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"At Bjelland Vineyards Outlook Is Exciting" Article

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At Bjelland Vineyards

Outlook Is Exciting



Paul Bjelland, "cooping" barrel

Greeting winery visitors in "kormi"-striped overalls and a French beret, Paul Bjelland offers optimistic insights into the current state of the wine business and, more particularly, his own wine operation.

His enthusiasm for his now fulltime hobby and occupation as vintner expands proportionately with his production each year and the public's growing interest in wine.

Bjelland's wines — part of the 2,100 gallons he produced this past year — are available at his own winery, at Byrd's and Drive-N-Save markets in Roseburg; at Meier & Frank Co. stores; at Porter's Foods Unlimited in Eugene and Salem, at Anderson's Delicatessen in Beaverton, Harris Wine Cellars in Portland and Ye Olde Wine Shop in Eugene.

"But the most exciting thing in the marketing picture right now are the shipments to New York and the San Francisco Bay area, Denver, Colo., and Albuquerque, N.M.," Bjelland says. A national broker he now has with offices in New York and San Francisco enables his wines to be shipped to any state, without the vintner in Roseburg having to contend with the problems of interstate commerce.

Bjelland says European visitors to Oregon often take trips to visit the Umpqua Valley wineries to get a taste of their home country while in the U.S.

"Salishan Resort on the coast is our best account," Bjelland said, adding that the staff there and at Oregon's Gleneden Beach resort often send their guests on a day trip to visit the winery.

"And Phil deVito, the maitre 'd at Salishan, uses my wines in the television cooking class he teaches," the winemaker beamed.

He has had his problems. The record freeze in Douglas County two years ago caused considerable damage, with many of the vines freezing back and starting over again.

"If you have a real good, gentle slope with good drainage for air currents, it doesn't seem to freeze," Bjelland said. But the famous rock mountain that juts skyward behind his vineyards can sometimes help trap the cold air in the valley below. The winter cold at the lower elevations forced him to take out 10 acres he had planted.

But the viticulturist was undaunted by that climatic setback and looks instead to the future and ever-increasing production.

He proudly shows off a new rack he's building to cradle his growing supply of 55-gallon wine barrels during the aging process. The rack is housed in his newly insulated and wired

year-old winery, now half finished. The other half he hopes to have completed before the 1975 wine festival.

He picks up an ancient cooper, a heavy antique spike-like tool, and begins hammering and tightening the rings around the oak barrels to discourage leaking and evaporation.

"When you're a one-man operation, you have to learn to do everything," Bjelland said.

His greatest support and help comes from his wife Mary, whom Bjelland credits with being a most proficient worker and hostess to visitors.

The husband-wife team gave a demonstration on wines and home-wine making at the Oregon State Fair this year in Salem. They also brought home first and second place awards in the first annual wine competition at the fair for their Cabernet Sauvignon and wild Himalayan blackberry wines.

Bjelland says, in addition to using all of his own grapes each year, he buys "all the grapes I can" from other winegrowers in Douglas County. His 2,100-gallon production last year he hopes to top with 3,000 gallons this year.

And he looks to the day when he can get enough grapes to bottle 20,000 gallons of wine a year. There seems to be a market for it — for just as much as he can produce.

The Umpqua Valley's Very Own

Special Occasion Table Wines