

Thanksgiving in Wine Country

Sunday, November 1, 2015

By Lee Lewis Husk-



photo by Marc Salvatore

“Traditionally, Thanksgiving at the winery was a reunion of family, friends and longtime customers,” said Jason Lett, proprietor of Eyrie and son of legendary winemaker David Lett. The elder Lett is credited with planting the first pinot noir and chardonnay grapes in the Willamette Valley in 1965, and the first pinot gris in America in 1970.

Fifty years later, nearly 700 wineries are rooted across Oregon. It is the nation’s third-largest winegrowing state, a region still under the stewardship of pioneering families such as the Letts, who focus on small-batch, hand-crafted vintages and, more recently, sustainable growing practices. With harvest season gone and fruit in the barrel, Thanksgiving weekend is a time for Oregon wineries to roll out new releases, offer barrel tastings and enjoy camaraderie with the public.

If this is your first trek, keep a few things in mind. You’re in Oregon wine country, a place where you’ll often get to speak directly with the winemaker if you call. And call ahead you should, because not all wineries are open Thanksgiving weekend. (A complete listing of wineries open in the Willamette Valley for the holiday can be found at willamettewines.com.)

Traffic leading in and out of Dundee can raise blood pressure to lethal levels, so get your Zen going and enjoy the scenery. One sure way to avoid popular Dundee is to head east out of Portland on I-84 and visit Columbia River Gorge wineries—or commit to a couple of days in Southern Oregon where you can still sip pinot noir alongside warm-climate varietals. Crowds are rare and tastings inexpensive.

“It’s important for people to remember that wine tasting isn’t an athletic event,” said Jim Prosser of J. K. Carriere Wines. He suggests that people select a maximum of three or four wineries to visit in a day, find out whether a winery requires an appointment and remember to eat. Also, if you tend to enjoy yourself a little too much, be sure to have a designated driver or see our ideas for getting around wine country without a car (1859magazine.com/thanksgiving-wine-country).

Willamette Valley | Hidden gems in the hills

Two hidden gems lie at either end of Highway 99W: J. K. Carriere, northeast of Newberg on Parrett Mountain, and Coeur de Terre in the foothills of the coast range.



Coeur de Terre Vineyard | *photo by Lisa Scott*

Coeur de Terre Vineyard

If you meet a guy with grape-stained fingernails at Coeur de Terre Vineyard during harvest, chances are good it's Scott Neal, the owner and winemaker who lives amid the vineyards with his family. He and his wife, Lisa, bought the vineyards in 1998 and named the winery after a huge, heartshaped rock on the property (coeur de terre is French for "heart of the land"). This hands-on family does it all, from planting to bottling. The winery produces about 5,500 cases, mainly from estate-grown grapes. The majority of those vines are pinot noir, a grape that is "muscular, with structure and depth that ages well," according to Neal. The winery and homey tasting room are mid-slope of the hilltop enclave where Thanksgiving visitors can sample pinot noir from different vineyard blocks, as well as syrah, dry riesling, pinot gris and rosé—all estate grown.

Open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Friday through Sunday, flights and food for \$15.

Located at 21000 SW Eagle Point Road in McMinnville.

cdtvineyard.com

J.K. Carriere Wines

A first generation winemaker, Jim Prosser produces internationally acclaimed wines under the visage of a couple of ancestors whose names and integrity grace all aspects of the endeavor. Established in 1999, Prosser named the winery for his two grandfathers, J. K. Prosser and Paul Carriere. The winery's high acid, smooth tannin pinot noirs "offer people something to ponder," said Prosser.

In 2007, he bought forty acres on Parrett Mountain, then built the winery and tasting room in 2009 and this year will release a 2013 pinot noir “at the highest end of the acid spectrum.” In addition to his own non-irrigated, organically grown vineyards, he sources fruit from ten other Willamette Valley vineyards, with annual case production at about 5,000. Try the 2014 Glass white pinot noir and introduce yourself to Prosser’s sister, Linda Crabtree, who works the tasting room and often tells stories about her older brother while pouring samples.

Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday, \$15 tasting fee.

Located at 9995 NE Parrett Mountain Road in Newberg.

jkcarriere.com

Willamette Valley | Cluster fun in dundee

Curious about the hype over Oregon wines, including the much-storied pinot noirs? Skip the wine store and head to the hills of Dundee, ground zero for Oregon pinot noir. After Eyrie Vineyards’ 1975 pinot noir out-classed some of the best French Burgundies in an international competition in 1979, the rush for Oregon farmland was on. Today Dundee Hills has its own AVA (American Viticultural Area), more than thirty wineries, and many varietals—including pinot gris, riesling and chardonnay.



Argyle Winery | *photo by Andrea Johnson*

Argyle Winery

This landmark winery was founded in 1987 with the purpose of growing and making world-class sparkling wine in the perfect, cool climate of Oregon’s Willamette Valley. Today, the folks at Argyle farm more than 500 acres of vineyard plantings in the Dundee and Eola-Amity Hills, and is among Oregon’s top ten producers (70,000 cases). Sparkling wines, pinot noir, chardonnay and riesling are made under the supervision of head winemaker, Nate Klostermann.

Argyle's new Tasting House opened in September and is located directly behind the Victorian farmhouse that was the original Argyle tasting room. The contemporary architecture incorporated many recycled and repurposed materials from the old winery building on site. Thanksgiving activities include tastings of sparkling wine, pinot noir and white wine; small group sessions led by Argyle principals; light hors d'oeuvres and a wine glass (while supplies last) for \$25.

Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday through Sunday.

The Tasting House is located at 691 Highway 99W in Dundee.

argylewinery.com

Vista Hills Vineyard & Winery

Vista Hills' Treehouse Tasting Room and vineyards off Hilltop Lane provide glimpses of the valley and coast range through tall white oaks and Douglas firs on the forty-two acre property. When owners John and Nancy McClintock built the Treehouse, they chose classic Northwest-style architecture that incorporates timbers milled from onsite trees. A cool, high-elevation vineyard, Vista Hills produces small-batch pinot noir, pinot gris and more recently a white pinot noir. All vintages are estate grown and most are produced in McMinnville at Elizabeth Chambers Cellar by winemaker Dave Petterson. The first vintage of Vista Hills came out in 2001. Today it makes 4,000 cases a year, and sells grapes to other wineries.

It will be open Thanksgiving weekend 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. The \$25 tasting fee covers six pinot noirs, including newly released 2013 Skyraider Reserve, a pinot gris, cheese and a take-home glass.

Located at 6475 NE Hilltop Lane in Dayton.

vistahillsvineyard.com

Winderlea Vineyard & Winery

Co-owner Donna Morris says the vines planted in the '70s at the winery on Worden Hill Road make "lovely, elegant pinot noirs." Her husband and co-owner, Bill Sweat, uses these grapes to produce his whole-cluster Imprint pinot noir in a little "garage" winery under the tasting room. The estate tasting room offers 360-degree views of the Dundee Hills, and visitors can taste the Imprint pinot noir, along with other pinot noirs and a chardonnay made from estate fruit and fruit sourced from nearby growers. Its current case production is 4,300. For drivers of electric cars, Winderlea is one of nine Willamette Valley wineries on the electric highway, nicknamed "Plug and Pinot," that offer car charging stations on site.

On Thanksgiving weekend, Winderlea's tasting room in Dundee (it also has a tasting room in McMinnville) will present seated tastings that consist of a three-year, "vertical flight"—a selection of the same varietal made by the same winery over different years—of each of their two estate wines at 10:30 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Participants can compare pinot noirs from 2011, 2012 and 2013. Each tasting will take about an hour, and visitors will get a vineyard overview, as well as food pairings for \$25.

Located at 8905 NE Worden Hill Road in Dundee.

winderlea.com

Willamette Valley | Urban wineries in the country

If you bypass McMinnville on your way between the coast and Portland, you miss a genuine slice of Americana. This turn-of-the-twentieth century town reverberates with a twenty-first century vibe. Make a day stop or spend the night, wining away the hours in tasting rooms throughout the city or dining at one of the many boutique cafés and restaurants.



Elizabeth Chambers Cellar | *photo by Andrea Johnson*

Elizabeth Chambers Cellar

A must-see, this tasting room is the perfect start for a walking tour around historic downtown. The 1926 brick building and former electric power plant has been updated to a spacious tasting room and winery. Liz Chambers, who founded the business in 2013 and who also owns Silvan Ridge Winery near Eugene, has said she's not "interested in seeing who can make the wine with the biggest muscles. I want to drink wines that have table manners, wines that can dance." The cellar produces 3,500 cases of wine, primarily pinot noir and pinot gris, and buys grapes from northern Willamette Valley growers.

Thanksgiving weekend activities include live music, the release of 2013 pinot noirs, 2014 barrel tasting with Stevenson, guest varietals from Silvan Ridge, and paired cheeses and locally crafted Honest Chocolates. Open 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., Friday through Sunday, \$10 per person. On Friday, the Santa Parade passes by the winery at 4:30 p.m.

Located at 455 NE Irvine Street in McMinnville.

elizabethchamberscellar.com

R. Stuart & Co. Winery

Formerly the winemaker at Erath Vineyards, Rob Stuart and partners created their winery in 2002 and focus their efforts on drinkable pinot noir, pinot gris and sparkling wines that don't break the bank. The winery sells mostly blended pinots, with a few single vineyard pinot noirs. It produces 16,000 to 20,000 cases a year and sells most of them under the Big Fire label, or what they like to call their "Tuesday night wines" that you can drink when you get home from work.

For Thanksgiving, their Wine Bar at 528 N.E. Third Street will be open 12 p.m. to 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday, and 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday, with a mixed flight of pinot noir, dry rosé and pinot gris for \$12, and a reserve flight of single-vineyard pinot noir for \$15. Or make an advance reservation for a barrel tour (and tasting), \$30, at the cellar.

The Eyrie Vineyards

Given its prominence in Oregon winemaking, Eyrie's tasting room in McMinnville is surprisingly modest (and hard to find—get a map if you're walking). "Our whole thing is to be as anti-glitz as possible," said Jason Lett, proprietor and winemaker. Following in his father's foot steps, Lett cleaves to these mandates: Treat vines and soil gently. Make wine that tastes good with food. And make wines that age well. The winery's average case production is 8,000, which includes more Dundee Hills pinot gris than any other varietal. The winery is rolling out a new label for its chardonnay, which Lett said is making a "gratifying" resurgence.

This year's Thanksgiving theme is "the past and the future." Visitors will be treated to a staged tasting in three barrel rooms, including different cuvées and library wines from older vintages. Guests will also preview trousseau noir, a future pinot noir-like varietal that Eyrie has bottled for the Thanksgiving tasting. Open

11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Friday through Sunday, the first tier tasting is \$15, and the second tier (with older wines) is \$25, both with cheese and bread. Buy a fiftieth anniversary T-shirt and Eyrie will donate the proceeds to the Cascades Raptor Center in Eugene.

Located at 935 NE 10th Avenue in McMinnville.

eyrievineyards.com

Columbia Gorge | Discover the path less traveled

Compared with other winegrowing regions, the Columbia River Gorge is just getting its legs. Nevertheless, the variety of climates and soil allows vintners to make delicate pinot noirs, big bold cabernets and everything in between. Its proximity to Portland makes it a no-brainer for wine tourists who want to experience stress-free tastings amid the many splendors of the Columbia River Gorge.



Viento

Analemma Wines

Ask industry experts where to find excellent Columbia Gorge wines and you'll get an enthusiastic review of a little boutique winery in Mosier founded in 2010. Owners Kris Fade and Steven Thompson farm grapes from three vineyards, Atavus, Mosier Hills and Oak Ridge, to create 1,500 cases of sparkling chardonnay and pinot noir, rosé and gewürztraminer—wines that express the cool-climate traits of the region.

For Thanksgiving, Analemma will release its much-awaited 2011 Atavus Vineyard Blanc de Noir Sparkling Wine made from a single vineyard in which “bubbles preserve the expression of this special terroir,” said Fade. Open 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., Friday through Sunday, Analemma will pair sparkling wine with artisan olive oil cakes. Visitors who don anything sparkling will get a reduced tasting fee. A tasting of five wines, including the blanc de noir, is \$10.

Located at 1120 State Road in Mosier (only ten minutes from downtown Hood River).

analemmawines.com

Viento

Rich Cushman returned to his hometown of Hood River in 2007 after three-decades of winemaking for his private label, Viento, and other wineries in the Willamette Valley and Columbia Gorge AVAs. He recently achieved a lifelong dream of building his own tasting room adjacent to the vineyard he planted in 1981. His production of 2,000 cases annually now includes riesling, pinot noir, sangiovese, sparkling rosé, barbera and gewürztraminer ice wine.

For Thanksgiving, the tasting room will be open 12 p.m. to 5 p.m., Friday through Sunday. Tasting flights include at least six wines, usually including an assortment of Gorge pinot noirs, for \$10. The winery will do 2015 barrel tastings and will release its 2007 nocturne, a port-style wine made from “a crazy blend of viognier and muscat,” Cushman said. Guests can munch on pistachios or purchase small plates with local breads, cheeses, olives and veggies.

Located at 301 Country Club Road in Hood River.

vientowines.com

Southern Oregon | Umpqua and Rogue Valleys

With only 10 percent of Oregon's wineries (sixty-seven of 676), Southern Oregon has an outsized number of wine pioneers and innovators. HillCrest Winery was the state's first estate winery and planted the first pinot noir vines in 1961. Scott Henry, founder of Henry Estate, designed a trellis system used around the world. A Earl Jones at Abacella introduced the first high-quality tempranillo to America. With 170 microclimates, Southern Oregon is one of the world's most diverse regions for growing grapes.



Ledger David Cellars | *photo by Marc Salvatore*

Abacela

Earl and Hilda Jones searched the globe for the ideal climate and soil to cultivate tempranillo wine. Roseburg turned out to be the place. They planted the first vines in 1995, and in 1997, launched the first Abacela brand. The winery soon earned critical acclaim and is among this year's nominees for Wine Enthusiast's American Winery of the Year. It makes between 10,000 and 12,000 cases, including malbec, syrah, albarino, grenache rosé and, of course, tempranillo. Their daughter Hanna Jones designed Abacela's 4,400-square-foot tasting room, which opened in 2011, and features a winegrowers' interactive walk.

For Thanksgiving, the winery is hosting an open house from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday, with five-wine flights paired with food and a logo wine glass for \$15.

Located at 12500 Lookingglass Road in Roseburg.

abacela.com

Ledger David Cellars

This young, boutique winery near Medford prides itself on crafting premium wines from its single vineyard estate, home of owners Lena Varner and David Traul. Planted in 2007, the vineyard produces about 2,500 cases that include red varietals cabernet franc, syrah, malbec, sangiovese, and tempranillo and white varietals chenin blanc, malvasia bianca, viognier, chadonnay and sauvignon blanc.

In Le Petit Tasting Room in Central Point, Thanksgiving festivities include an open house from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m., Friday through Sunday, with a \$5 tasting fee. Live music Saturday and Sunday and pizzas from Mamma Mia's.

Located at 245 N. Front Street in Central Point.

ledgerdavid.com

Del Rio Vineyards & Winery

Located along the Rogue River in Gold Hill, Del Rio is Southern Oregon's largest vineyard with 200,000 vines on 300 acres, yielding enough grapes for Del Rio and several more vintners. Sarah, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, and malbec thrive in the site's southern slopes and low elevation. The Del Rio property also came with the historic Rock Point hotel, a stage coach stop now converted to a tasting room. The winery, located in an old orchard barn, produces about 20,000 cases a year under the Del Rio and Rock Point labels.

Thanksgiving festivities include an open house from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. "Black Friday" is the mystery-case sale. People can pick a concealed case for \$100. From 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday, guests can enjoy barrel tastings, hors d'oeuvres and live music in the winery (\$15). Sunday features new releases, light food pairings and warm-spiced wine. Tastings typically include a flight of six varietals, including claret and Bordeaux-style reds or white varietals such as pinot gris, viognier and chardonnay.

Located at 52 N. River Road in Gold Hill.

delriovineyards.com