

6 of the Best Wineries in Washington State

By Bryce Wiatrak 2.14.2019



Photo by Heather Hill

Abeja, in Walla Walla, unfolds on a restored, century-old farmstead with 38 acres of vineyards; there's also an inn on the property.

Trailing only California, Washington is the USA's second-biggest wine-producing state—and these half-dozen Washington wineries offer some of the finest pours around.

Washington's history of grape growing dates back to 1825, when the Hudson's Bay Company planted vines at **Fort Vancouver** (now a National Historic Site, set across the river from **Portland**). By the time an early Prohibition struck the Evergreen State in 1916, Washington had already nursed a burgeoning wine industry, supported by its sizeable population of European immigrants, many from wine-loving countries like **Italy**, **France**, and **Germany**. The movement gradually rebounded post-Prohibition, starting in the mid-20th century, with pioneering and still-in-production labels, such as Quilceda Creek, Chateau Ste. Michelle, and Leonetti, which helped forge a path to Washington's current status of harboring one of the country's most dynamic fine wine industries.

Washington cultivates grapes—with cabernet sauvignon, merlot, syrah, riesling, and chardonnay leading the charge—in several pockets across the state, including around the banks of Puget Sound and the trendy, emerging Columbia Gorge region. The largest and most classic wine region, however, is the Columbia Valley, which traverses the **Oregon** border and includes several important sub-appellations, such as Walla Walla, Yakima Valley, and Horse Heaven Hills, among others.

Many Washington wineries offer tastings on site, but several have also set up shop in the town of Woodinville, part of the Puget Sound viticultural area, roughly 30 minutes northeast of **Seattle**. An easy trek from the city by car, Woodinville offers the opportunity to taste wines from across the state (including its most remote locales), all in one compact town. Whether in Woodinville or deep in wine country, here are six of the top wineries to visit in Washington State.



Courtesy of Long Shadows Vintners

The tasting room at Long Shadows in Walla Walla features glassworks by sculptor Dale Chihuly.

Long Shadows

Walla Walla & Woodinville

Long Shadows gathers some of the wine world's biggest talents under the umbrella of a single label. In 2003, Allen Shoup began the Long Shadows project, in which iconic winemakers from around the globe focus on their signature grape varieties, as produced with Washington fruit. Accordingly, the Long Shadows portfolio offers seven wines, made by seven different winemakers hailing from the [Napa Valley](#) to [Tuscany](#), [Australia](#) to [Bordeaux](#). Winemaker and viticulturalist Gilles Nicault holds down the fort in Washington year round, to ensure the grapes are grown and the wines are vinified to meet each winemaker's specifications. Long Shadows operates two tasting rooms (with vineyards in several parts of the Columbia Valley)—one conveniently close to Seattle in Woodinville, and the other in Walla Walla, which is decorated with glassworks by famed native Washington sculptor Dale Chihuly.

What to Drink: Long Shadows's only white wine, its Poet's Leap riesling, made by German winemaker Armin Diel of Schlossgut Diel, is one of America's most consistent and age-worthy examples of the grape, as well as an incredible value (at around \$20 a bottle). The Pedestal merlot, crafted by Bordelais legend Michel Rolland, demonstrates remarkable polish, with its velvety, plummy warmth.



Courtesy of DeLille Cellars

DeLille's red blend D2 offers polished, violet, and Chambord-like tones.

DeLille Cellars

Kirkland & Woodinville

Founded in 1992 by Greg Lill, Greg's late father Charles Lill, Jay Soloff, and Chris Upchurch, [DeLille](#) was one of the first wineries to set root in Woodinville. The focus is on Bordeaux-style blends, although DeLille also vinifies a second portfolio from Rhône grapes. On top of its own Grand Ciel vineyard, it purchases fruit for each from some of Washington's most revered properties—Harrison Hill, Klipsun, and Bouschey, among others. DeLille has opened several spots to enjoy its wine: In Woodinville, the Carriage House Tasting Room offers a sprawling patio on which you can taste through the wines, and just down the road, the DeLille Cellars Chateau houses a flock of sheep and alpaca. Even closer to Seattle, in Kirkland, DeLille also has a tasting lounge featuring small plates and live music.

What to Drink: Chaleur Blanc, DeLille's sauvignon blanc and sémillon blend, is fantastically tactile—waxen, pithy, and apple-skin flavored. Its entry-level red blend, D2, is a wonderful introduction to the portfolio, with polished, violet, and Chambord-like tones.



Courtesy of Quilceda Creek

Quilceda Creek turns out some of Washington's very best wines; it's celebrating its 40th vintage in 2019.

Quilceda Creek

Snohomish

Celebrating its 40th vintage this year, [Quilceda Creek](#) has long been regarded in the highest echelon of Washington wines. The winery was founded in 1978 by Alex and Jeanette Golitzin, who vinified their first wine the following year. Alex was born into wine royalty, the nephew of André Tchelistcheff, the most influential winemaker in 20th-century America. Tchelistcheff, whose work focused primarily in [California](#), first came to Washington as a consultant for Chateau Ste. Michelle. It was through visits with his uncle that Alex Golitzin learned his craft and attained the encouragement to launch his own project, which would go on to become one of Washington's most highly sought after sources of cabernet sauvignon. Alex's son Paul serves as winemaker today. Quilceda Creek is open for visits by appointment, which includes a tour of its Columbia Valley property, followed by a tasting in its lodge.

What to Drink: You don't want to leave Quilceda Creek without tasting the iconic Columbia Valley cabernet sauvignon, a fleshy, hedonistically dark-fruited expression of the grape. While prices are high across the range (top wines run around \$200 a bottle), its entry-level red blend CVR (an acronym for Columbia Valley Red) shows the house style and is more ready to drink in the short term (and slightly easier on the wallet, too, at \$75 a bottle).



Photo by Traveis Gillet; Courtesy of Avennia

Avennia's wines are polished and pure, not unlike its sleek and modern tasting room in Woodinville.

Avennia

Woodinville

Since its first vintage in 2010, [Avennia](#) is one of the most rapidly ascending newcomers to the Washington wine scene within the past decade. The winery is a joint venture between Marty Taucher, an early leader at Microsoft, and Chris Peterson, former winemaker at DeLille. The duo first met at DeLille, while Taucher was enjoying a post-tech-world internship at the winery. *Avennia* is a play on the Roman name for the French city [Avignon](#), in the heart of the southern Rhône Valley—a place of inspiration for the portfolio. Sourcing grapes from several of Washington's top vineyard sites, Peterson focuses production on both Bordeaux (cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot) and Rhône (syrah, grenache) grape varieties. The sleek, contemporary Woodinville tasting room reflects the style of the wines—polished and pure. Stop by and stand around the bar to taste the lineup for yourself.

What to Drink: Avennia's only white, Oliane, is a delicious sauvignon blanc made in the style of white Bordeaux—unctuous, palate-coating, and tropically fruited. Gravura, a predominately cabernet sauvignon and merlot blend, is silkily textured, tasting of anise, cassis, and blackberry liqueur.



Courtesy of Charles Smith

In downtown Seattle, the Charles Smith Jet City tasting room pairs wine tasting with tunes, rustic decor, and views of the runways at Boeing Field.

Charles Smith

Seattle & Walla Walla

The man behind such omnipresent wines as Kung Fu Girl riesling and Boom Boom! syrah, [Charles Smith](#) is Washington State's resident rock-and-roll winemaker. (He even managed rock bands in Europe before entering the wine business.) Charles Smith (both the name of the winemaker and of his umbrella winery, under which several different labels are turned out) makes a tremendous variety of wines and across all price ranges. What they have in common, besides eye-catchingly graphic labels, is some of the most exuberant examples of what Washington grapes can do. Although he also has a second space in Walla Walla (and sources fruit from assorted Washington vineyards), the Charles Smith Jet City tasting room fittingly takes place not in wine country, but in downtown Seattle, with views of Boeing Field and Mount Rainier. The whimsically urban space, which once operated as a Dr. Pepper bottling plant, marries themes of aviation, Pacific Northwest decor, and '60s rock—putting forth more of a swanky bar feel than a country club—esque tasting salon.

What to Drink: Charles Smith shares his initials with one of the most beloved grapes: cabernet sauvignon. His Cs cabernet, bottled under his Wines of Substance label, offers one of the best values for the variety on the West Coast (bottles are available from around \$15). K Vintners, Charles Smith's first and more premium line, has earned particular acclaim for its syrahs. Try the

Powerline syrah—a meaty, opulent wine with gratifyingly rich boysenberry flavors.



Courtesy of Abeja

Visits to the Abeja winery's idyllic country farmhouse setting are by appointment only.

Abeja

Walla Walla

Ken and Ginger Harrison founded [Abeja](#) in 2000, restoring a century-old farmstead in Walla Walla and cultivating a 38-acre property. The wines, focused on cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and chardonnay, are made by husband-and-wife duo Daniel Wamplfer and Amy Alvarez-Wamplfer. The name *Abeja* translates to “bee” in Spanish, a reference to the farmers’ ethos of respecting the environment at all levels to maintain a fully functioning ecosystem. Visits to Abeja are strictly by appointment and the property itself is stunning—the most idyllic, elegantly rustic country farmhouse setting you can imagine. Abeja also operates an inn on the estate—a top option if visiting Walla Walla, [The Inn at Abeja](#) offers a gourmet breakfast and priority for Abeja tasting appointments.

What to Drink: Abeja’s chardonnay charms with its gentle white floral aromas, coupled with notes of nectarine and fresh peach, and a broad, flowing undercurrent of lemon blossom acidity. Its cabernet sauvignon is exceptional, striking a balance between a taut line of rocky tannins and fleshier smoked cherry and violet pastille flavors.