



# The Road to Wine Country

Applegate Valley Wine Trail's unhurried beauty

BY PAUL OMUNDSON

**J**UST 180 MILES SOUTH OF EUGENE, AT THE FOOT OF the state, is a jewel of a valley with 18 modest-sized wineries in close proximity to one another. The Applegate Valley, which stretches 50 miles north from the California border to the Rogue River west of Grants Pass, is a sub-appellation of the Rogue Valley AVA (American Viticultural Area), which is itself within the larger Southern Oregon AVA.

Whether you're a wine lover or not, the Applegate Valley Wine Trail is an awesome one-day or overnight road trip—that is, if you like country roads that meander through pleasant hills and valleys (wine-



Red Lily Vineyards (shown left and right), located in Jacksonville, is just one stop on the Applegate Valley Wine Trail.

centrically, these provide varying mini-climates that allow an amazing array of wine varietals to be successfully grown here). Tasting rooms await, as well as spectacular views to enjoy with your sips. Best of all is meeting these artisan winemakers, most of whom have been here for three decades or more, plying their craft, earning accolades, and making this area one of the hottest wine producing regions in the world.

It's worth the three hour drive from Eugene just to meet Joe Giniet—or, really, any of his wine-making neighbors.

Ginet (Plaisance Ranch, Applegate Valley) will never forget a moment in a village in the Savoie region of the French Alps, when he and a group of his French cousins passed glasses of local wine they had made back and forth to each other, the 14th generation to do so at that same tavern counter. "The feeling of continuity is incredible," Joe recalls. His adventurous grandfather of the same name left the Savoie town of St. Jean de la Porte in 1898, and after some time as a chef in New York City, followed his muses to the Applegate Valley and found a neglected orchard outside Jacksonville where he grew and sold vines and made wine. He was simply continuing what his family had been doing for centuries in France. But in doing so, he joins Peter Britt—who introduced wine grapes to the area in 1852 and started

Oregon's first winery (Valley View Winery) in 1873—as a pioneer of today's Oregon wine industry.

Today, Giniet taps into his grandfather's legacy. He and wife Suzi bought their current 310-acre Plaisance Ranch 35 years ago, not far from his grandfather's digs, and for three decades he, Suzi, and their five kids ran a dairy farm with 500 head of Holstein cows. But family history pulled his heart to the wine side. "I was really struggling with how to make the transition," Giniet recalls. That's when cousin Francois Velletaz from Savoie suggested carrying on the centuries-old family tradition of running a grape vine nursery. Velletaz came to Plaisance Ranch for six years straight to teach Giniet the art of grafting.

The ranch, which also sports a vibrant organic beef operation, has been in continual operation since 1856. But these days, the winery is all-consuming. "I really spend most of my time making wine"—2,000 cases of it a year—the ex-dairyman says. And that's the way he likes it. His signature tempranillo and syrah wines on the red side, and viognier and chardonnay for whites, are acclaimed, and deservedly so.

Ginet, who has served as president of the Applegate Valley Wine Trail Association for six years, exemplifies the spirit and craftsmanship visitors find at each of the 18 stops on the trail. It's a terrific introduction to

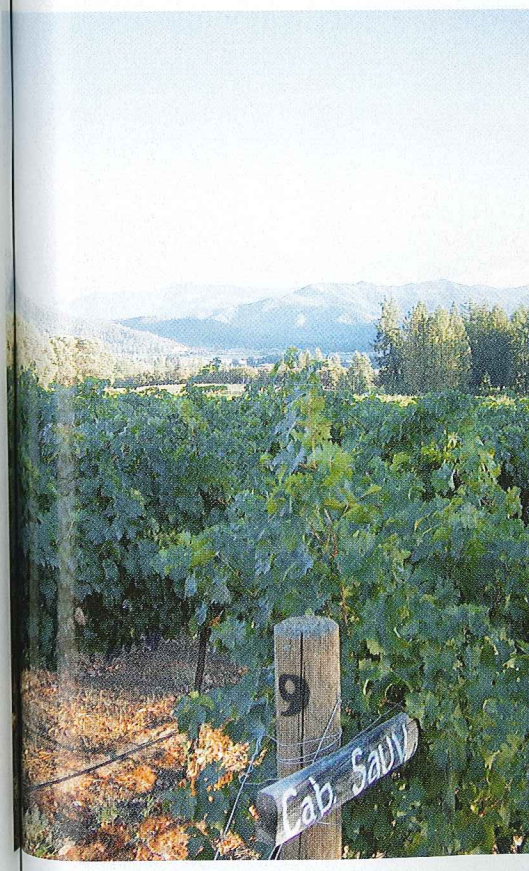
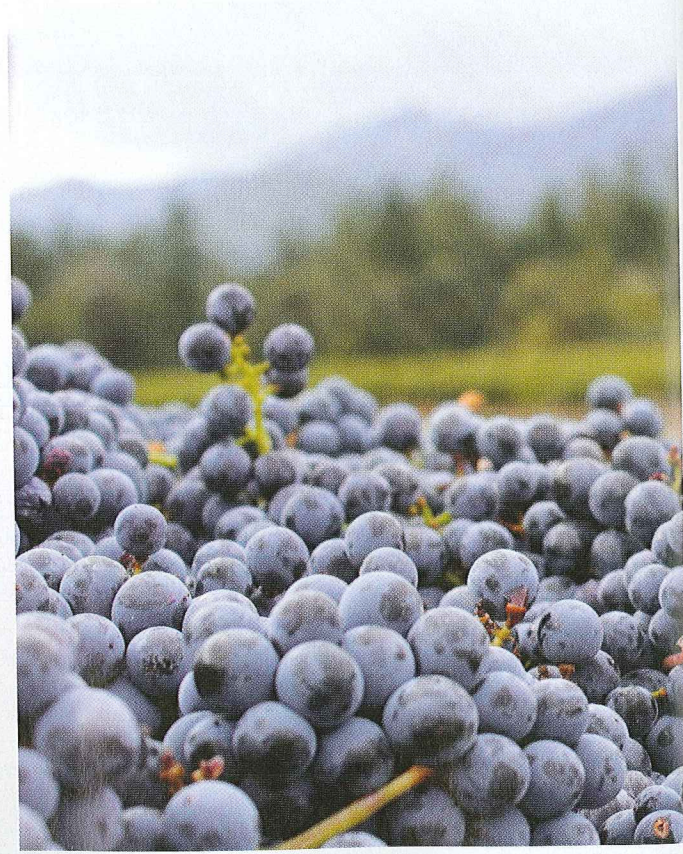
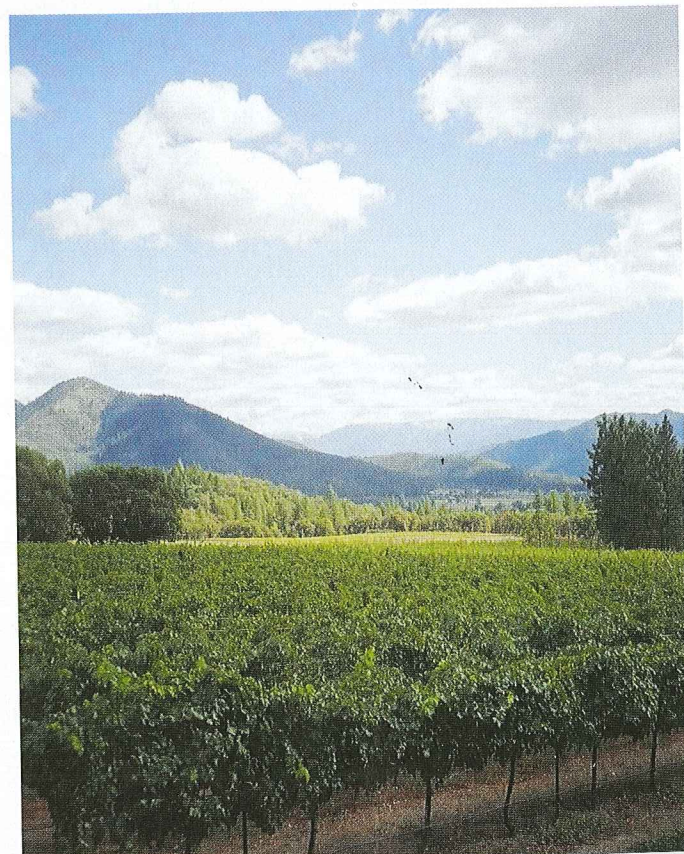
winemaking as it emerges into the 21st century, especially from an area that has been doing it since the 19th century.

Each of his fellow Applegate Valley wine growers and winemakers has an equally compelling story. Best of all, they're glad to share it with you.

Down here, things are unhurried and there's time to chat (and sip).

And what a bountiful feast! Whether it's the well-known Blue Moon line of wines at Bridgeview Vineyard & Winery, along with its small wildlife preserve; or the exquisite Rhone wines at Cowhorn; or Red Lily Vineyards' terroir-driven tempranillo; or artisanal wines organically grown from flowers, fruits, and berries at Wild Wines—each has its own unique personality.

A one-day trip from Eugene is possible, but choose just a couple of wineries that hit your fancy. They're all close together. If you plan an



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— GREAT ESCAPE —

overnight stay, nearby Jacksonville is the place, seeped in frontier history and rocking splendidly these days. It's a great base for your excursion and hosts its own World of Wine event in August. Likewise, if you're so inclined, an epic way to soak in Applegate Valley all at once is to immerse yourself in "Uncorked," a barrel tasting and special wines event that occurs twice a year, on the weekends before Thanksgiving and Memorial Day. Each of the 18 wineries offers special sips paired with

appetizers. About 700 people flock to Uncorked events so you might prefer to do your own tour at a different time. When you do, be sure to try Ginet's Carmenère for a tasting experience you may not yet have enjoyed. As he says, "it's a terrific wine, big, bold, unlike anything you've tasted. It's hard to grow the grape," Ginet adds, "but I've had some time now and I'm figuring it out." That's the spirit you find at every Applegate Valley stop. ■

[applegatewinetrail.com](http://applegatewinetrail.com)



Raising a toast at Serra Vineyards in Grants Pass, Oregon.

**ON THE TRAIL**

*Key stops along the Applegate Valley Wine Trail*

The Academy of Wine of Oregon

Bridgeview Vineyards & Winery  
[bridgeviewwine.com](http://bridgeviewwine.com)

Cowhorn Vineyard & Garden  
[cowhornwine.com](http://cowhornwine.com)

Cricket Hill Winery  
[crickethillwinery.com](http://crickethillwinery.com)

Devitt Winery  
[devittwinery.com](http://devittwinery.com)

Fiasco Winery  
[jacksonvillevineyards.com](http://jacksonvillevineyards.com)

John Michael Champagne Cellars  
[johnmichaelwinery.com](http://johnmichaelwinery.com)

LongSword Vineyard  
[longswordvineyard.com](http://longswordvineyard.com)

Plaisance Ranch  
[plaisanceranch.com](http://plaisanceranch.com)

Red Lily Vineyards  
[redlilyvineyards.com](http://redlilyvineyards.com)

Rosella's Vineyard & Winery  
[rosellavineyard.com](http://rosellavineyard.com)

Schmidt Family Vineyards  
[sfvineyards.com](http://sfvineyards.com)

Serra Vineyards  
[serravineyards.com](http://serravineyards.com)

Soloro Vineyard  
[solorovineyard.com](http://solorovineyard.com)

Troon Vineyard  
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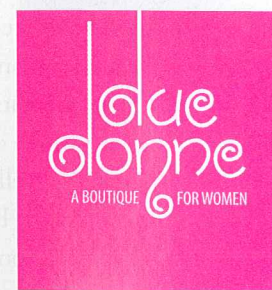
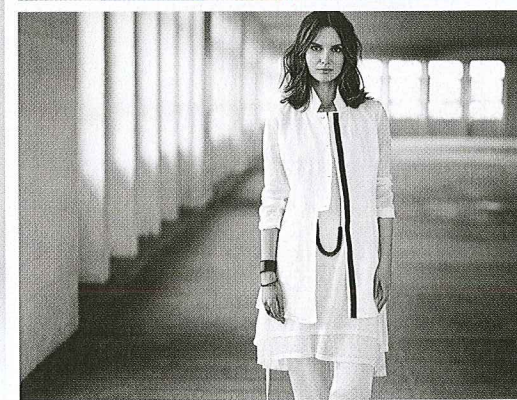
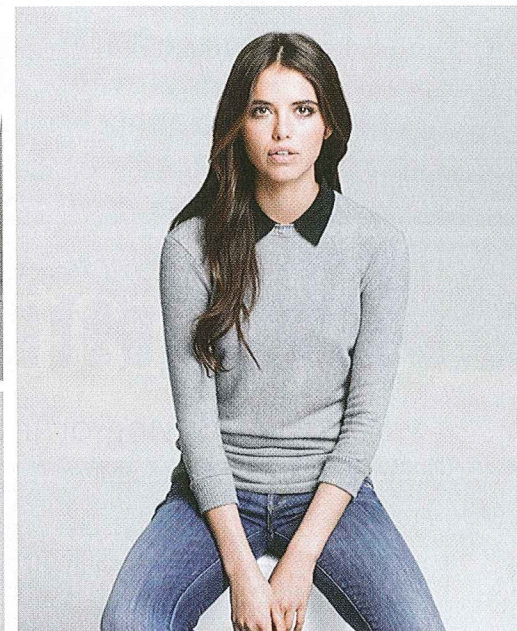
Valley View Winery  
[valleyviewwinery.com](http://valleyviewwinery.com)

Wild Wines  
[enjoywildwines.com](http://enjoywildwines.com)

Wooldridge Creek Winery  
[wwinery.com](http://wwinery.com)

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