

An aerial photograph of a large vineyard in the Dundee Hills. The rows of grapevines are neatly spaced and extend across the hills. In the foreground, a large, two-story house with a grey shingled roof and a prominent front porch is visible. The porch has white railings and several hanging flower baskets. Three people are standing on a path leading to the house. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with lush green foliage.

John and Karen Bergström bought these 15 acres in the Dundee Hills in 1997. They spent two years carefully preparing the earth, sowing and plowing under rich green cover crops that would help revitalize the soils and improve the organic matter before planting the Bergstrom Vineyard in 1999.

Grape Acres

Is the Place to Be!

STORY BY KERRY NEWBERRY • PHOTOS BY ANDREA JOHNSON

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When investigating wine country living, it only makes sense to start in the vineyard. This usually involves jaunting amidst roads with character, i.e. nameless roads that fork, using chicken coops or mountain peaks as reference points, with the occasional goat trail and wildflowers sprouting up through the actual road in spring. Quite likely this equals adventure, a good story and definitely getting lost.

Navigating to Nicholas Estate Vineyard with only a few wrong left turns, I knew I was on the right gravel road when I could see Sheila Nichols waving from the top of a sea of vines, a white and spotted terrier prancing around her feet. Their 70-acre property includes 30 acres of planted grapes, a 100-year-old farmhouse (very rustic she says), a chicken coop, a nostalgic stable and one breathtaking view. "It called to us," she explained as we began our vineyard stroll. "We showed up the day the property went on the market. It was meant to be."

They certainly had creative vision as pre-vineyard photos capture a dilapidated walnut, hazelnut and plum orchard, engulfed in wild blackberries. Familiar with wine country life, Cabernet style, the Nicholas' moved from the Napa Valley when they decided to throw fortune to the wind and plant a vineyard. A horseshoe she and her husband found from the old stable marks the first vineyard post and has weathered every vintage since 2002. Her husband joins our meander, narrating his cover crops from row to row with ardor and detail.

"He's the tractor driver and national sales manager," Sheila nods, as Nick sweeps a hand over the perennial row. "And Digger, he's my enthusiastic but ineffective gopher control," she laughs. All that can be seen of Digger right now is a spunky white tail protruding from a gopher hole in the ground.

"We sit out on the porch and watch the grapes grow," Sheila says. "With a glass of wine," adds Nick. They also watch the moonrise over Parrett Mountain. "You can see a glow just as it's below the horizon," he says, eyes sparkling. From their living room windows, also known as the shipping headquarters, they can point to spots where a horned

owl observes, red hawks flirt like crazy and bluebirds sky dance.

The Nicholas' found their answer to the pensive lines of the Mary Oliver poem, *The Summer Day*, "...tell me, what is it you plan to do/with your one wild and precious life?" Oregon wine country, the life they've embraced, unpredictable, simple, sometimes muddy and often poetic.

Wine Country Living

You love Pinot, sip Pinot but don't want to tangle with vines of your own, wine country living straight up. But, is it a good time to buy?

According to Amy McCreith, real estate broker and owner of Bella Casa Real Estate Group in McMinnville, the answer is, "Yes!" McCreith founded this local brokerage group in March of last year to focus on Yamhill County because there is a demand. Destination travel, festivals, international events like IPNC have a residual effect with retirees relocating to the area, along with those seeking a lifestyle change after a trip to Oregon wine country.

Though the market tapered during the holidays, the firm noted a burst of activity after the New Year. "Interest rates are great, there is a lot for buyers to choose from and it's a fantastic time for first-time home buyers," McCreith said. "Sellers are competing for the unburdened first time buyer, add-on incentives and programs—there is no time like the present to take advantage of them."

At Home in the Vineyard

Peter Bouman, a broker with The Realty Network GMAC in McMinnville, alludes to a wine country phenomenon when describing the market and clients he works with, adding that despite a fairly soft market across the country and in the Portland-metro area, the people he works with (those making a lifestyle change to make wine or grow fruit) has not slowed down in the least. He specializes in sales for established vineyards or property with potential vineyard sites.

"The thirst for Oregon Pinot Noir is insatiable, so the demand for vineyard suitable properties is high," Bouman said. "My clients range from local winemakers to regional and national wineries, to the proverbial bottomless-checkbook ▶▶▶"

Vineyard Buying Tips (By Beth Caster)

1. Locating vineyard potential or vineyard property is not as simple as going into the RMLS database and looking up acreage. The real estate broker should have a very clear and detailed understanding of soil types, slope suitability, water resources and other factors that make the property viable for a vineyard.
2. Does the Realtor know and understand what is required by the county so that a winery and/or tasting room permit can be issued?
3. Do they know what is meant by due diligence and can they advise you on resources for completion of your due diligence? (Due diligence means that a prospective buyer researches all of the necessary aspects of a certain piece of property to insure that it can be used in the manner they require).
4. Has this Realtor had experience in working with other buyers to locate a property and bring it to a successful close?
5. Most of all, do you like the broker? Are you comfortable with his or her ability to provide information? As buyers, you will be spending a lot of time with this broker in a car and at properties; if you are not comfortable, then it is not a good match. ☹️

Beth Caster is the principal broker for Coldwell Banker Executive Realty, and she is the McMinnville president of the Yamhill County Association of Realtors (YCAR).

Farm Living Is the Life for Me!

James and Lisa Matthisen
Spring House Cellar Winery • Mosier

It was a fickle twist of fate that sparked James and Lisa Matthisen to uproot from the urbane streets of Seattle to the rambling waterfalls of the Columbia Gorge.

"Lisa and I were actuaries working in downtown Seattle, just friends and colleagues, walking to lunch one day before the big meeting," Matthisen said.

They were hit by a car at a cross walk, moderately injured and emotionally transformed. Afterward, they both approached the future with the philosophy that "life's too short and tenuous not to take a few more risks."

Serendipity at play: they fell in love, moved to Mosier (population around 400), had a couple of babies, started making wine, established a bonded winery from home, sold out of wine, bought a warehouse in Hood River and are celebrating each day as boutique producers, and sipping great wine.



Brad Cunningham and David Godfrey
Dundee Manor Bed & Breakfast

Design and architecture business partners from Northern California, Brad Cunningham and David Godfrey, set off in search of the perfect locale to run a bed & breakfast ignited by a desire for adventure and change.

The search started in states with Southern drawls, wended back to Northwest coastal towns, traversed the nooks and crannies of California and Oregon, which led them to Worden Hill Road.

"Landing in Oregon and in the hills of Dundee was truly fate," Cunningham said. "We drove into Dundee, pulled into the driveway of this property, took a deep breath while looking at this 100-year-old house (that needed some TLC) and simply knew that's it!"

Aware there was some vineyard land around, they did not realize they were literally in the heart and soul of Oregon wine country.

"We spent the next six months getting the Manor fine-tuned to open as a premier property, one that would reflect all that we loved in our travels and wanted to share with our guests."

During that time, they befriended their new wine country neighbors—the more illustrious ones including a pair of llamas, bearded goats (one named Pinot) and one big beautiful Pyrenees dog named Sadie.

Since day one, the Manor has provided fine dining, warm surroundings and a sprawling hound (eager to greet) that takes up most of the gravel drive way during morning, afternoon and late evening naps. ▶▶▶



Land Spreading Out So Far and Wine...

*Don Mixon • Madrone Mountain Vineyard
Jacksonville/Southern Oregon*

In 2001 I was living on an island in Biscayne Bay off Miami Beach. In 2002, I found myself in Ruch, Oregon,” said Don Mixon from his front porch that overlooks the Siskiyou Mountain range. Ruch is a town with a general store, one restaurant and a tanning salon. “To be honest with you, I really loved it.”

Mixon courted the wine lifestyle for over two decades and was lured to Southern Oregon in 2002 with the desire to produce sweet wines and to work as a public defender in the area. He left the “Magic City” of bright lights and bikinis and promptly purchased 12 acres of land on a mountainside in his new home.

“I went from nights that if I decided all of a sudden I wanted to have venison for dinner, six blocks away there was a butcher shop that always had wild game,” he said. If he wanted Italian hand-made mozzarella cheese, there was an Italian deli three blocks from his high-rise home.

“What I realized is that I didn’t need all that stuff. It must have been a transition I was ready to make long before I did.”

As Mixon settled into the region, he was cruising around in a BMW M3 convertible. “I’d drive to vineyards and wine tastings and people looked at me like I was a bug,” he said. “I soon traded that BMW in for a pick-up.”

He quickly realized the merits of vintage wheels and long-lived gadgets, salvaged creatively with baling wire. “I grew up in Texas, my dad fixed many things with baling wire. Maybe that’s why I felt like I came home when I moved here.”

*John and Judi Stuart
Abbey Road Farm B&B • Carlton*

John and Judi Stuart left the high life in Las Vegas to homestead a piece of land in Oregon’s Yamhill County. John recalled reading an article about agriculture consortiums and the last paragraph quoting statistics on rapidly disappearing family farms, multiple farms a day.

“A modern tragedy,” he said, “something that is so evocative of the American spirit evaporating before my eyes. To imagine that in my lifetime I might see the end of the family farm.”

He decided the legacy he wanted to leave his family was neither monetary nor material, but instead a family farm.

The Stuarts run the elegant B&B supplied with goat cheese from their dairy goats, eggs from their diverse flock of chickens, in addition to llamas, sheep, alpacas and donkeys that roam the pasture.

When asked for an anecdotal tale about life on the farm versus Vegas, Stuart divulged: “In Vegas, my wife would get jewels, maybe diamonds for anniversaries. Well, life changes when you move to the farm. One year she got a tractor, last year it was the green house and this year, it’s a manure spreader,” he said with a chuckle. ☺

**Bergström Vineyard and surrounding
properties in the Dundee Hills.**

California-lifestyle buyer seeking vineyard-suitable soil, from five acres or 500 acres.”

He finds Yamhill Valley is to Portland what Sonoma is to San Francisco. For some it’s a weekend community. Others, a get-away. There also are small groups of Portland friends making a shared-ownership purchase of a million-dollar property to hold as a wine country weekend getaway.

“It’s a one hour drive, and Portlanders are either buying a second home or a primary home and commuting because they want to live in a beautiful area,” he said.

“The level of wine tourism has reached a point that draws people from the world over. The combination of natural beauty, cultural amenities, and food and wine offerings have attained to a level that draws this caliber of interest.”

The Vineyard Lowdown

Kevin Chambers, co-owner of Oregon Vineyard Supply and Results Partners (a vineyard development and management firm), often conducts property assessment, determining whether a site is appropriate for vineyard development or not. He concurred with Bouman that Yamhill County is the nexus of the state for viticulture today, so properties tend to be more highly valued and in demand.

Prices climbed significantly over the past five years. In 2003, Chambers noted, you could still find parcels for \$15,000 to \$20,000 an acre, now \$15,000 an acre is a true bargain. Especially when compared to the \$200,000 an acre you would pay for land in Napa.

Land price is determined by many variables: appellation, size and whether a vineyard is already established or not, to name a few. The smaller parcel of land—around 20 acres—usually draws the higher cost and is in more demand.

Chambers suggested a minimum of 15 to 20 acres of planted vineyards for the books to pencil out at the end of the year.

Current pricing in Yamhill County runs approximately at \$25,000 an acre for bare land. To bring that parcel into production (planting vines, trellising, labor and materials) that price-per-acre cost rises to about \$50,000 an acre. Add in \$5,000 an acre minimum to maintain the vineyard throughout the year. The highest price Chambers saw last year was \$32,000 an acre in the Ribbon Ridge AVA.

In the Southern Willamette Valley, bare land can be purchased for about \$12,000 an acre, and in the Umpqua Valley, it runs around \$25,000 an acre. The Applegate stands between \$6,000 to \$10,000 bare and \$20,000 to \$25,000 planted.

To the northeast, according to Don McDermott, a John L. Scott vineyard real estate specialist, vineyard prices in the Columbia Gorge currently range from approximately \$10,000 an acre for bare land to \$20,000 for planted.

Although vouching for different parts of the state, both McDermott and Chambers agreed, prices are stable, but inventory is low. The demand for vines is voracious.

Whether your dream vineyard is in the Willamette, down south or in the Gorge, you will need a few things to get it done the right way: a knowledgeable real estate agent, a sizable sum of money, a bit of luck and the gusto to get dirty and get planting! ☺