WASHINGTON STATE WINE

2019 Press Kit
It was 200 years ago that pioneering explorers Meriweather Lewis and William Clark traversed the amazing terrain of Washington State. The same vistas that captivated them then, remain today, but modern explorers discover something our early visitors never witnessed: Washington State is one of the world’s most dynamic wine regions.

WASHINGTON STATE IS DIVERSE. We cultivate nearly 70 grape varieties, including Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. With 14 unique growing regions, Washington State is a mosaic of landscapes, from evergreen coasts and snow-capped mountains to a vast sagebrush desert where the sun shines 300 days a year. Diversity is a part of our culture - our wine industry ties creative people from different backgrounds and several countries around the world.

WASHINGTON STATE IS AMBITIOUS. Home to global giants Microsoft, Starbucks, Costco and Amazon, Washington State is a place of tremendous vision and drive. Our wine industry reflects this. Our innovative growers and winemakers broke ground in a vast, wild territory where conventional wisdom said they could not. And they have expanded that work to create America’s second-largest wine region, with more than 59,000 acres of vines and more than 1,000 wineries.

WASHINGTON STATE IS GENUINE. Our winemakers and grape growers live and work in small towns where old homes, beautiful barns and converted mills reflect the American west. They are active in their communities, connected to the land and eager to share their stories. When stopped in a tasting room, the person you see walking in the vineyard, driving a forklift or opening bottles behind the counter is often the owner or winemaker. Our wines echo this authenticity - rare natural conditions permit cultivation without the common, manipulative practice of vine grafting or intensive use of chemicals. We harvest the purest expression possible for every wine.

WASHINGTON STATE IS INTEGRATED. Because vineyards and wineries here are often spread across hundreds of miles, grape growers and vintners must work in tandem. From individual vine rows reserved for specific winemakers to fully-fledged joint-ownership projects, our region is one of shared endeavors. And our wines exhibit that spirit of integration, combining the vibrant fruit character expected of American wine with the defined structure typical of the Old World.
INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

PRODUCTION

Licensed Wineries: 1,000+
Grape Growers: 400+
Appellations (AVAs): 14
Acres/Hectares Planted: 59,000+*
Tons Harvested in 2018: 261,000

LEADING VARIETIES

Cabernet Sauvignon: 74,400 tons
Chardonnay: 41,500 tons
Riesling: 38,300 tons
Merlot: 37,500 tons
Syrah: 24,300 tons

ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT: 7 billion

FAST FACTS

• Washington is the second largest wine-producing region in the U.S.
• 950+ wineries in the state; a number more than doubling in the past decade.
• Washington is not defined by a single grape variety, with nearly 70 varieties planted.
• Varietal typicity, pure fruit flavors, and a blend of Old World and New World styles are the hallmarks of Washington’s wines.
• Washington wines consistently offer high quality and value across a range of price points.
WASHINGTON STATE APPELLATIONS

Washington State embraces a diverse collection of world-class vineyard areas. There are fourteen unique growing regions across the state. These appellations have been officially designated as American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) by the U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB). Each AVA possesses a unique combination of climate, topography and soils that define the aromas and flavors of locally grown grapes and the wines crafted from them.

YAKIMA VALLEY - Yakima Valley is Washington's first and most diverse growing regions. Its vineyards flourish across nearly a hundred miles, and they yield more than 40 different white and red grape varieties. Stretches of cooler terrain in the Yakima Valley are home to almost half of the Chardonnay and Riesling grown in the state. Simultaneously, the Yakima Valley's many warmer sites yield significant percentages of Washington's best Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah. In fact, the appellation includes Washington's oldest Cabernet Sauvignon vines at Otis (1957) and Harrison Hill (1963) vineyards.

• Designated in 1983: Washington State's first federally-recognized AVA
• More than 16,000 vineyard acres over 1/3 of Washington’s vineyards
• Includes more than 65 wineries
• Top varietals: Riesling and Syrah
• Silt-loan soils predominate allowing proper drainage necessary to keep vine's under control
• In addition to vineyards, Yakima harvests more than 75% of hops grown in the United States

WALLA WALLA VALLEY - The Walla Walla Valley is home to some of Washington's oldest wineries and has the highest concentration of wineries in Washington. Initially, many wineries sourced grapes from other regions of the Columbia Valley due to the limited number of plantings in the area. While many continue this practice, a large increase in plantings now allows many wineries to create Walla Walla Valley designated bottles.

• Designated in 1984
• One Washington’s four cross-border AVAs; 220,799 acres in Washington, 98,628 acres in Oregon
• Over 100 wineries and tasting rooms
• Top varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon leads, Merlot, Chardonnay and Syrah are predominant
• Loess derived soils which are essentially unconsolidated, unstratified calcareous silt
• Growing season of 190 – 220 days, with annual rainfall averaging 12.5 inches per year
• Grape growing began in Walla Walla Valley in the 1850s by Italian immigrants
• Also known for its sweet onions, asparagus and expansive wheat fields

COLUMBIA VALLEY - Encompassing more than a third of the state, the Columbia Valley is by far Washington's largest growing region at nearly 11 million acres. The appellation is located in central, south central, and southeastern Washington with part of the appellation spilling across the border into Oregon.

• Designated in 1984
• Largest growing region, totaling over 11 million acres
• Contains 99% of all the wine grapes grown within Washington
• Top varietals; Riesling, Merlot, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon
• Contains eight (8) sub-AVAs within its borders: Red Mountain, Yakima Valley, Walla Walla Valley, Wahluke Slope, Rattlesnake Hills, Horse Heaven Hills, Snipes Mountain, Lake Chelan, Naches Heights and Ancient Lakes
• 6,070 vineyard acres are planted in the Columbia Valley and not included in any other sub-AVAs
WASHINGTON STATE APPELLATIONS

PUGET SOUND – Located in western Washington, Puget Sound is unique for Washington in that it enjoys long, mild and dry summers, but gets enough rainfall to grow grapes without irrigation. It is Washington’s coolest and wettest growing region. It rarely suffers significant freezes in winter. The Puget Sound’s best-grown varieties pair very well with the region’s famous fresh seafood.
• Designated in 1995
• 92 vineyard acres of vinifera grapes planted
• Approximately 45 wineries live in the Puget Sound region
• Top varietals: Madeleine Angevine, Siegerebbe and Muller-Thurgau. Followed by Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir
• Washington’s coolest and wettest growing region: average of 15 inches – 30 inches of precipitation per year

RED MOUNTAIN – Red Mountain harvests some of the state’s most sought-after wine grapes. This very warm site, where growing season daytime temperatures average 90 degrees, gets only 5 inches (127 mm) of rain each year. These warm temperatures cultivate an ideal climate for red grape varieties, but limit plantings of white grape varieties.
• Designated in 2001
• Over 2,227 vineyard acres planted in the 4,538 acre area
• Washington’s smallest appellation by acreage
• Top varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Sangiovese, Malbec and Petit Verdot
• Sub-appellation of Yakima Valley AVA
• Not a mountain, not red in color

COLUMBIA GORGE – The Columbia Gorge AVA gave recognition to a uniquely beautiful area straddling the Columbia River along the Oregon border. Notably, the Columbia Gorge is one of Washington’s only growing regions that lies outside of the Columbia Valley appellation.
• Designated in 2004
• Nearly 400 acres under vine
• One of the few AVAs where white grape variety plantings outnumber red grape plantings
• One of Washington’s four cross-border AVAs; 66,604 acres in Washington and 120,012 acres in Oregon
• Traveling west to east within the Columbia Gorge, rainfall diminishes almost an inch per mile
• Western vineyards: cool, marine influenced climate (40 inches of rain per year) – perfect for Gewurztraminer, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Riesling
• Eastern vineyards: continental high desert climate (10 inches of rain per year) but plentiful sunshine – perfect for Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Zinfandel
• Vineyard altitudes vary from near sea level to close to 2,000 feet
WASHINGTON STATE APPellATIONS

HORSE HEAVEN HILLS – The Horse Heaven Hills AVA is nestled between the Yakima Valley and the Columbia River at the Oregon border. The Horse Heaven Hills AVA is among Washington’s warmer growing regions allowing a wide variety of grapes to ripen successfully. More than 1,500 feet of elevation change across the face of the appellation, paired with high winds and well-draining soils establish this AVA as one of the premier wine grape sources in the Pacific Northwest. The Horse Heaven Hills had its first vinifera plantings in 1972 at what is now Champoux Vineyard, and vineyard designated bottles—particularly cabernet sauvignon—from this site are some of Washington’s most coveted and expensive wines.

• Designated in 2005
• Nearly 13,000 vineyard acres - represents 25% of Washington’s total grape production
• Top varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Riesling and Syrah
• 37 total varieties planted within AVA
• 2/3 of acreage is planted to red wine grapes, 1/3 to white wine grapes
• Over 1,500 feet of elevation change across the face of the appellation
• Proud source of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd “100 point” wines from Washington State

WAHLUKE SLOPE – The Wahluke Slope is bounded by the Columbia River to the south and west and the Saddle Mountains to the north, is a dry, very warm site near the center of the larger Columbia Valley AVA. The major distinguishing feature of the Wahluke Slope is its uniformity in aspect, soil type, and climate. The entire appellation lies on a broad, south-facing slope with a constant, gentle grade of less than 8%. This, along with the proximity to the Columbia River, helps minimize the risk of frost, which can affect other areas of the state.

• Designated in 2006
• More than 8,000 acres of vineyards
• Top varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah
• Home to more than 20 vineyards and at least three wine production facilities

RATTLESNAKE HILLS – The Rattlesnake Hills AVA is located along the north-central edge of the Yakima Valley appellation. The high elevation of the Yakima Ridge to the north of the Rattlesnake Hills protects the area from winter freezes that can affect other areas of the state. An arid, continental climate and receives an average of 6 to 12 inches of rainfall annually. Irrigation is therefore required to grow vinifera grapes.

• Designated in 2006 – first commercial vineyards date back to 1968
• Nearly 1,800 acres of vineyards – 70% of these grapes are winery-owned
• Top varieties: Riesling, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon
• 18 wineries and 29 vineyards
• Predominant soils are silt-loam and loam
• A sub-appellation of the Yakima Valley AVA
SNIPES MOUNTAIN - The Snipes Mountain AVA, located at the center of the Yakima Valley. This AVA is set apart by the surrounding terrain by an elevated topography and distinct soils. Though Snipes Mountain was established recently (February 2009), it is one of the state’s oldest wine grape-growing districts and is home to our second-oldest block of Cabernet Sauvignon vines.

- Designated in 2009 - Washington State’s 10th official viticultural area
- 2nd smallest AVA in Washington State (4,145 acres) - 807 acres under vine
- Top varieties: Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon
- Vineyards grow more than 30 different wine grape varieties - fruit is used in more than 25 wineries
- Sub-appellation of the Yakima Valley AVA

LAKE CHELAN - This AVA wraps around the tourist-popular Lake Chelan Set at the northwest corner of the larger Columbia Valley appellation. Lake Chelan AVA has a high elevation and a temperate climate relative to its neighbor AVAs to the south. The AVA is also distinguished by a significant “lake effect” that creates mild and favorable temperatures for surrounding areas, resulting in a longer growing season and a reduced risk of frost.

- Designated in 2009
- Of the appellations 24,040 acres, only 261 is under vine
- Top varieties: Syrah, Merlot, Malbec Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer and Chardonnay
- Home to 16 wineries

NACHES HEIGHTS - Naches Heights is an extremely young growing region, with its first vinifera plantings in 2002. The AVA sits on a volcanic plateau within the Yakima Valley and is a sub-appellation of the Columbia Valley. Naches Heights is unique in that it has a higher elevation than most regions in Washington. The lowest point of the AVA is 1,200 feet and elevations rise to 2,100 feet. That high elevation kept Naches Heights unaffected from the Missoula Floods during the last ice age that formed the soils of many other grape growing regions in the state.

- Designated in 2011
- Of the 13,254 appellation acres, only 39 vineyard acres
- Washington’s smallest AVA in terms of acreage under vine
- Soils are windblown and heavy in clay helping the soil retain water
- Top varieties: Pinot Gris, Riesling and Syrah
ANCIENT LAKES OF COLUMBIA VALLEY - Ancient Lakes sits right in the middle of the state. The area is wholly contained within the Columbia Valley region and is named after a series of thirty-five lakes that dot the area. The AVA sits on soils left from the Missoula Floods giving the area soils of sand and silty loam. The famous Gorge Amphitheater resides on the western edge of the AVA. Designated in 2012

- Of the 162,762 appellation acres, 1,608 are vineyard acres
- Produces 20 different grape varieties. Top varieties: Riesling and Chardonnay
- 65 soil types within the AVA
- 182-day growing season and receives very little rainfall, only 6.5 inches of rain a year

LEWIS CLARK VALLEY - The Lewis-Clark Valley AVA’s soil is comprised of decomposing perennial grasses and grass roots with capacity to hold water. The majority of soils contain loess, or wind-deposited, nutrient-rich silt. The region has good planting areas that are easy to develop and contains air drainage characteristics that are ideal for wine grapes. It also contains steep sides within shallow, stony surficial coverage for both classic and exotic vineyard sites. Designated in 2016.

- Formed by the Snake and Clearwater rivers, the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA consists of canyon side and bench lands and is 306,658 acres in size.
- About 72% (219,838 acres) of the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA is located in Idaho, the rest in Washington.
WASHINGTON STATE WINE HISTORY

THE BEGINNING Washington’s first wine grapes were planted in 1825 at Fort Vancouver by the Hudson’s Bay Company. By 1910, wine grapes were growing in several areas of the state, following the path of the early settlers. French, German and Italian immigrants pioneered the earliest plantings. Wine historians, Ron Irvine and Dr. Walter Clore, document in their book The Wine Project a continuous and connected effort to cultivate wine grapes beginning with those early plantings at Fort Vancouver. Hybrid varieties arrived in nurseries in the Puget Sound region as early as 1854, and by 1860 wine grapes were planted in the Walla Walla Valley.

In 1903, large-scale irrigation, fueled by runoff from the melting snowcaps of the Cascade Mountains, began in eastern Washington, unlocking the dormant potential of the land and its sunny, arid climate. Italian and German varieties were planted in the Yakima and Columbia Valleys in the early part of the 20th century and the wine grape acreage expanded rapidly. In 1910, the first annual Columbia River Valley Grape Carnival was held in Kennewick. By 1914, important vineyards had sprung up in the Yakima Valley—most notably the vineyards of W.B. Bridgman of Sunnyside. Muscat of Alexandria vines on Snipes Mountain date back to 1917 are considered the oldest in the state and are still producing today. The arrival of Prohibition in 1920 put a damper on wine grape production, but ironically may have helped spawn early interest in home winemaking. At the end of Prohibition the first bonded winery in the Northwest was founded on Puget Sound’s Stretch Island. By 1938 there were 42 wineries located throughout the state.

COMMERCIAL-SCALE PLANTINGS The first commercial-scale plantings began in the 1960s. The efforts of the earliest producers, predecessors to today’s Columbia Winery and Chateau Ste. Michelle, attracted the attention of wine historian Leon Adams. Adams in turn introduced pioneering enologist Andre Tchelistcheff to Chateau Ste. Michelle. It was Tchelistcheff who helped guide Chateau Ste. Michelle’s early efforts and mentored modern winemaking in this state. The resulting rapid expansion of the industry in the mid ’70s is now rivaled by today’s breakneck pace, where a new winery opens nearly every 15 days.

TODAY’S INDUSTRY The trend for quality wine production started by a few home winemakers and visionary farmers has become a respected and influential $4.4 billion-plus industry within Washington State. Washington wine is available in 50 states and more than 100 countries globally. Washington ranks second nationally for premium wine production and over 50,000 acres* are planted to vinifera grapes. Over 40% of these vines have been planted in the last 10 years as the industry rapidly expands. Significant developments in Washington State include the formation of the Washington State Wine Commission, a unified marketing and trade association, in 1987.

In 2003, the Washington Wine Institute and its educational partners celebrated the state’s $2.3 million investment (per biennium) to create new 2-year and 4-year degree programs supporting Washington’s growing wine industry. The program provides an educated work force to satisfy the needs of the growing industry. A degree program, ongoing education and research enhance the state’s reputation as a quality wine-producing region. In 2011, the industry voted to increase their annual assessments to help fund a world-class Wine Science Center at Washington State University opened in June 2015.
WASHINGTON STATE RECENT VINTAGES

2017 - The 2017 vintage started out with a cool, wet winter, with significantly above average snowfall in eastern Washington. Going into spring, the cool trend continued. “We thought we might have another 2011 on our hands,” one winemaker said, referring to the recent, historically cool vintage. As a result, bud break in 2017 was behind historical averages and significantly behind the most recent warm vintages of 2013-2015. Bloom was also slightly delayed. The early part of summer saw average temperatures in the Columbia Valley followed by above average temperatures in July and August. As a result, heat accumulation was a bit above average for the season, despite the cool start. Harvest began right on schedule, perhaps even a bit early, in late August. Wildfires occurred throughout the Pacific Northwest late in the growing season, but there is no widespread concern of smoke taint in the grapes. In the second half of September, temperatures cooled considerably, which delayed ripening. “Things just kind of stalled,” one winemaker said. This allowed for luxurious amounts of hang time without the threat of increased sugar accumulation, stretching harvest into the first week of November. As a result, winemakers report that sugars were slightly down in 2017 whereas acid levels were up. Overall, quality is reported to be high.

2016 - 2016 continued the trend of warm growing seasons in Washington marked by an early start. Bud break and bloom were significantly advanced from historical dates, with bloom occurring in some areas as early as the third week of May, a good two-plus weeks ahead of average. By the end of May, 2016 was easily on pace to surpass 2015 as the warmest vintage on record. To everyone’s surprise, beginning in June, temperatures swung back toward normal. “As we all know weather is very unpredictable and we did not see the cool second half coming,” said one winemaker. These cooler temperatures persisted throughout the majority of the summer. One of the hallmarks of the vintage was a large crop which, notably, caught many winemakers and growers by surprise. As a result, many sites picked out heavier than average and expected, despite successive thinning passes. Most attributed the large crop size to larger than average cluster size. Both berry size and the number of berries were significantly increased. Several factors were in play to cause this: the warmth of the previous year, the lack of fall or winter freezes, the warm spring, and then cooler summer temperatures. “Everything was set to maximize,” one grower reported. As a result of this and additional plantings, 2016 was easily a record crop for the state. Harvest started early, though not quite as historically early as the previous year. Cooler temperatures in September and October, along with some unseasonable rainfall, stretched the harvest season out to record lengths for some growers, with larger sites not finishing until the first week of November after starting in the third week of August. Overall winemakers expected high quality fruit due to the extended hang time, with larger berry and cluster size.

2015 - “The overwhelming factor in 2015 in Washington was heat,” said one winemaker. No one would disagree. If 2013 and ’14 could be described as ‘hot’ and ‘hotter,’ then 2015 would no doubt be described as ‘hottest.’ 2015 was Washington’s warmest vintage to date, with above average temperatures across the Columbia Valley throughout the growing season. While the ever-warm Red Mountain accumulated over 3,900 Growing Degree Days, even cooler regions like the Yakima Valley saw over 3,150. Overall, the Columbia Valley averaged 3,157 GDDs, compared to a long-term average of 2,628 – a sizeable difference. The warm temperatures led to advancement of all markers of the growing season, with bud break, bloom, and harvest occurring two to three weeks ahead of historical averages. Harvest began historically early, with some wineries bringing in fruit in mid-August – a prospect that would be unheard of in most years.

2014 - Harvest grew for the third consecutive year and many growers reported their warmest growing year on record. Grape production expanded 8% to 227,000 tons. The first few months of the growing season were dry, with some areas receiving as little as half the annual precipitation. July and August broke into record temperatures, and the warm weather continued all the way into mid-October. The warmth of the year led to an early start to harvest; some areas of the Columbia Valley began picking their fruit the third week of August! The heat gave the fruit higher sugar levels, which brought a lot of depth, vitality and power to the wines in barrel.

2013 - This year was a warm growing season in Washington, with above-average temperatures throughout spring and summer and notably warmer-than-average nighttime temperatures. A dramatic mid-September drop in temperatures extended harvest into early November. Many growers and winemakers reported lower acidities, sometimes markedly so, and in some cases higher sugar levels.
WHAT MAKES WASHINGTON STATE WINE DIFFERENT

DISTINCTIVE AND DIVERSE GROWING REGIONS AND SOILS
Washington has 14 federally approved unique growing regions cultivating a diversity of climates, soil types, and growing conditions that allow a wide variety of grapes to grow well. These range from warm sites such as Red Mountain (sometimes approaching Climate Region III, 3000-3500 Growing Degree Days) to cool regions like the Puget Sound (Climate Region I, up to 2500 GDDs) and areas in between. The relationship to the Missoula Floods, a series of cataclysmic events, defines the soil types of the vineyards in Washington. Most vineyards lie below the floodwaters with soils of loess—wind-blown deposits of sand and silt—overlying gravel and slackwater sediment with basalt forming the bedrock. This provides a diversity of soil types that are well drained and ideal for viticulture.

LARGE DIURNAL SHIFT PRESERVES NATURAL ACIDITY
Long, warm days and cool nights in the growing regions create a large diurnal shift, which helps maintain the natural acidity of the grapes. Washington State has some of the most dramatic fluctuations of any wine region in the world with up to 40º F difference between daytime high and nighttime low temperatures. The higher levels of natural acidity contribute to making the wines more food friendly and also assist with their longevity.

WINERIES ARE OFTEN SEPARATED FROM VINEYARDS
In the traditional grape-growing model, wineries are located next to or close to their vineyard sources. Washington, generally, completely breaks this model. Many wineries are located dozens and even hundreds of miles from the vineyards they work with. Additionally, many contract their grapes rather than establishing their own vineyards. This gives the wineries a number of advantages. First, purchasing grapes minimizes the startup time for a winery and has enabled the industry’s rapid growth. Second, it allows wineries to set up shop wherever they like, be it near the consumer hub of Seattle or in the far reaches of the state that they call home. Third, not being tied to a single vineyard source in a single location means that wineries can experiment with vineyards all across Washington. They can make a wine that blends, say, Cabernet Sauvignon from the Horse Heaven Hills with Merlot from Red Mountain and Petit Verdot from the Wahluke Slope, in essence taking what they feel is the best from each location. Using a diversity of sites also helps keep quality consistent across vintages. Lastly, working with a diversity of sites in different locations also helps protect against disruptions caused by Washington’s occasional spring and fall frosts and winter freezes.

A LEGION OF SMALL, FAMILY PRODUCERS
The vast majority of wineries in Washington are small, family producers making less than 5,000 cases annually. In fact, of the state’s 900+ wineries, only about 20 make more than 40,000 cases annually. The small, artisan nature of the industry contributes to producing wines of exceptional quality.
ABOUT WASHINGTON STATE WINE

Washington State Wine represents every licensed winery and wine grape grower in Washington State. Guided by an appointed board, WSW provides a marketing platform to raise positive awareness of the Washington State wine industry and generate greater demand for its wines. Funded almost entirely by the industry through assessments based on grape and wine sales, WSW is a state government agency, established by the legislature in 1987. To learn more, visit www.washingtonwine.org.

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