

West Coast judges gather for Idaho Wine Competition

By [Eric Degerman](#) on September 22, 2014



Ste. Chapelle, owned by Precept Wine in Seattle, is Idaho's oldest and largest winery. (Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

CALDWELL, Idaho — Judges from throughout the West Coast gather today in the Snake River Valley for the fifth annual [Idaho Wine Competition](#) and crown the Gem State's top wine.

More than 150 wines have entered the event created to celebrate the best of Idaho wine, and the judging will be staged at [Ste. Chapelle Winery](#) on the historic Sunnyslope region of Canyon County.

This year's field of judges includes wine journalists [Dan Berger](#) of Santa Rosa, Calif., and [Cole Danehower](#) of Portland.

Berger, former wine columnist for the Los Angeles Times, writes a nationally syndicated column, produces his Vintage Experiences weekly commentary and contributes to Wine Press Northwest magazine. He also serves as chief judge for the Riverside (Calif.) International Wine Competition and the Long Beach (Calif.) Grand Cru Competition.

Danehower, author of the book *Essential Wines and Wineries of the Pacific Northwest: A Guide to the Wine Countries of Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, and Idaho*, serves as the region's correspondent for Hugh Johnson's acclaimed [Pocket Wine Book](#). He founded the Oregon Wine Report in 1998, which led to the James Beard Foundational Journalism Award in 2004. A year later, he became editor/publisher of Northwest Palate magazine. He judges at the Dallas Morning News/TEXSOM Wine Competition and the Sunset magazine International Wine Competition.

Producers hope competition boosts consumer confidence



Bitner Vineyards, on the Sunnyslope in Idaho's Snake River Valley, was first planted in 1980. (Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

“The Idaho Wine Competition is extremely important to the Idaho wine industry because it gives a sense of credibility to these wineries,” said Moya Dolsby, executive director of the [Idaho Wine Commission](#). “It’s not only a marketing tool, but it’s also validation. Consumers look a lot at what scores and awards the wines win, especially in the local papers.”

Washington’s market share of wine within its own state stands at 36 percent. Last year, Idaho’s market share nearly doubled from 3 to 5.8 percent.

Idaho’s first wine grapes were planted during the Civil War, and while Prohibition crushed the commercial wine industry until the 1970s, the religiously conservative state has restricted growth until recent years. Idaho had just 11 wineries in 2002, that figure has climbed beyond 50 wineries as a result of the establishment of the Snake River Valley American Viticultural Area in 2007.

At this point, the growth and size of the industry is waiting for more vineyards to be established. There are just 1,200 acres of vines in the Gem State, which is less than the Walla Walla Valley.

The Idaho Wine Competition is conducted by Great Northwest Wine and coordinated by the Idaho Wine Commission in Boise. Previous best of show wines include the Coiled Wines 2012 Dry Riesling, Snake River Valley (2013), Snake River Winery 2010 Arena Valley Vineyard Sangiovese (2012), Sawtooth Winery 2010 Estate Gewürztraminer, Snake River Valley (2011) and Fraser Vineyard 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, Snake River Valley (2010).