domestic and foreign — of the economic benefit of libraries to their communities. And they all show double, triple, quadruple the benefits for money spent on operations, because they draw people in."



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

The Astoria Oregon Public Library Foundation is hoping the city will look at public financing to pay for a full renovation of the Astoria Library.