

# THE AMERICAN WAY



**FIONA BECKETT packs her bags for an American adventure in tasting wines produced outside of California, and is pleasantly surprised to find her tastebuds tickled in both Oregon and Washington States**

**T**hink of American wine and you almost certainly think of California. After all, 90% of the wine that is produced in the US is made in the Golden State. But believe it or not some wine is made in all of the other 49 states too, most notably New York State and Oregon and Washington State, the two states that I visited this summer.

Oregon and Washington actually couldn't be more different. Like a pair of

sisters, Washington State is the clever quick-witted one, Oregon the pretty one who unfairly gets all the attention.

If you were on a wine trip then you'd head straight to Oregon – with its gently rolling hills and wild-flower strewn hedgerows it's one of the most enchanting wine regions I've ever visited. You can see why there is a symbiotic relationship between Oregon and Burgundy, whose wines many of the pioneer producers started by emulating and now rival for

seductive and delicious fruit.

It's also one of the greenest wine producing regions I've been to. Apparently a third of the wineries have some kind of certification – most under the LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology) programme which covers both viticulture and what goes on in the winery, or the umbrella organisation OCSW (Oregon Certified Sustainable Wine) which covers all the certification schemes including the imaginative 'Salmon Safe', a conservation programme in which the wine industry is involved to protect the native wild salmon ([www.salmonsafe.org](http://www.salmonsafe.org)).

On top of that some producers are organic and others biodynamic. As elsewhere, the latter is the most

controversial with its proponents claiming they can see improved vitality and purity in their wines and others pointing out it doesn't necessarily involve sustainable practice in the vineyards. 'LIVE' goes outside the grapes. Workers are cared for and paid a living wage.

"It isn't a fixed standard – there's a constant growth requirement. Where your effluent goes, your carbon footprint, the weight of your bottles, what you do with your refuse," explains David Adelsheim, one of the Oregon pioneers who was responsible for drawing up the state's strict labelling regulations.

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Oregon is also easier to understand in wine terms. It quite simply produces some of the greatest pinot noir outside Burgundy, which is memorably celebrated every year by a hedonistic three-day festival, the International Pinot Noir Celebration ([www.ipnc.org](http://www.ipnc.org)). Like Burgundy, Oregon also produces Chardonnay but also some fine Riesling and Pinot Gris (in the style of Alsace rather

than Italian-style Pinot Grigio).

Washington couldn't be more different. For a start almost all the grapes are grown to the east of the Cascade mountains in the swelteringly hot AVAs (American Viticultural Areas) such as Red Mountain and Walla Walla. It's dry, arid and sparsely populated but has extraordinary soils due to the flooding that occurred at the end of the last ice age which gives the wines a greater minerality and balance than many of their Californian counterparts.

Just as Oregon modelled itself on Burgundy, the early Washington State pioneers set themselves up producing

Bordeaux-style blends of Cabernet and Merlot but now are much more ruggedly individual, producing wine from grapes as diverse as Gruner Veltliner and Tempranillo. I would look out particularly, however, for Washington Riesling, Viognier Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah which is particularly well suited to Washington State's hot dry climate.

The bad news is that the wines are not cheap and relatively hard to get hold of over here, but if you're the sort of adventurous drinker who likes to explore the more obscure corners of the wine world, the Pacific North West is for you. 🍷



**A taste of Oregon and Washington State  
Eyrie Vineyards Pinot Gris  
2007, £15.50,**

[www.savageselection.co.uk](http://www.savageselection.co.uk)

Eyrie was a pioneer in Oregon and is now in the capable hands of founder David Lett's son Jason. A fragrant, exotic, spicy white that is great with Thai or other south-east Asian food.

**Domaine Drouhin 'Arthur'  
Chardonnay 2007, £16.99,  
Noel Young Wines**

[www.nywines.co.uk](http://www.nywines.co.uk)

The close association between Oregon and Burgundy is embodied in this French-owned domaine. Despite the very un-French name, 'Arthur' is a beautifully crafted, creamy, Burgundian-style chardonnay.

**Chateau St Michelle Eroica  
Riesling 2008, £16.22**

[www.winedirect.co.uk](http://www.winedirect.co.uk) [slurp.co.uk](http://slurp.co.uk)

A joint enterprise between Washington's biggest producer and German winemaker Ernie Loosen results in this deliciously crisp, mineral riesling with great ageing potential. Great with fresh shellfish.

**Gramercy Cellars Inigo  
Montoya Tempranillo 2007,  
£37.95 Walla Walla, www.**

[flintwines.co.uk](http://flintwines.co.uk)

A wine that demonstrates the diversity of Washington wines, made by former sommelier Greg Harrington. Awarded 93 points by Robert Parker. Good with smokey pork and grilled lamb.

**Bergström Vineyard Pinot  
Noir 2006, Oregon, £50.50  
www.nywines.co.uk**

If I had to pick one Pinot from my trip it would be this one from Bergström's biodynamically farmed vineyard in Dundee Hills. As satisfying as any great burgundy.

**Cristom Sommers Reserve  
Pinot Noir 2006/7, Oregon, £34  
www.flintwines.co.uk**

Another strikingly good, and more affordable, Pinot from one of the most admired Oregon winemakers Steve Doerner. Rich, spicy and savoury – terrific with lamb.

