



## *The Birth of a Wine Region*

To some, the Columbia River Gorge may conjure Ken Burnsian images of Lewis and Clark perched atop rocky crags, staring with resolve down a roaring river. Others may think of the end of the Oregon trail and the pioneers who were coming to see what new life awaited them on the West coast. The heritage of the Columbia River Gorge may be summed up in one word: discovery.

This sense of discovery has persisted through the last several decades as the Columbia Gorge has been found to contain an array of diverse microclimates and soil types that mirror the quality of old world wine growing regions.

Geographically, the Columbia Gorge has it all. Moving from West to East along the Columbia River, the climate goes from a temperate rain forest at Cascade Locks (~80 inches of annual precipitation) to an extremely arid high desert in The Dalles (~14 inches of annual precipitation.) The interceding 40 miles covers a broad range of climates and places, The Columbia Gorge is within only a few degrees of latitude from the famous French wine regions like The Rhone Valley, The Rhine Valley, Burgundy, and Bordeaux.

Also in the Columbia Gorge's favor is the extreme proximity of the different microclimates. Few wineries purchase grapes from farther than 30 miles away. This proximity means that from the time of picking to crushing and wine making is only a few hours as opposed to days. The result is cleaner, more aromatically intriguing wines.

But even the best grapes in the world can be mistreated in the hands of novice wine makers. Luckily for the Columbia Gorge, the versatile growing region has attracted masterful wine makers from the beginning. The region has drawn winemakers from some of the best winemaking schools in the world like UC Davis and winemakers who have found success in the Willamette Valley and Sonoma, as well as winemakers from Europe.

Michael Sebastiani of Sonoma notoriety joined owner Robb Bell and began making wines for Cathedral Ridge Winery (Hood River, OR) in 2003. Since then, Cathedral Ridge's wines have brought home over one hundred awards at local, national, and international competitions. Noble French grapes are prominently featured on Cathedral Ridge's wine list, as well as the occasional Tempranillo or Cabernet Franc to add diversity and dimension to the wine list.

Unafraid of experimentation, Cathedral Ridge's current offering features a unique and thought provoking Pinot Noir blend called "Necessity Red" and an off-dry Zinfandel that is more reminiscent of Ruby Port than a dry dinner wine.

It seems that almost every winery in the Columbia Gorge is currently under some type of construction. Be it a tasting room or production facilities, formerly humble wineries are now taking their first steps into serious commercial industry.

But that doesn't mean the competition is getting out of control. Wineries all along the Columbia Gorge get along quite congenially, often trading staff or even winemakers, there is something bordering on incestuous about the familiarity in the Columbia Gorge wine scene.

It is almost like the Columbia Gorge wine industry is all in on a secret. The secret being that 40 miles from Portland, there is a place where tourists and industry professionals alike can experience bravery, passion and adventure in winemaking again. And they are smiling together, waiting for the rest of the world to figure it out.

Come out and discover for yourself. Get in on the secret:) We will be waiting for you!