



# WELCOME TO OREGON WINE COUNTRY

## Down-to-earth and personal

**T**HERE'S SOMETHING YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY. CHANCES ARE YOU'VE HEARD THAT THIS REGION PRODUCES SOME OF THE BEST PINOT NOIR IN THE WORLD. YOU MIGHT HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT IT'S A BEAUTIFUL PLACE, DOTTED WITH FAMILY FARMS, COLORFUL VINEYARDS AND THE LAZY CURVES OF THE RIVER FOR WHICH IT IS NAMED. BUT YOU MIGHT NOT BE PREPARED FOR A REMARKABLE AND UNIQUE CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS PLACE: IT'S REALLY FRIENDLY.

Walk into the tasting room of a Willamette Valley vineyard, and you're certain to receive a cheerful welcome. Show up on a special weekend, and you might be invited to join in on a grape-stomping demonstration. And that smiling guy leading tours is likely the owner and winemaker himself.

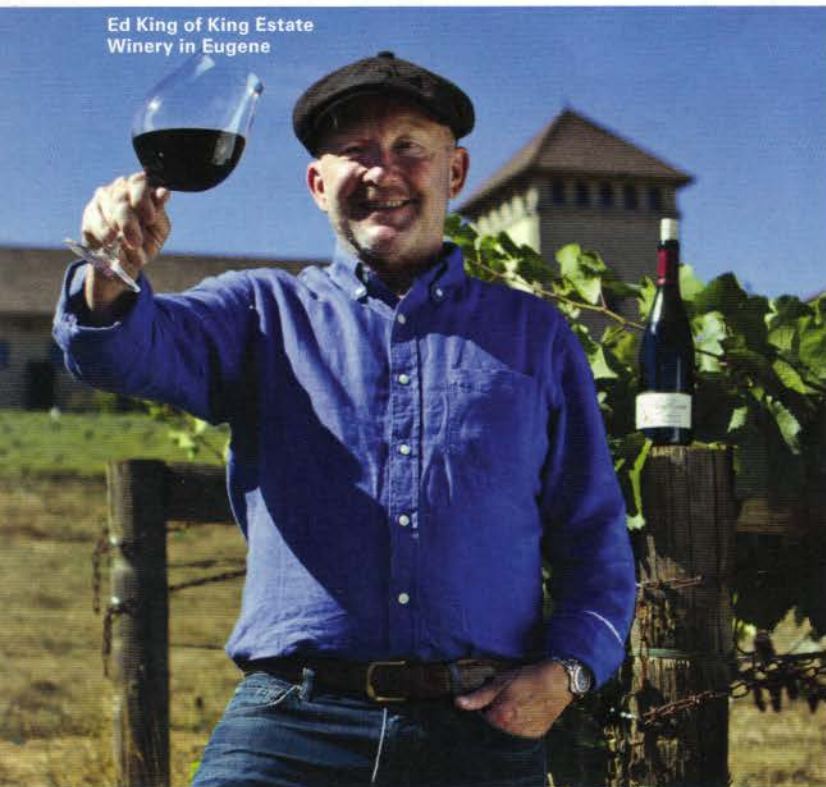
This friendliness is natural, it's regional and it's contagious. "It works both ways," said Josef Fleischmann, owner of St. Josef's Winery ([StJosefsWinery.com](http://StJosefsWinery.com)) in Canby, which was one of the first 25 wineries founded in the Willamette Valley. "When you are friendly, people want to talk to you."

### A HISTORY LESSON

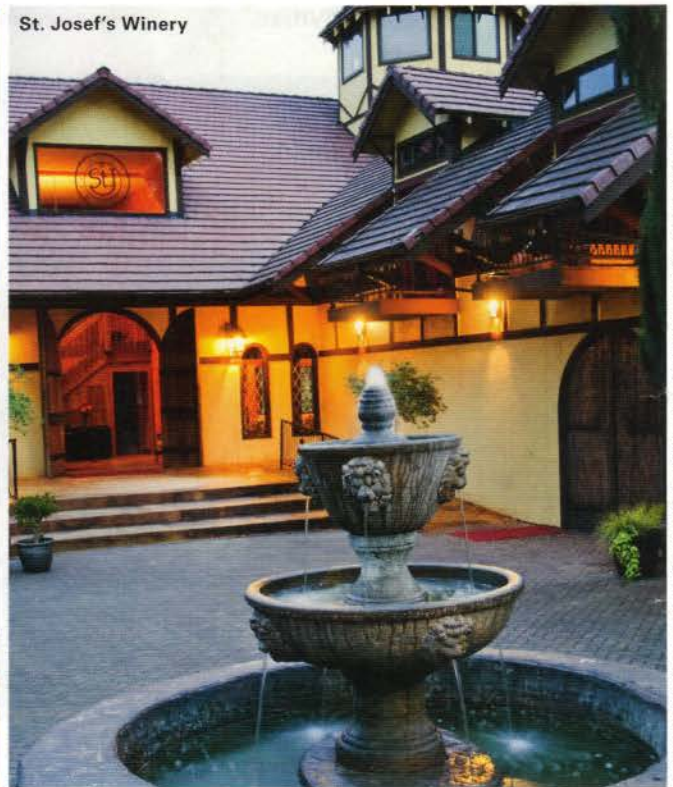
Located south of Portland, the Willamette Valley stretches for about 150 miles (241 km) from the towns of the Yamhill Valley through the city of Salem and south to Eugene — home of King Estate Winery, which has the world's largest contiguous organic vineyard. The Valley first drew settlers who discovered its pastoral richness after coming west on the Oregon Trail in the 19th century. Verdant orchards, farms and small towns still speak to that legacy.

Wine pioneers came much later, in the late 1960s — people like David Lett, Charles Coury and Dick Erath,

Ed King of King Estate Winery in Eugene

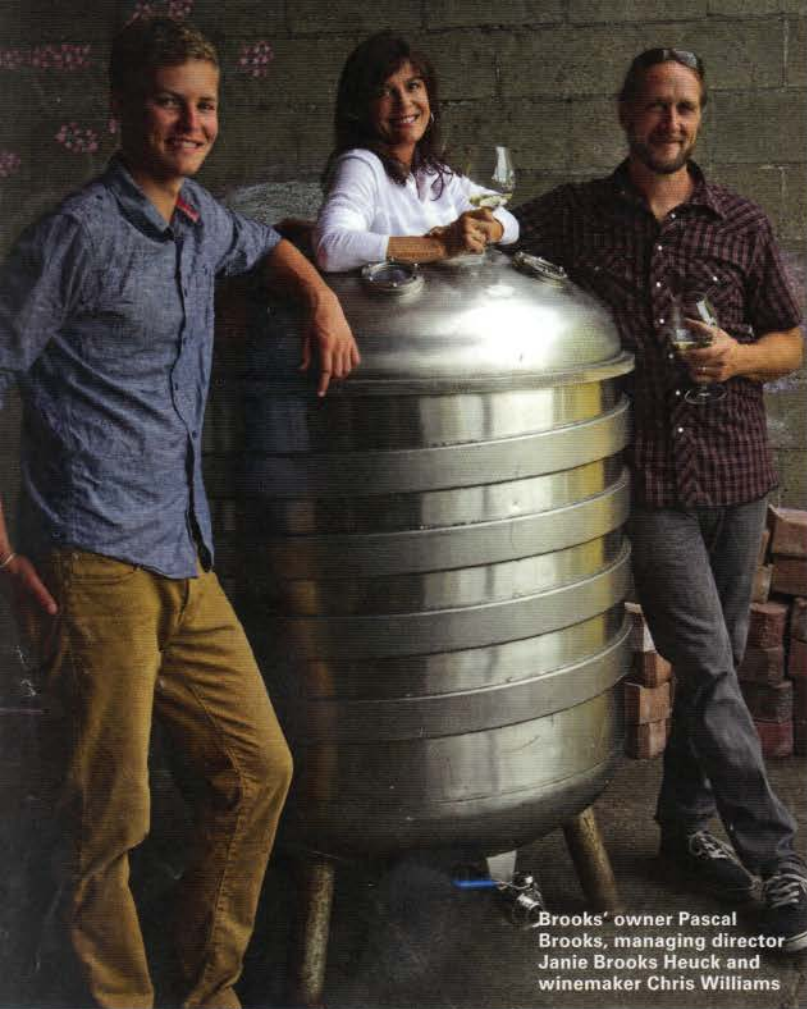


St. Josef's Winery



LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTESY OF OREGON CRAFT BEVERAGE COALITION AND ST. JOSEF'S WINERY





Brooks' owner Pascal Brooks, managing director Janie Brooks Heuck and winemaker Chris Williams

ANDREA JOHNSON

who were convinced that the Willamette Valley had the right ingredients for superior winemaking. They planted the first Pinot noir vines, putting down the roots for the grape that would make Oregon famous. And it was Lett's wines that first competed against French Burgundies — and won — putting the Willamette Valley on the map. The Valley saw the first Pinot gris vines planted in North America, and that varietal has also gone on to make a name for itself.

Established in 1984, the Willamette Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA) is the largest of the state's 17 AVAs. The area currently comprises 15,180 vineyard acres (6,143 ha). Of the 450-plus wineries in the state, more than 300 are located in the Willamette Valley. About 600 of Oregon's 850 vineyards are located here, and 88 percent of Oregon's Pinot noir is grown in the Valley. In 2011, 12,560 acres (5,083 ha) of Pinot noir grapes were planted in Oregon. Pinot gris and chardonnay followed with 2,590 acres (1,048 ha) and 950 acres (384 ha), respectively.

The early success with Pinot noir endures. "The way we grow our fruit is so different than other states because of the weather," said Carl McNight, assistant winemaker at St. Josef's Winery. Climate — namely, the Valley's cool, wet winters and warm, dry summers — is a chief reason for Pinot's success. "Wines in Oregon have more flavor, more acid. It makes the wine distinctive and is part of the allure of Oregon wine," McNight said. Soil is another key element, with past

volcanic eruptions and glacial flood deposits creating perfect wine-growing conditions and distinct terroirs. "Flavors can be picked up from the soil," Fleischmann said. Perhaps that's why some refer to Pinot noir as the "poet's grape."

And the third part of the recipe for success is the commitment to the future. Brooks Winery ([BrooksWine.com](http://BrooksWine.com)) in Amity is one example of that. Owner Pascal Brooks became the youngest winery owner in Oregon at the age of 8 with the sudden passing of his father, Jimi, in 2004. Brooks, who now goes to high school in Pittsburgh, returns each summer to help with harvest, crush, bottling and talking to visitors about the winery. Now 18, Brooks sees himself in the Oregon wine world in years ahead. "I view it as something in my future. It is part of my identity."

### COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The Willamette Valley wine industry continues to grow and thrive. And the friendly reputation of winemakers here has only added to the region's success. Jim Bernau, founder of Willamette Valley Vineyards ([wvv.com](http://wvv.com)), said Oregon winemakers are famous the world over for their willingness to support one another. "People know in their hearts that you get more from collaboration than competition," he said.

Brooks' experience reflects that sentiment, perhaps more radically than most. When his father died, a dozen or so of his winemaking friends brought in the harvest and made the year's wine. They also encouraged Brooks' aunt, Janie Brooks Heuck, to run the winery and pass it along to him when he was older. "The idea my dad set forth, part of it is still there because of his friends. They see me as the continuation of what he wanted to do," Brooks said. "I'm proud of that."

That spirit of connection and community is nurtured at St. Josef's Winery, too. In the charming tasting room — a converted barn that Fleischmann and his wife Lilli remodeled to look like a country chateau — you're likely to find visitors from around the country enjoying wine and exchanging stories. There's a celebratory atmosphere on St. Josef's Day, a popular saint's day in Fleischmann's native Hungary that the winery celebrates in April. And the annual Grape Stomping Festival is a full-on party, bringing as many as 2,000 people for wine, Bavarian music, artisan sausage and Hungarian goulash. "This last one we had, there was down pouring rain and people were dancing in it," Fleischmann said.

And the tradition of quality endures, too. In 2013 Wine Enthusiast Magazine named the Willamette Valley to its list of "America's Best Pinot Noirs."

Bernau, who has been called one of "America's Great Pinot Noir Producers" by that same magazine, said "We've been at this a long time, and we love contributing to the growth of our community."

See page 18 for a map of wineries. And for more information about shopping-, garden- and art-centric wine trails, visit [OregonWineCountry.org/wine](http://OregonWineCountry.org/wine).