

# 1889

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**T**he desert seems an unlikely place to grow wine. Yet vineyard managers across the globe dream of such long, dry, reliable growing seasons with hot days and cool nights. Abundant irrigation water from the Columbia River and Cascade Range make this dream a reality for Washington's AVAs, or American Viticultural Areas. With nineteen AVAs to date, Washington, the country's second-largest wine producer, continues to grow in size and fame.

Vivid with fruit and deep in color, Washington wines achieve balance with refreshing acidity, ripe tannins and defined varietal flavors. While a few AVAs exist in cooler, damper parts of the state, most lie in arid Eastern Washington where loess, a blend of fine, windblown silt and sand resulting from repeated glacial retreat, provides ideal soil. The Missoula Floods, which tore through the region between 18,000 and 15,000 years ago, added soil diversity. These soils prove naturally resistant to root-eating phylloxera mites, so vines here are ungrafted.

Above ground, the Cascade Range rain shadow casts a desert climate for most of Washington's vineyards. The lack of rain requires irrigation, but this asset gives growers fine-tuned control over ripening. Desert air also reduces the need for pesticides, which creates a naturally sustainable environment. Most importantly, the formidable swing between daily temperatures during the final months of ripening allows for flavor and tannins to develop while acidity remains sharp.

Known for red and white Bordeaux and Rhone varietals and anything from tempranillo to chardonnay, plus eighty other varietals, Washington can grow almost anything. Yet winemakers prefer to craft wines using different AVAs, not varietals. "The state's diverse AVAs let us blend multiple layers of complexity and nuance of flavors, aromas and textures, to make better wines," said Dan Wampfler, winemaker at Abeja Winery in Walla Walla.

The enormous Columbia Valley AVA serves as a catch-all for the Eastern Washington wine country and mainly covers wines blended from multiple AVAs. But the true, defining fruit of Washington wine emerges from an AVA with its own signature of character and style.



Morning sunlight catches the early-season shoots in Seven Hills vineyard, Walla Walla AVA.

## Walla Walla AVA

Since becoming an AVA in 1984, Walla Walla has grown to become Washington's wine epicenter. Home to the largest concentration of wineries and to some of the most iconic vineyards in the state, nowhere in Washington feels more like wine country.

Walla Walla soils vary greatly—flood silts, loess, fractured basalt, ancient river rocks—each providing a distinct flavor profile. Cabernet sauvignon, merlot and syrah dominate, but other varietals like cabernet franc and viognier also flourish.

Vineyard locations range from northern sites overlooking the Palouse to terraces in the cooler, wetter foothills of the Blue Mountains to the east. Some lie in Missoula Flood terraces just south of town. The sloping vineyards around

Seven Hills, actually in Oregon, offer soil types that change dramatically with elevation. A new sub-AVA, The Rocks District, also in Oregon, has carved itself from the Walla Walla AVA because of its odd soil type, which is almost ninety percent cobblestone.

More sub-AVAs will surface here, but Walla Walla maintains a common identity. "We've always been pretty isolated out here, so it was important from the beginning for winemakers and growers to share information, help each other out and collaborate," said Jordan Dunn-Small, general manager and co-owner of Woodward Canyon Winery, which her parents founded in 1981. "Even as the industry has grown, we still seem able to hold onto that sense of camaraderie and collaboration."



FROM LEFT First-rate winemaking facilities like at Abeja in Walla Walla demonstrate winemakers' respect for Washington-grown grapes. Jordan Dunn-Small manages and co-owns Woodward Canyon, which her parents founded in 1977 before they helped create the Walla Walla AVA.