

Arizona's Growing Wine Scene

There was a time when Arizona's surging wine industry was a well-kept secret. No more. National acclaim continues to flow as Arizona wines get nod after nod of acceptance.

Arizona's wine scene is quickly growing in size, sophistication and stature. More than 20 wines from eight Arizona wineries have scored at least an 88 rating from *Wine Spectator*. Arizona wines have been served at the White House on many occasions, and in 2010 Arizona wines were poured at three James Beard House dinners

Too good to be true? Come to Arizona and find out for yourself. Visit and see why our wine is turning heads and making believers, one tasting room and one competition at a time.

History of Wine in Arizona

Wine has been produced in Arizona since the 1700's by the Spanish Missionaries. The modern state of Arizona wine started in 1973 in the southern end of the state. The Arizona Wine Growers Association was incorporated in 1983 to support and assist the wine growers.

Arizona now has 45 licensed wineries in three growing regions – the Verde Valley in the north, Sonoita and Elgin in the south and the greater Willcox region in the southeast. The number of wineries has grown significantly from 12 in 2006.

Arizona's high desert produces a climate similar to Mendoza, Argentina – hot daytime temperatures cooling off at night, the perfect recipe for a happy grape. Most of Arizona's vineyards can be found between 4,200 and 5,200 feet.

There are approximately 700 acres planted with vines. Grapes are a low-water crop, perfect for Arizona's desert environment. These crops yield a high-value product, which in turn means important tax dollars and strong tourism destinations.

Northern Arizona – The Verde Valley Region

Wines from Arizona's Verde Valley have been poured at posh dinners, called "rising stars" by *Wine Spectator*, and applauded by the *Wall Street Journal*.

There's also a splash of notoriety in this region. Winemakers include filmmaker Sam Pillsbury, whose work includes "Free Willy 3: The Rescue" and directing Nicolas Cage. Another famous winemaker is Maynard James Keenan, lead singer for the multi-platinum rock band, Tool. A recent documentary entitled "*Blood Into Wine*" features Keenan and winemaking mentor Eric Glomski's efforts to turn Arizona soil into wine.

With the largest collection of tasting rooms, you are sure to find a wine in this region you will love. You can explore the wineries on your own, take a wine bus tour or float your way to a winery on a kayak tour.

Southern Arizona – The Sonoita/Elgin Region

Just three wineries called the Sonoita/Elgin region home back in 1990. Now? There are 10, with more wineries and tasting rooms on the way.

In 2010, *USA Today* Travel named Sonoita one of the country's "10 great places for local wines," lauding the red blends in particular. Wines from the region have been served in the White House, and applauded by wine critics from *Sunset* and *Wine Spectator* to *Food & Wine* and *Bon Appetit*.

That hasn't affected the charm of these wineries; they have a comfortable, boutique, family run feel. You will definitely enjoy your time touring and tasting these wines.

Southeastern Arizona – The Willcox Region

The Willcox region produces most of the grapes used for Arizona wine. Many wineries from the north and south utilize Willcox-grown grapes in their wines.

Traditionally a growing region, the Willcox region now boasts nine tasting rooms with more on the way. Some are by appointment only, so be sure to call ahead before heading out to taste these wines.

Like the other two regions, wines from Willcox have been busy drawing attention. Willcox wines have been featured in *Sunset* magazine and applauded by wine critics around the country. In addition, Dick Erath, who pioneered the Pinot movement in Oregon, has a vineyard in this region.

Arizona wineries have shown they can compete with big-name wineries and continue to impress wine critics. The Arizona Wine Growers Association invites you to come out and sample Arizona wines for yourself – you will be just as impressed. To learn more and plan your wine tasting adventure, visit www.arizonawine.org.