



sommelier

JOURNAL

The essential guide for wine professionals

Savoie

**Beverage
Programs
Go Green**

**Chilean Wine:
Can It Age?**

June 2009

A proposal addressing the use of "Washington State" on wine labels, developed by the Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers, Washington Wine Institute, and Washington Wine Commission, has been signed into law by Gov. Chris Gregoire. The law requires wines bearing labels from a specific American Viticultural Area (AVA) to be made at least 95% from grapes grown within that region. Previously, Washington required its wines to be made from 75% Washington-grown grapes. The legislation also covers wines produced in Washington from AVAs that cross state lines into Oregon, such as Columbia Gorge, Columbia Valley, and Walla Walla Valley. Washington vintners now have requirements similar to those of their neighbors: Oregon requires its wines to contain 95% Oregon-grown grapes, and British Columbia requires its wines to be made entirely from B.C. vines.

"We believe this language underscores the fact that quality is the universal characteristic of Washington wines and reinforces our state's commitment to producing world-class wines," said Jean Leonard, executive director of the Washington Wine Institute. An amendment added to the bill in the state Senate applied the labeling provisions only to wine made from grapes harvested after Dec. 31, 2009. "The bill serves as long-term protection for not only Washington wine growers, but also for the integrity of Washington wine," added Todd Newhouse, director of the Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers. "We want consumers to know that they can count on getting Washington quality in every bottle, so we can truly be 'the perfect climate for wine.'"

With the passage of another recent bill, Washington wineries can now invest in distributors and retailers—a practice already allowed in British Columbia. Taking effect July 26, the law allows wineries to provide promotional items to retail stores and restaurants and to establish accounts with distributors and retailers for electronic fund transfers, instead of paying by cash on delivery (checks sent by mail are still prohibited). Also included in the new legislation is a provision eliminating the state's post-and-hold rule, which required a minimum 30-day period between changes to liquor prices posted with the state liquor board.

The U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) has approved two new Washington AVAs, Lake Chelan and Snipes Mountain. Lake Chelan, the state's 11th AVA, is a subappellation of the Columbia Valley, located east of the Cascade Mountains, with elevations ranging from 1,200 to 2,000 feet; 300 acres are planted thus far, primarily to Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, Viognier, and Chardonnay, along with some Cabernet Franc and Pinot Noir. Snipes Mountain is a subappellation of the Yakima Valley. Another Washington AVA, Naches Heights, northwest of the Yakima Valley, is still pending. The TTB rejected a proposed California sub-AVA, Paso Robles Westside, within the Paso Robles AVA.

Five sommeliers-turned-winemakers presented their wines to some 500 wine enthusiasts in a seminar called "Somms Gone Wild!" at the Hospice du Rhône on May 1 in Paso Robles, Calif. "Making wine has made me a better sommelier," said John Lancaster, currently the full-time sommelier at Boulevard in San Francisco as well as co-proprietor of Skylark Wine Company with Robert Perkins, also a Boulevard sommelier. Showing his phenomenally rich, spicy, silken 2007 Syrah Il Padrino, sourced from Santa Maria Valley's Bien Nacido Vineyard, Paul Lato quipped that sommeliers who get into winemaking are not wild, but "mad," adding that he often wonders "why I left a job where I only had to enjoy drinking wine, not making it." Other highlights of the seminar were the dense, smoky, perfumed 2006 Betts & Scholl Syrah Cali presented by Richard Betts, MS; Lancaster and Perkins's stunningly deep, plush, roasted 2006 Skylark Syrah Rodgers Creek Sonoma Coast; and Cris Cherry's bright, red-cherry 2007 Villa Creek Garnacha.

—Randy Caparoso

WASHINGTON PASSES WINE LEGISLATION



Jean Leonard, executive director of the Washington Wine Institute.

SOMMS GONE WILD



Left to right: Chris Cherry; Robert Perkins; Richard Betts, MS; moderator John Alban; John Lancaster; and Paul Lato.