

VITICULTURE

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Sweetbriar Vineyard
blossoms
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LADYBUGS FIND HOME ON PREDATOR WINES LABELS AND VINEYARDS

By JULIA JOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

The Zaninovich family began growing grapes in California in the 1930s and crafting wine as a family in 1981 and are now in the third generation.

In the rolling vineyards, among the clusters of ripening grapes, tiny red-and-black ladybugs scuttle busily along the leaves. These unassuming insects play an outsize role in the story of Predator Wines, embodying the harmony between nature and viticulture that defines the winery's philosophy.

It's not just the ladybug's appetite for pests that makes it the winery's mascot — it's

a symbol of balance, stewardship and the creative energy that flourishes when tradition meets innovation.

What makes these areas special is what they have in common: cold breezes from the Pacific Ocean and blankets of fog and raising insects.

"Our wine cellars began in the Southern San Joaquin valley of California," said Morgan Zaninovich, president of Rutherford Wine Company, the maker of Predator Wine.

California's North Coast stretches from the small inland vineyards in Mendocino all the way south of Petaluma, with hundreds of microclimates and soil types in between.

The Predator brand is fam-



ily owned and operated by the Zaninovich family, who have been farming in California since the 1930s and are true stewards of the land" he said.

The use of raising insects began in 1978 as a benefi-

cial way to reduce pesticides in our vineyards. The insects are used to prey on pest mites such as spider mites.

"We use both ladybugs and beneficial mites to feast on non-beneficial mites," Zani-

novich said. "Spider mites can cause grape vines to become unhealthy and unproductive."

They also breed predator mites who work with the ladybugs to keep the vineyards healthy.

"The Zaninovich family has been committed to sustainability for years and the ladybug is just one part of that commitment," Zaninovich said.

The ladybug is a natural predator that feeds on aphids and mites that are harmful to plants and crops. "Natural predation" is just one of the many sustainable vineyard practices that eliminates the need for synthetic pesticides.

Predator is a premium wine brand and takes its name from the predator that roams

the vineyards at night, keeping watch over the precious grapes.

With a portfolio that includes red, white, and rosé wines, Predator offers a range of wine options.

The Zaninovich family has been committed to sustainability for years and the ladybug is just one part of that commitment.

They also breed predator mites who work with the ladybugs to keep the vineyards healthy.

"We firmly believe what is good for the vine, is good for the wine," Zaninovich said.

"We firmly believe and take seriously our role as stewards of our lands for generations to come."

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ST. JOSEF'S WINERY IN CANBY WELCOMES VISITORS OF ALL TYPES

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

It's no wonder Wine Spectator magazine and the New York Times named the Willamette Valley the No. 1 place in the world for growing and making wine.

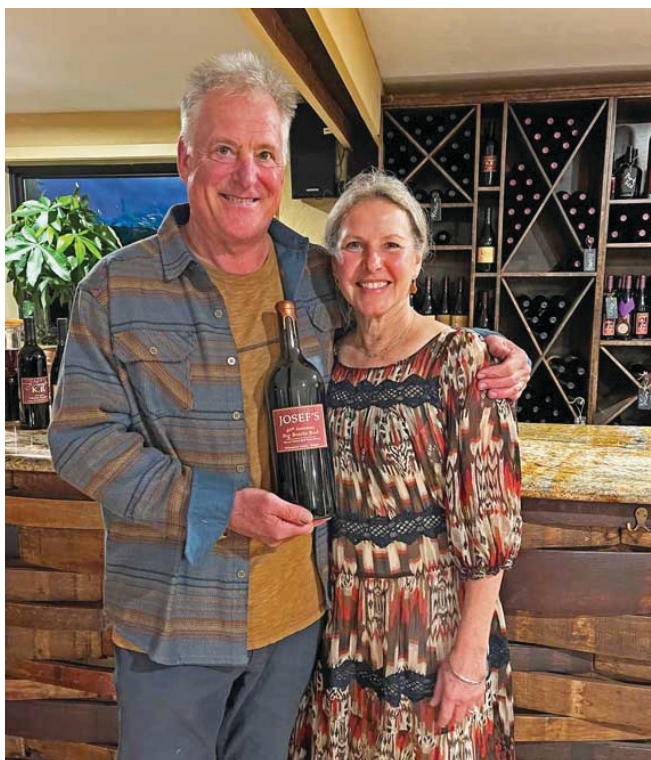
"We have good sugar because of our nice warm days and high acid because it cools off at night," Carl McKnight, of St. Josef's Winery in Canby, Ore., said. "Having the combination of both good acid as the backbone of the wine and enough sugar to ferment into nice wines makes it quite lovely."

Carl and Tara (Fleischmann) McKnight, daughter to 1978 winery founders Josef and Lilli Fleischmann, took the reins 25 years ago and have continued to make major improvements.

St. Josef's has a cozy tasting room, a courtyard with a fountain and grounds landscaped with the help of goats and llamas.

St. Josef's hosts many events that draw both new visitors and long-time fans, including live music on Sunday afternoons, a Memorial Day weekend bike ride and barbecue along with the Northwest's original grape stomping festival every September.

"Not many farmers grow something that people want to come visit and see where it's grown and made, and then take something home to share and enjoy," McKnight said. "Our philosophy is that you should be able to get a really nice bot-



Photos by Courtesy St. Josef's Winery

Owners Carl and Tara McKnight proudly display a magnum of their wine at St. Josef's Winery near Canby, Oregon.



Carl McKnight, chief winemaker at St. Josef's Winery, says the secret to Oregon's exceptional wine lies in its warm days and cool nights. The Canby, Ore., winery, established in 1978 by Josef and Lilli Fleischmann, was one of the first 30 in the state.

tle of wine at a fair price, industry in general. The terraced gardens of something that's not necessarily shared by the wine the tasting area overlook



Carl McKnight, chief winemaker at St. Josef's Winery, shows a manual grape press from the early days

11 acres of natural area that includes a 2-acre pond home to a range of wildlife — owls, bats, eagles, ducks and a family of geese that come back every year to raise their young.

The nearby Bear Creek adjacent to the pond contains an enormous beaver dam, and in the winter river otters come to play in the pond. Once, McKnight's son was fishing there when one ran between his legs.

"Another time, we were tasting with our distributor, and a bald eagle grabbed a fish from the pond and flew over our heads with it," he said.

They allow swallows to

have owl boxes and bat boxes because it's good for the environment and to let animals have somewhere to exist in peace."

That is, until the bullfrogs unite in song.

"There are a lot of challenges in alcohol and wine these days, so we're very happy to still be doing it and to still have people coming to visit," McKnight said. "It's all about winning customers for the long term, and if you do things nicely and well, it's a rewarding business."

For the McKnights, the flavor of their wine begins in limiting the fruit allowed on each vine. They grow 3 to 3 1/2 tons per acre, each vine producing about 2 1/2 pounds — about two bottles of wine.

"That's a low yield, but we want the right amount of fruit per vine so that we have very distinctive, flavorful fruit, and the more fruit you grow per vine, the more the flavor gets spread out," he said. "We also try to be as natural as possible, including not using bad chemicals or fertilizer."

"That's why Oregon wines are so highly rated — it's the right way to do things."



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INGRAM FAMILY BRINGS OLD WORLD TECHNIQUES TO OREGON CITY'S KING'S RAVEN WINERY

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

People are surprised to learn they're making vintage wine in Oregon City, Ore., but its climate, good soil and rolling hills make it a natural for Darin Ingram.

King's Raven Vineyard was established in 1999 and is owned by Sheri and David Ingram, their son Darin Ingram and wife Taneha, and daughter Kim with husband David Walton.

Darin is winemaker and vineyard manager on property his family has owned since 1941.

Darin's wife Taneha joined the winery full time in 2020, bringing to bear her experience in event planning and public relations while learning the ropes of the winemaking process.

"We're always working on something special," she said. "We just released a fan-favorite Blanc de Pinot Noir and recently expanded our indoor space."

She also serves as president of Cascade Foothills Winegrowers, 15 area wineries working together to promote the industry and each other.

With the market's current downturn, she has taken a second job during the week, managing the tasting room on weekends, and Darin is looking into ways to diversify.

Prior to starting the winery, Darin worked as a freelance video producer and web developer, which took him around the world and supported him while they built the vineyard.

Just before his first trip to France, he planted their first vines, an acre of Pommard, a clone from a small French village of the same name, which he visited during the trip.

"I visited a local winemaker who said the secret to good wine was simple: 'Two years in the bar-



Courtesy King's Raven Vineyard

Taneha Ingram dumps grapes into the processor at King's Raven Winery. The family-owned operation employs Old World techniques that include hand-harvesting, foot-stomping and indigenous yeasts.

rel, one year in the bottle,' with the emphasis on grapes and growing," he said. "I have the benefit of growing grapes for over 25 years now and for the first half it rained nine months of the year.

"We've been in a drought since 2012, and the Pacific Northwest is unlikely to see another period as wet as the 20th Century any time soon."

The 35-acre property contains 15 acres of grapes; 10 varieties on that include four heirlooms, including Ingram's favorite, Leon Milot, from which he has created King Raven's premier wine he makes every year.

Perhaps nothing proves the winery's dedication to Old World techniques more than foot-crushing all their red grapes, a gentler, slower method that proponents say mingles the stems and skins with the fruit's interior more thoroughly, resulting in wine with more spice,

subtle flavors and greater control over tannin levels.

While foot-treading has yielded many award-winning vintages for King's Raven, there are Old World remedies for batches that don't make the grade.

"It still has an alcohol content and can be distilled into brandy, which can also be used to make port, madeira or sherry," Ingram said.

In fact, King's Raven started a port program in 2014 using Maréchal Foch grapes and has produced a new vintage every year since.

"Our commitment from that first vintage is to age each one for at least 10 years," Ingram said. "We released our first 10-year port last year on our 25th anniversary."

Of the 1,000 cases produced each year, the winery only sells 600-700, funneling the rest into their aging program.

IDAHO'S SWEETBRIAR VINEYARD SPRANG FROM A RETIREMENT HOMESITE

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery, owned and operated by Mike and Tamara

Mackenthun, is 7 miles north-east of Mountain Home, Idaho. When they retired from the Air Force in the late 1990s they bought this place to build a home.

"We decided to grow wine grapes and I started doing some research," said Mike Mackenthun. Their vineyard was planted in 2006 after they finished their house. By 2009 the vineyard had 700 plants which included Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Lemberger for red wines. For white wine they planted Vignoles, Riesling and Pinot Gris.

The property is above the valley and doesn't get extremes in temperature like vineyards in the Snake River area and south of Boise.

"Cold air flows downhill and follows the river," he said. "Rattlesnake Creek is behind us and is a low spot, so the cold air keeps flowing on down the creek and doesn't settle here like it does in lower areas like Mountain Home. Temperature is usually not a problem for us; my only concern is that the grapes get ripe by the end of the season."

"Our vines are more mature now, and production fairly stable. Quality varies, however, based on weather. I lost some plants the past two years, mostly the ones on the berm, due to the topography. The bottom plants in the individual rows on that berm get too much water because there's not much soil under those roots. Water from above keeps draining down there. I lost some Rieslings this year but since the old roots are there I have quite a few trunks coming back up. They will produce fruit next year or the year after," Macken-



Mike Mackenthun, co-owner of Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery near Mountain Home, Idaho, stands among the vines in his vineyard.



The Sweetbriar Vineyard grows several varieties of grapes for red and white whines near Mountain Home, Idaho.

thun said.

He has about 700 plants that will bear fruit next year.

"I don't outsource grapes for our wines, but our neighbor has some Sauvignon and Gewurztraminer and sometimes I get some of his grapes. He planted his before we moved in, and has been making wine for a long time. He helped me get through the initial learning phase," he said.

"His vines are different, even though they are nearby. He has

fewer issues with powdery mildew, and I have more issues with insects like leafhoppers and whiteflies. His vines are more open to the wind, which helps reduce the powdery mildew. My Cabernet Franc are in a little valley that has more moisture and not much wind, so I get more powdery mildew. This year I lost a good portion of my Cabernet Franc because of that; I happened to go on vacation at just the wrong time."

Mother Nature is always in



Part of the Sweetbriar Vineyard near Mountain Home, Idaho, where Mike and Tamara Mackenthun grow Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Lemberger for red wines and Vignoles, Riesling and Pinot Gris for white wines.



Mike and Tamara Mackenthun are the owners and operators of Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery northeast of Mountain Home, Idaho. When they retired from the Air Force in the late 1990s they bought this place to build a home before turning it into a vineyard and winery.

charge. Growing the vines is an art and a science.

"The science takes you to a certain point and to go beyond that you need to know your own vineyard. For example, I have five Vignoles rows. Two are similar but the other three are all different, due to the layer of clay beneath the lower part where Rattlesnake Creek runs. Water seeps down to that clay, then goes to the creek. The first row that's closest to the hill gets a lot of water. The fourth one doesn't get a lot, but the fifth one gets the backup from the creek and the clay layer and gets more water. The middle three rows have good water so we water all those rows a bit differently."

He used different amounts of water to make them ripen at the same time. Last year, he ended up harvesting late because he made the decision to wait — because the acid level was too high.

"Then the acid and sugar shot up due to a hot week; the grapes dehydrated a little, increasing the sugar percentage. The decision I made on a Thursday was just the wrong one. You learn as you go, and you look at the weather and try to determine what to do and sometimes you get it wrong!"

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FATHER-SON TEAM MAKE HANSON VINEYARDS MORE THAN A HOBBY IN MONITOR, OREGON

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Jason Hanson and his father Clark started Hanson Vineyards 20 years ago on land that's been in the family for four generations.

Jason Hanson, who'd been working in Washington, D.C. for 14 years, was ready to come home. His father, a hobby winemaker and retired educator, was easily convinced to take out some walnut trees, cancel the rental contract and put in some grapes.

Clark began hand-digging a wine cellar, setting a goal of 15 wheelbarrows a day, finishing it in under two months.

"I was dealing with some family issues and hard work is

the best thing for me," he said. "Working with my son has given me a new lease on life."

His hobby wine making space soon became a full-fledged commercial winery.

Today, Hanson Vineyards distributes around 1,200 cases a year throughout Oregon, Vermont, Massachusetts, California and Ohio, mostly in wine shops, restaurants and smaller grocery chains including Market of Choice and New Seasons. They enjoy an active wine club with more than 350 members.

However, storm clouds have been brewing over the wine industry for some time now.

"When I came back, Oregon was going through its second wine renaissance; now it's crashing and burning," Jason



Photo by Brenna Wiegand

Jason Hanson of Hanson's Vineyards in Monitor, Ore., rests after a day among the vines. He and father Clark Hanson started the winery 20 years ago when the wine industry was enjoying its second renaissance.

Hanson said. "Worldwide, there are far too many grapes planted and there's a massive glut with thousands of acres being torn out in California and Washington.

"California's 10 gigantic wineries found they could import wine from Chile and Argentina for cheaper than making it right there in the Central Valley."

That's just part of the perfect storm of factors hitting the wine industry across the globe. Aging Baby Boomers, the industry's longtime mainstay, are giving way to Millennials and Generation Z, who enjoy many new options, including hard seltzers, ciders and canned cocktails. Nonalcoholic beverage choices abound, as do new medical warnings against alcohol.

Another factor is a rising tide of Americans taking weight loss drugs.

"These GLP-1 drugs make food uninteresting and alcohol unpleasant," Hanson said. "They don't have an exact number, but they estimate somewhere between 16 and 30 million Americans are taking them."

The wine business has enjoyed a 20-year run of unfettered growth, a rarity for any industry. Five years ago, Oregon had 800 wineries; 2024 started with over 1,100 but decreased by 25-30 wineries by year's end.

"There are a lot of wineries for sale, but the problem is, a lot of sellers don't understand that there isn't necessarily any tangible value in the brand of a 2,000-case-a-year winery," Hanson said. "They're trying to sell it as a continuing business, which puts them at loggerheads with most people, who only value the property."

Meanwhile, in the little hamlet of Monitor, Ore., the Hansons continue doing what they do best and thoroughly enjoy.

"I work out in the vineyard every day and in the tasting room on the weekends when we have a chance to show off the fruit of our labor," Hanson said. "We set up tables and chairs; people bring their picnics and their dogs. We want them to kick off their shoes and stay awhile."

The visitors enjoy being on a working farm, frequently admiring his parents' large vegetable garden and taking advantage of the opportunity to watch the progression of the grapes and how they turn it into wine.

"More than anything, I hear what a relaxing, quiet place it is," Hanson said. "You don't feel the rest of the world and in this era that's a kind of a nice thing."



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CALIFORNIA WINE GRAPE GROWERS TOAST AWARD WINNING VINTAGES

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press



The California Association of Winegrape Growers was founded in 1974, when a small group of forward-thinking growers recognized the need for a unified voice to represent winegrape growers to advocate for their interests.

Last year, the association brought together over 400 members in Sacramento to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

“CAWG began with a few dozen dedicated growers who represented a cross-section of California’s diverse winegrape regions,” said Natalie Collins, president of the association. “In the following year, CAWG made the jump to about 100 grower members. Today, CAWG represents about 600 winegrape growers throughout California”.

Winegrapes have long been grown across California, with different areas known for their unique climates and growing conditions. According to the 1976 USDA Crush Report, the

largest volume of winegrapes was crushed in the San Joaquin Valley; which includes Madera, Fresno, Kings, Kern and Tulare counties.

That year, 1976, was a pivotal time in wine history with the Judgment of Paris, where California wines (notably a Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay) were ranked highly against French wines.

This event put California wines on the international map and helped increase their popularity among wine drinkers.

What was the most popular wine grown?

Based on the USDA’s California Grape Crush Reports from the mid-1970s to 1980, Carignane was the most widely crushed winegrape variety in California during that period, particularly from 1974 through the late 1970s.

It was especially popular in bulk wine production due to its high yields and adaptability. Zinfandel and Grenache were also among the top varieties by crush volume.

During that time, Thompson Seedless was the most popular white grape variety grown and crushed in California. It dominated white varietal production not only because of its use in wine, but also due to its dual-purpose role as a raisin and table grape.

Other commonly crushed white winegrape varieties during that time included French Colombard and Chenin Blanc, which were often used in large-scale, lower-cost white wine production.

However, in terms of sales, Wine Institute data shows that 2018 was the year with the highest California wine shipments recorded in recent years, both to the U.S. market and to all markets (U.S. and abroad).

- In 2018, California wine shipments reached:

- 284.8 million cases to all markets (U.S. and abroad).

“California winegrape

growers began seeing major industry shifts in the late 1960s and 1970s, as consumer demand moved toward higher-quality, varietally labeled wines,” she said. “The 1976 Judgment of Paris, where California wines outshined the French in a blind tasting, brought global recognition and accelerated the shift from bulk, high-yield grapes to premium varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay.”

That era marked the rise of quality, branding, and global competitiveness, but today, growers face a very different challenge.

Consumers now have more beverage choices than ever, not just within the wine category, but across the entire beverage market, from craft cocktails and beer to ready-to-drink and non-alcoholic options.

The pressure to stand out is immense, and California growers are carrying the burden of high production costs without a guaranteed place in an increasingly crowded and price-sensitive market.

What is the biggest challenge in California winegrape growers?

Collins said there are many challenges California growers face.

“California winegrape growers are facing an unprecedented convergence of challenges — a true ‘death by a thousand paper cuts.’”

On their own, issues like labor cost and availability, pest and disease pressure, wildfire smoke exposure, prolonged drought, market oversupply, and ever-increasing regulatory burdens might be manageable. But together, they’ve created a landscape where growers are no longer able to compete, not just globally, but even within the domestic marketplace.

Low-cost bulk wine imports flood the U.S. market at a time when California growers are expected to meet some of the highest labor, environmental and sustainability standards in the world. The cost of operating a vineyard in California has made it nearly impossible for growers to profitably supply many

low- to mid-tier wines and compete against foreign producers with lower costs, Collins said.

In 2024, more than 37,000 acres of winegrapes were removed in California. Industry experts are calling for another 50,000 acres to be taken out of wine production.

When vineyards are removed, Collins said, it causes a loss of generational investment, local jobs and rural economic stability.

“Vineyard removal often means permanent exit from farming, especially in regions where the cost of replanting is too high, and there’s no alternative crop to switch to,” Collins said. “Communities lose tax revenue, farmworkers lose employment, and the long-term viability of California’s winegrape industry is further eroded. In some areas, removed vineyards are being left abandoned because growers can’t afford the cost of disposal under current air board restrictions, posing pest and disease risk and compounding environmental and economic challenges.”

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