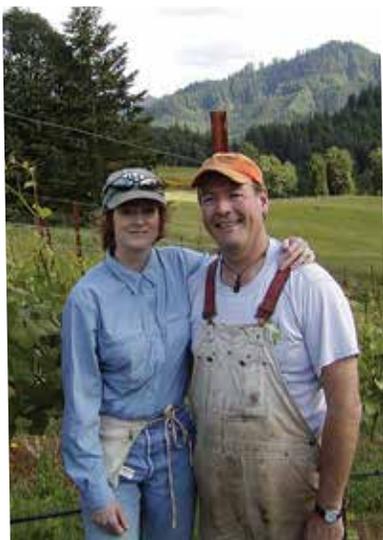


The Umpqua: Gewurztraminer, Syrah, Tempranillo and the “100 Valleys”

A view of Reustle Vineyards in Umpqua Valley, Oregon during autumn.

HOW AN UPSTART AVA AND ITS “BIG THREE” WINERIES ARE **REDEFINING OREGON’S WINES**

by Cliff Rames



Sue and Terry Brandborg.

TRAVELING ITS 65 MILE LENGTH FROM NORTH TO SOUTH IS LIKE EXPERIENCING the best wine regions of Europe in a single day, they say, where award-winning Albariño, Gewurztraminer*, Grüner Veltliner, Syrah and Tempranillo wines await, swirled and sipped at wineries with names like Abacela, Brandborg and Reustle. Only you wouldn't be gazing out at the Douro, Danube or Mosel rivers. You'd be in the heart of Oregon's Umpqua Valley.

Wedged between the cool Willamette to the north and the warm Rogue to the south, the Umpqua Valley AVA (est. 1984) is colloquially referred to as “the 100 Valleys of the Umpqua” for its diversity of microclimates, fault-lined tectonic geology, 150 soil types and rustic undulations carved by the meandering Umpqua River.

Yet it is the dramatic diurnal difference in temperatures within the Umpqua that governs terroir and renders it possible to grow a wide variety of cool- and warm-climate grapes. Dr. Gregory V. Jones, a research climatologist at Southern Oregon University, describes the Umpqua's climate as “remarkable”—with roughly 1,000 growing degree days (GDDs) difference between the cool north and the warm south.

“What is so fascinating about the Umpqua is our ability to plant varieties you normally don't associate with Oregon,” echoed Stephen Reustle, owner and winemaker at Reustle-Prayer Rock Vineyards. “Many people think Oregon only produces Pinot Noir. Imagine their surprise when my Syrah won first place at the 6 Nations Wine Challenge in Sydney, Australia!” (See the February/March 2016 issue of *The SOMM Journal* for the story).

Reustle and his wife, Gloria, along with Terry and Sue Brandborg of Brandborg Vineyard & Winery and Earl and Hilda Jones of Abacela Vineyards, are among the vanguard of pioneers who heeded the siren song of the Umpqua and sowed their dreams, visions and resources in the valley. Collectively referred to as “The Big Three” for their dedication to quality and regional development, individually their wines represent an intriguing cross-section of styles from the various microclimates.

Brandborg boasts the coolest maritime climates in the Umpqua as evidenced by years of climate reports—perfect for Pinot Noir, Riesling and Gewurztraminer. Grown on 50 acres of ancient marine sediment and sandstone soils just 25 miles from the Pacific Ocean at elevations ranging from 750 to 1,150 feet, Brandborg's Pinot Noir is lithe, seductive and beautifully perfumed; the Gewurztraminer and Riesling aromatic, racy and refreshing. “Our winemaking philosophy never strays far from the dinner table,” said Terry Brandborg. “We strive to achieve balance, elegance, minerality, and true varietal character.”

Reustle recalls how an internet real estate ad entitled “Vineyard Potential” led him to the

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BRANDBORG VINEYARD

*In the Umpqua as in Alsace, Gewurztraminer is usually spelled without the umlaut.



Abacela's Fault Line Vineyards.

Prayer Rock Vineyard property. "To most eyes," he laughs, "there was no potential; there was never a vineyard there before." Undaunted and inspired by an experience he had in Austria, Reustle scrutinized heat unit accumulation data and decided the Umpqua was perfect for Grüner Veltliner. In 2001 he purchased the 200-acre site and planted the first commercial Grüner crop in the United States. Reustle was immediately impressed with its fruit and crisp acidity. Critics agreed, and Reustle has since garnered nearly two dozen medals for Grüner, with over 500 awards across a portfolio that includes Malbec, Pinot Noir, Sémillon, Syrah and Tempranillo. "We make wines we like to drink at home, with food, around the table with family and friends," says Reustle of his winemaking philosophy.

Earl Jones and his wife, Hilda, always loved Tempranillo for its structure, ageability and food-friendliness. Their passion for the variety led them on a journey from their home in Florida to Spain and ultimately to southern Oregon. In 1995, after meticulous research and climatic studies, Jones planted Tempranillo in the Umpqua—the first commercial planting in the Pacific Northwest. The gamble paid off: Abacela's 1998 Tempranillo won Double Gold at the 2001 San Francisco International Wine Competition, besting Spain's top Tempranillo wines. Today, Jones cultivates 76 acres across three zones: the flat, sun-soaked Benchlands for Tempranillo; the warmer Southern Slopes for Syrah, Tannat, and Port varieties; and the cooler Northern Slopes for Albariño (the vineyard straddles an ancient fault line).

In 1961 Richard Sommer dared to plant Oregon's first Pinot Noir vineyard. True to his pioneering spirit, the Umpqua Valley is now home to 23 wineries and almost three thousand acres of vineyards cultivated by a close-knit, passionate group of visionary winemakers. Like the shifting ground below them, they are collectively reshaping the landscape of Oregonian viticulture and awakening palates to the unique, food-friendly wines of the "100 Valleys of the Umpqua."



Umpqua Valley owner-winemaker Stephen Reustle of Reustle Vineyards.

TASTING NOTES

Brandborg 2013 Gewurztraminer, Umpqua Valley (\$18) Gorgeous and aromatic; an enticing potpourri of candied tangerine peel, lychee, English rose and tart apple invite sip after sip; pleasantly sweet at first, followed by blazing acidity and a mouth-filling freshness with lasting honeysuckle, Asian pear; and exotic spice notes.



Brandborg 2012 Pinot Noir, Ferris Wheel Estate Vineyard, Umpqua Valley (\$38) Seductive, alluring and profoundly pretty; evokes sweet forest fruits, violets, tobacco smoke and cotton candy; bright and balanced, graceful and feminine, with silky tannins and elegant, enduring finish.



Abacela 2014 Albariño, Umpqua Valley (\$21) From the estate Fault Line Vineyards; clean, bright and fruity; vibrant aromas of peach compote, lime, sea salt and a hint of white flowers; at first soft and juicy, then finishing sleek and tart, with zesty citrus, Granny Smith apple, white pepper and wet river stone minerality.



Abacela 2012 Barrel Select Tempranillo, Umpqua Valley (\$32) Aged in French oak (44% new); deeply colored; intense, compelling aromas of brambly ripe blackberry, violet, brandied cherry, leather and smoked sea salt; velvety but juicy texture, backed by fine tannins and dark mineral core, give way to layers of black cherry, plum compote, anise, mocha and sweet smoke.

Reustle 2014 Grüner Veltliner, Revelation & Sorek Bloc, Prayer Rock Vineyards, Umpqua Valley (\$24) Rich yet perky, with melon, flint, chamomile, dried honey, lanolin and white pepper; round, juicy with an unctuous texture balanced by mouth-tingling acidity and silty minerals.



Reustle 2013 Syrah, Masada Bloc, Prayer Rock Vineyards, Umpqua Valley (\$32) Lovely notes of juicy black cherry, elderberry, candied violets, black pepper; and cured meat smoke; juicy and fresh on the palate, with tantalizing tension between tannins, acid, and sweet, oak-kissed blueberry fruit; long, luscious mineral-backed finish.