

# Savoring Southern Oregon's **WINE COUNTRY**

BY MICHAEL & ELIZABETH FAGIN



Abacela Winery, Umpqua Valley

Abacela Winery specializes in growing Southern European varietals; in good humor, this sign post on the property gives the mileage to those growing regions.

Refreshing whites and bold reds? You will find both when you explore the Southern Oregon AVA (American Viticultural Area). This wine region covers a vast area comprised of five sub-appellations. It begins about 160 miles south of Portland and stretches almost to the California border.

## Umpqua Valley and Elkton

Elk Creek Tunnel State Scenic Corridor is part of the Umpqua Hwy (OR 38). Follow this toward the coast and you will come to Brandborg Vineyard & Winery



Augustino Estate Winery, Illinois Valley

([brandborgwine.com](http://brandborgwine.com)). This is part of the Elkton AVA, which is a sub-appellation of the Umpqua Valley AVA. Owner and winemaker Terry Brandborg started making wine as a hobby in Concord, California, which is just 35 miles south of Napa. Terry eventually worked his way into the Alexander Valley of northern California, where you can find some of the best cool-climate pinot noir.

The warmth of the summer and fall days cools off late in the afternoon and evening as the fog rolls in. This is the prototypical environment for cool-climate grapes. The average temperatures in Alexander Valley and Elkton are very similar, which is why Brandborg chose Elkton for his vineyard. Both areas receive most of their precipitation in the late winter and with limited rainfall in the summer. A star among his white wines is their Coastal Cuvee White Wine, a blend of gewürztraminer, riesling, pinot gris and sauvignon blanc. Another exceptional wine is Brandborg's Bench Lands Pinot Noir.

A little bit of Spain can be found in Roseburg, which is just a short drive away. Travel away from the coast along the Umpqua River and within an hour you will arrive just south of Roseburg at Abacela Winery ([abacela.com](http://abacela.com)).

com), known locally as the home of the Spanish grape tempranillo. Farther away from the ocean than Elkton, the Roseburg area has warmer growing degree day units (GDD) 20 percent higher than Elkton. The bolder reds thrive with these higher units. GDD is a calculation of the average heat accumulation of a specific area and is very useful in comparing one region to another. You can find a more in-depth explanation at [wine.wsu.edu/extension/weather/growing-degree-days](http://wine.wsu.edu/extension/weather/growing-degree-days).

Tempranillo was a priority of owners Earl and Hilda Jones, so they started on a mission in the late 1980s to find weather that was similar to the tempranillo regions of Rioja and Ribera Del Duero in Spain, meaning a climate that had a cool spring, hot summer, and short autumn. Earl took three years to review volumes of climate data and found the perfect spot in the Roseburg area. You will be rewarded for his extensive research when you taste any

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one of their tempranillo wines. And don't miss their malbec, or their whites, albariño and viognier.

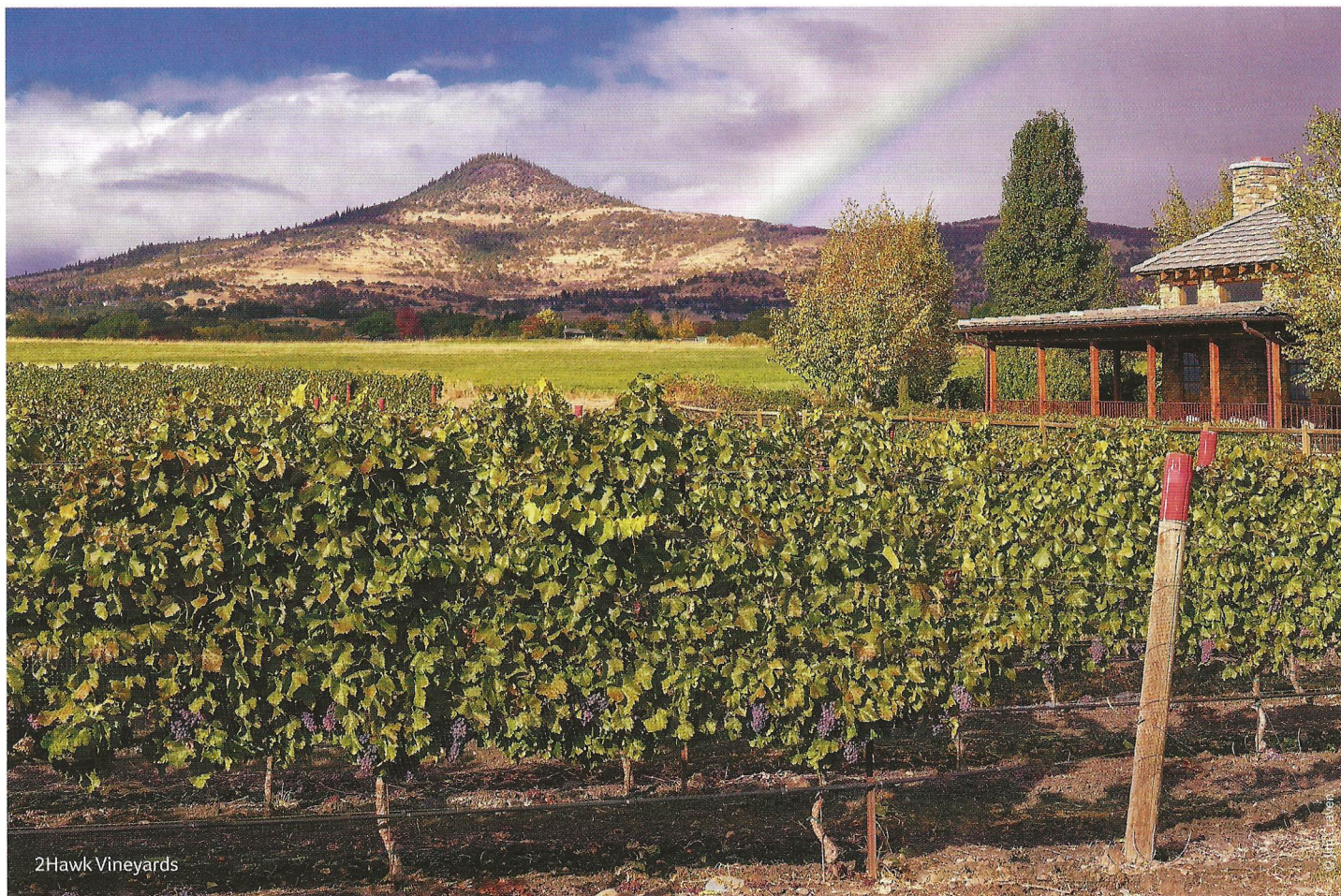
## Illinois Valley

With the forests of the Siskiyou Mountains to the south and the Oregon Coast Range to the west, the Illinois Valley is Oregon's south-westernmost wine region. It's small with only three wineries, and the valley hub is the rural town of Cave Junction (not far from the California border) and the popular natural site, Oregon Caves National Monument.

The combination of high elevation and marine weather makes this region ideal for cool-climate varietals. It's worth the drive down Highway 199 from Grants Pass to sample these wines and explore this rural wine region.

## Rogue Valley

Should you hike at Crater Lake or visit the iconic Harry & David or indulge in more wine tasting? The Medford area, located about 100 miles south of Roseburg, offers all this and more. Medford is much



2Hawk Vineyards



Applegate Wine Trail

© Applegate Wine Trail

drier than Roseburg, with 35 percent less rainfall, warmer daytime temperatures and a slightly greater diurnal swing in temperatures. The cooler nights bring different wine structures and slightly higher acidic levels.

Winemaker Kiley Evans of 2Hawk Vineyards & Winery ([2hawk.wine](http://2hawk.wine)) has created their Darow Series, named for the Darow soil, which features a blend of volcanic soil and rocks and is common in the Rogue Valley. The wine spends some extra time in the barrel, creating great structure. Try their Darow Series of viognier, malbec and tempranillo.

Want a view of the Cascade and Siskiyou Mountains? Just drive 14 miles south to Ashland (only 20 miles from the California border) and arrive at Irvine & Roberts Vineyards ([irvinerobertsvineyards.com](http://irvinerobertsvineyards.com)). The vineyard is at 2,100 feet. With this higher elevation the GDD units are 15 percent less than areas to their north. Thus, the wine focus is on the cool climate wines such as chardonnay and pinot noir. Owners Doug and Dionne Irvine worked several years on recruiting winemaker Vince Vidrine, who has an extensive resume, with experience from nearby Willamette Valley to New Zealand and Burgundy, and the wines show his expertise.

In the  
summer it  
can be 105  
degrees in  
the afternoon  
then cool to  
60 degrees  
after the  
marine air  
arrives. And  
the grapes  
love it!

## Applegate Valley

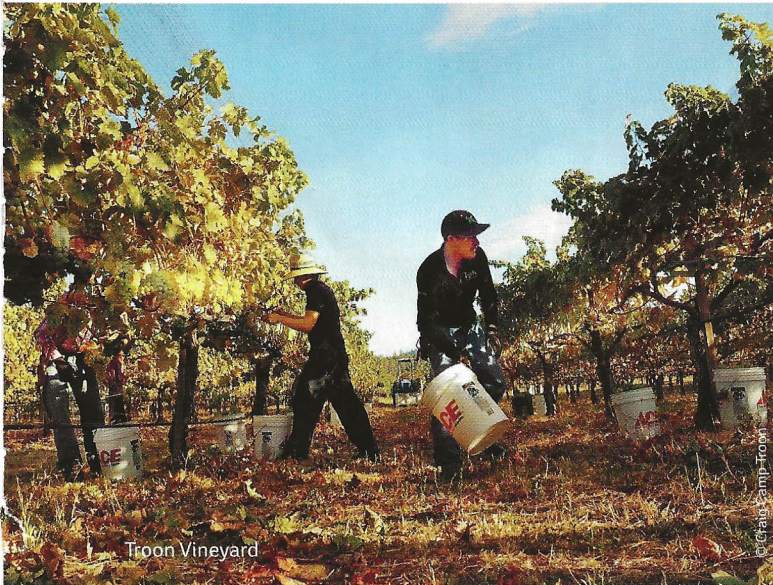
A spiritual-ethical-ecological approach to agriculture, gardens, food production and nutrition is what distinguishes biodynamic farming. That is what you will find at Troon Vineyard ([troonvineyard.com](http://troonvineyard.com)). Troon Vineyard is just 25 miles west of Medford in the Applegate River Valley and is sub-appellation of the Rogue. Dick Troon, known throughout the region as an eccentric and charismatic displaced Scotsman, owned this land for cattle grazing and then, realizing wine grapes would bring in a better income, planted his first vines in 1972. The current general manager, Craig Camp, has taken this operation to a new level.

Camp has vast experience as a wine importer, student of winemaking in Italy, and president of vineyards in both the Willamette Valley and Napa Valley. He brings more than 35 years of experience and has incorporated a very progressive growing and winemaking philosophy.

Troon Vineyards has both biodynamic and organic certifications.

Troon is about 57 miles from the coast, so they get nice diurnal temperatures. Warm summer days cool in the afternoon with cool west winds in the late afternoons. The property sits on the Kubli Bench, which is 1,400 feet above the valley and accounts for the cool afternoon breeze. In the summer it can be 105 degrees in the afternoon then cool to 60 degrees after the marine air arrives. And the grapes love it!

Try the Cuvee Rolle, Estate Vermentino, which is a white blend of 90 percent vermentino and 10 percent marsanne, inspired by similar wines produced in Languedoc, France. This is called an “orange wine, which is “skin-contact white wine.” White wine is made with grapes that are immediately pressed, with just the



Troon Vineyard

juice going through the fermentation process. When you ferment with the skins and seeds – you get a wine color anywhere between light orangy tinted golden to Tony-the-Tiger orange, depending on how much time the grapes spend fermenting with the skin and stems. Any white wine grape can be used to create orange wine. Troon’s Vermentino Whole Grape Ferment is a beautiful light orange tint and had a lemony nose, with a bold but flexible taste. You could easily pair this with just about any food. 🍷

## When you go

Which of the five AVAs are the best? You’ll have to go yourself to find your favorite. It’s a tough job, but someone has to do it—it might as well be you. Learn more about Southern Oregon’s wine regions and the wineries to visit at [southernoregonwines.org](http://southernoregonwines.org). Plan your trip to Southern Oregon by visiting [southernoregon.org](http://southernoregon.org).



Tasting room at a boutique winery in Southern Oregon