

Idaho's having a wine time

The state's scrappy wine industry is on a serious roll. It now boasts 50 wineries, located primarily in the Snake River Valley west of Boise.

By [Andy Perdue](#)

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Ste. Chapelle, which opened in 1976, is Idaho's oldest and largest winery. It's owned by Precept Wine in Seattle.

THANKS TO a little help from Washington, Idaho is finally gaining some well-deserved recognition as an up-and-coming wine region.

It's been a long time developing, but Idaho's scrappy wine industry is on a serious roll. For the first time in its history, Idaho now boasts 50 wineries, located primarily in the Snake River Valley west of Boise.

And with help from University of Washington and Washington State University graduates, Idaho wines are enjoying a good deal of momentum.

Moya Shatz Dolsby, executive director of the [Idaho Wine Commission](#), learned about how to market a wine industry while working for the Washington State Wine Commission a decade ago after graduating from the UW. Now she's helping bring success to the Gem State.

Her largest challenge has been Idaho's most significant agricultural commodity, the one that adorns its license plates. That's right, potatoes. To say Dolsby and her winemakers are tired

of hearing the joke, “They make wine out of potatoes?” is an understatement. But Idaho wineries push forward, building on quality and steady expansion.

One of Idaho’s most talented young winemakers, Melanie Krause of Cinder Wines in Garden City, also got her start in Washington. The WSU grad worked for Chateau Ste. Michelle before moving back to her native Boise to launch Cinder in 2006. In a short time, she has gone from banging on doors to get restaurants just to try her wine to having little trouble selling everything she makes.

The modern Idaho wine industry began in 1976 with the launch of Ste. Chapelle near the town of Caldwell. It’s now a 130,000-case winery owned by Precept Wine in Seattle. Precept also owns Sawtooth Winery and Skyline Vineyard, Idaho’s largest planting, putting it in the same leadership position that Chateau Ste. Michelle has held in Washington since the 1950s.

The Snake River Valley has some natural advantages, not the least of which is its high-elevation vineyards, which range from 2,500 to 3,000 feet. This and the sandy soils help the grapes and resulting wines retain all-important acidity, a key for cellar- and food-worthy wines.

Because most of the wineries are small, finding Idaho wines can be a challenge. Seek out Ste. Chapelle at better groceries, and ask for producers such as Cinder, Vale, Pend d’Oreille, Bitner and Koenig at your favorite wine merchant. You’ll be glad you did.

Andy Perdue is a wine author, journalist and international judge. Learn more about wine at www.greatnorthwestwine.com.