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"Roseburg Wine Praised" Article

Jim Van Renssalaer

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Roseburg Wine Praised

Ed. Note: The following article by Jim Van Rensselaer appeared Aug. 15 in the News-Post of Laguna Beach, Calif. We sampled two remarkably good wines grown in Roseburg in the heart of Oregon's relatively new *Vitis vinifera* wine growing area. One was from the Hillcrest Vineyard, the pioneer vineyard in the Ump-

qua Valley, as established by Richard Sommer in 1963; and the other was from the Bjelland (pronounced B-yell-und) Vineyard planted by a transplanted Long Beach school man named Paul Bjelland in 1968.

One would expect white grapes to do well up here, particularly those varieties adapted to cool climates, and sure enough, one of the two outstanding wines was a Johannisberg Riesling from the Bjelland Vineyard. It is a soft mellow well-balanced wine with a fine Riesling rose and enough acid to give it character without the sharpness often encountered in these wines.

What really surprised me was the quality of the Cabernet Sauvignon from the Hillcrest Vineyard. It, too, was a soft mellow, well balanced wine, deep red in color with a big body and low tannin. I really did not expect to find a red wine of this quality grown so far north and I'm wondering if it is something that can be repeated or if it just happens to be an exceptional vintage. It was vintage dated 1970, and it undoubtedly will continue to improve with bottle age.

The Hillcrest Vineyard lies about 10 miles west of Roseburg in a hilly country somewhat reminiscent of the Alsatian wine country along the Rhine. Sommer indeed chose the location for its climate which he says is remarkably similar to Alsace. Since 1963, he has continuously increased the size of his vineyard to its present 20 acres with an annual yield of about 10,000 gallons.

The predominate variety in his vineyards is White or Johannisberg Riesling, which accounts for about 2,100 gallons of his total annual production. Other white grape varieties are Gewurtztraminer, Chardonnay, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc. Among the red wine varieties, the Cabernet Sauvignon is the predominate variety. He has also planted Zinfandel and Pinot Noir.

He was off on a weekend trip when we visited the small winery in the center of the vineyard, but we were welcomed by a young lady who was looking after the place in his absence and who let us taste the wines. I found the Gewurtztraminer somewhat less fragrant and drier than I prefer in a Gewurtztraminer, but the other whites were pleasant fruity wines if a trifle too much on the acid side. The picking season comes quite

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Photos at right show Paul Bjelland, OWGA president, at work in his winery. He produces 11 different wines under Bjelland Vineyard label. The author of this article, Jim Van Rensselaer, is wine editor of the News-Post.

late in this area and I imagine the grapes never develop an excess of sugar.

We had better luck at the Bjelland Vineyard, which is also about 10 miles west of Roseburg but some 10 miles farther to the South in a more heavily wooded and rugged country. Paul Bjelland himself spotted us at the gate and invited us in to his even tinier winery and tasting room. He is a big, jovial man of Norwegian descent who abandoned an executive post in the California school system to find 200 acres of peace and contentment for himself and his family at the foot of a towering mound of rocks in Tenmile Valley.

By 1971 he had 56.5 acres of vineyards and today he offers 11 wines under the Bjelland label. Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Johannisberg Riesling, Mountain White, Sauvignon Blanc, Vin Rose, May Wine, Mead (Honey Wine), wild Blackberry and White Cooking Wine.

I have already noted the exceptional quality of the Johannisberg Riesling, and I found his other grape wines very pleasant and well made.

Bjelland has been active in organizing and directing the Oregon Wine Growers' Association of which he is president. There are presently 11 members in the association which is devoted to the promotion of varietal grapes and the appreciation of fine wines and foods. An annual event which has achieved great popularity in the Oregon Wine Festival at Roseburg.



Paul Bjelland uses new-style "foot stomper" to achieve oxygen mix and speed fermentation in a phase of his wine-making operation. Note crusher in background.



Bjelland takes sample of finished wine from a 50-gal oak cask.



Roseburg Wines Impress Writer