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WINERIES OF WHITE SALMON, WA

BY TAMARA MULDOON

THE COLUMBIA GORGE American Viticultural Area, founded in 2004, encompasses both the Washington and Oregon banks of the Columbia River between Hood River and Highway 97 at Biggs. Stretching for 40 miles, its climate zones range from temperate at the western end to arid in the east. Because of this broad diversity in temperature, elevations and soil types, more than 50 wine grape varieties thrive there, making it an extraordinary wine tasting destination.

With the exception of highly successful Maryhill Winery (maryhillwinery.com), the majority of the 50-some wineries in the Gorge produce less than 5,000 cases per year and sell most of it directly to consumers. While the wineries around Hood River, Oregon, have garnered much attention, there is a developing wine destination just across the river in Washington that should not be overlooked.

In between the White Salmon and Little White Salmon Rivers, a high basalt bluff rises to an elevation of around 600 feet. This gently-sloping, south-facing hilltop area known as Underwood is home to a handful of boutique wineries worth investigating.

At family-run AniChe Cellars (anichecellars.com), a trio of female winemakers produce European-style, food-friendly wines that capture the nuances of terroir and vintage of the grapes' origins. Each wine in their tastings comes paired with small bites like cheese and fruit specifically selected to highlight each wine's characteristics.

This non-pretentious, community-focused winery produces an astounding variety of wines, using grapes sourced within 100 miles. Most of their offerings are well-balanced blends, but in my opinion their 2017 "Come & Go" made from 100% albariño is a standout. Join their wine club and enjoy four themed winemaker dinners each year, as well as other events. How about a barbeque pig roast and live music overlooking the scenic Columbia Gorge?



Two women enjoy the wines and the view at AniChe Cellars located in the Columbia River Gorge.

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Hawkins Cellars (hawkinscellars.com) was named the top-rated Pacific Northwest winery by *Travel + Leisure* magazine in 2017, and with good reason. Winemaker Thane Hawkins sources grapes from two of the northwest's premier wine regions—Oregon's Willamette Valley and Washington's Columbia Valley. Viognier, mourvedre, grenache, pinot noir, syrah, cabernet sauvignon, tempranillo and pinot gris star in both single-varietal wines and blends.

While the wines are first-rate, the location is also a worthy attraction. A spacious tasting room with a fireplace and comfy

West Yellowstone • Montana

seating opens onto a terrace and lawn which frames a dazzling view of Mt. Hood. Do a tasting to select your favorite; then, buy a glass or bottle of wine to enjoy with an outdoor picnic. Check the website for the lineup of summer concerts on the lawn and other special events.

White Salmon Vineyard (whitesalmonvineyard.com) was the first winery developed on Underwood Mountain. Owner, viticulturist and winemaker Peter Brehm bought the 43-acre property in 1989 and replaced an aging pear orchard with carefully selected wine-grape cultivars.

"I'm just a glorified home winemaker," Brehm humbly claims. However, he not only sells grapes to other winemakers, but also produces quality estate-grown wines with the chardonnay, riesling, pinot noir, sauvignon blanc, malbec and syrah grapes from his 20-acre vineyard.

Of particular note is the Estate Field Blend: Malbec and syrah, plus smaller quantities of pinot noir and chardonnay are grown in the same field, harvested and fermented together, then aged 22 months in neutral oak, giving the truest representation of that particular terroir.

There are more wineries in the White Salmon area as well. Not all have regular tasting-room hours, but they are happy to open for tastings by prior arrangement. Learn more at gorgewine.com, website of the Columbia Gorge Winegrowers Association. Make a weekend out of your White Salmon wine-tasting adventure with a stay at the boutique hotel, Inn of the White Salmon, innofthewhitesalmon.com. For visitor information, contact mtadamschamber.com.



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