

# SOUTHWEST WINE CENTER

## FUELING A VIBRANT ARIZONA WINE INDUSTRY

ARTICLE BY JOE CHAUNCEY/PHOTOS PROVIDED BY BOXWOOD

You may have heard a lot of talk lately about Arizona's rapidly expanding wine industry and you may be asking yourself how it came to be. The truth is that it's been slowly growing for some time but only now is it getting broad-based attention. This is due in large part because it has become a dynamic part of Arizona's economy. But, you ask, how did we get here?

It often begins as a dream. One day you wake up and decide to buy some red wine grapes from California to make some wine in your garage. You tend it carefully, reading everything about wine that you can get your hands on and the following fall it tastes pretty good. So you invite friends and family to help you bottle it. You repeat the cycle, but this time with more grapes. Three years go by and you love your hobby. In fact, you love it so much that you decide to make the jump from hobby winemaker to a bonded winery. After all, the quality has improved markedly and the quantities are beginning to grow. You're living the dream, but your responsibilities are growing, too. Now the day job is beginning to get in the way and your hobby that combines pragmatism and artistry, sales and accounting, winemaker and cellar rat, owner and janitor, has too many tasks for you to be effective at any one of them. It's time to move beyond your volunteer work force and hire your first employee. Of course, they are not trained because you're the first in your area to have a winery so you add another job description to your growing list: Mentor and on-the-job trainer.

Play this scenario out over and over and soon you have a dozen wineries in a region and fields are being cleared and vineyards planted. Some winemakers are trying their hand at growing *Vitis vinifera* varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Chardonnay, but more often than not, they discover that grapes lesser well-known grow better because they are more suited to the terroir of the area.

As the wine industry embeds itself into a region it reaches a point where it can no longer on-the-job train the number of people it needs to keep it vibrant and growing. We have seen this in region after region, AVA after AVA, state after state across the country. What follows this trend, because of necessity, is formal education and training that technical schools, colleges and universities can offer. This happened in my state of Washington, in California, Oregon, Virginia... and it is happening in Arizona.



The Verde Valley has embraced the wine industry and Yavapai College is responding to the need for qualified professionals in viticulture and enology. They are creating the Southwest Wine Center on their Clarkdale campus and plan to make it the premier academic center supporting the wine industry in the desert Southwest. The Center offers formal coursework in viticulture and this year will add enology and begin planting their 17-acre estate vineyard. Next year they will have a sustainable teaching winery, create a knowledge repository and enhance business linkages.

### Sustainable Teaching Winery

The 3000 case/year teaching winery will be housed in a repurposed structure formerly used for racquet ball. Yes, racquet ball. The thick masonry and cement plaster "bones" of the building are ideally suited for a winery because they help moderate temperatures with their mass. The winery will contain a fermentation room, two barrel aging rooms and a tasting room where students gain real world experience in marketing and selling Yavapai College wine. A new roof to cover the building and provide shade for outdoor work areas will collect enough water to make the winery net zero for water usage. The design allows enough natural light into the working areas to operate during daylight hours without the need for artificial lighting and a planned photovoltaic array could make the winery net zero for electricity. The overall design of the winery itself becomes a teaching model for sustainability for the wine industry.

### 17 Acre Estate Vineyard

Nikki Check, director of viticulture and enology for The Center, has planned an estate vineyard with 16 grape varieties, both known and



Crush pad rendering



lesser-known that will be managed by students. Varieties have been selected for their ability to grow and mature in the southwest while providing staggered harvest dates throughout the fall, optimizing the winery's production capabilities. The first three acres of the vineyard are being cleared and planted.

### Knowledge Repository

Remarkably, even though grapes have been grown and wine made for thousands of years, there is still much to learn. This is particularly true in the southwest where the industry is very young. The Center will build and make available a knowledge base that will advance best viticulture and enology practices throughout the desert southwest.



*Barrel Room rendering*

### Business Linkages

For any industry to be robust and sustainable, collaboration that supports economic development is paramount. Tom Schumacher, Dean at Yavapai College, has been an active liaison between the industry and the college for some time. The Southwest Wine Center is committed to establishing and fostering entrepreneurship, transferring knowledge, and helping the local industry fill positions with trained professionals to meet their needs.

The Verde Valley wine industry is already adding millions of dollars to the economics of the area and based on similar models in other states, it will continue to grow and thrive through collaboration. The Southwest Wine Center will play a key role in the continued development of an industry that creates new businesses and jobs while preserving and enhancing the Verde Valley quality of life.

*Joe Chauncey is a principal at Boxwood, an integrated design firm that is leading the design of the new teaching winery at Yavapai College. For over a dozen years he has designed wineries, branding and identity programs, and educated the wine industry on sustainable initiatives. He and his wife Linda make two barrels of wine each year in their small hobby winery. They are, in their own way, living the dream.*

# The Southwest Wine Center At Yavapai College

## Sign up for Fall Classes TODAY!

### *Come grow with us!*

- Yavapai College currently offers a certificate in Viticulture (grape growing). Beginning fall semester 2012, students will be able to earn an Associate of Science degree in Viticulture and Enology (wine making).
- Become a part of the Yavapai College vineyard for years to come by adopting a vine! Contact Linda Clark at 928.634.6572 or visit [www.yc.edu/adoptavine](http://www.yc.edu/adoptavine)
- The Southwest Wine Center at Yavapai College will be a state-of-the-art teaching winery and tasting room located at our campus in Clarkdale, AZ.

Learn more by contacting  
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[yc.edu](http://yc.edu)

**Yavapai College Verde Valley Campus**  
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