

NEWS

Oregon Gains Two Wine Appellations

U.S. government approves Laurelwood District and Tualatin Hills AVAs, both part of Willamette Valley



Ponzi's Aurora Vineyard lies in one of the new appellations in Oregon's Willamette Valley. (Andrea Johnson)



By Tim Fish

Jun 19, 2020

Oregon wine country has gained two new appellations. The U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) approved the Laurelwood District and Tualatin Hills as American Viticultural Areas (AVAs). That brings the total number of AVAs in the state to 21.

The two viticultural areas are located adjacent to each other in the northwest corner of the Willamette Valley. Tualatin Hills is the larger of the two, encompassing 144,000 acres, of which 979 are planted to vine. It includes 31 wineries and tasting rooms, and is situated west of Portland and north of the Yamhill-Carlton AVA, within the Tualatin River watershed. It is defined by elevations ranging from 200 feet to 1,000 feet and its Laurelwood soils, which are a windblown volcanic soil mixed with basalt. Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris are the leading varieties in the region, which is known for producing elegantly structured Pinot Noirs with distinctive cherry, blackberry and spice notes.

The AVA petition was filed in 2015 by Alfredo Apolloni of [Apolloni Vineyards](#)
[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery], Rudy Marchesi of [Montinore Estate](#)
[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery], and Mike Kuenz of [David Hill Winery](#)
[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery]. “This area has been our home for a long time,” said Rudy Marchesi, a partner at Montinore Estate. “The unique combination of the Missoula floods loess soil and the protection of the coastal range create distinctive conditions.”

Laurelwood spans 33,600 acres, 1,000 of which are planted to vine. It’s home to more than 30 wineries, and hugs the north- and east-facing slopes of the Chehalem Mountains, encompassing within its borders the highest elevation in the Willamette Valley, at 1,633 feet. “The most significant thing about this AVA is that it’s defined by soil, not just a geographic boundary,” said winemaker Luisa Ponzi of [Ponzi Vineyard](#)
[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery], which, along with [Dion Vineyard](#)
[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery], filed the petition in 2016.

Laurelwood, like Tualatin Hills, has distinctive Laurelwood soils, but Ponzi explained that the soils in Laurelwood are older. “It’s a very unique soil type in the valley.” Beneath the loess topsoil is a subsoil of fractured basalt. Young vineyards in the AVA, Ponzi explained, tend to produce elegant, red-fruited Pinot Noirs with light tannins. But as the vines age and the roots spread to the basalt, the wines change. “They develop darker and brambly blueberry fruit, with fennel and licorice,” Ponzi said. “There’s definitely a marked difference when they hit the basalt.”

Both AVAs become official on July 6, 2020.