

# Yakima Valley Wineries

By Braiden Rex-Johnson

**E**STABLISHED IN 1983, the Yakima Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA) was the first in Washington State, predating the mammoth Columbia River AVA by one year. Wineries here range from small, family-owned operations to large corporate entities. For instance, **Hogue Cellars** (800-565-9779; [hoguecellars.com](http://hoguecellars.com)) offers an impressive number of varietals bottled under Hogue, Genesis, and Reserve labels and the tasting room welcomes large tour groups with prior notification. At the other end of the spectrum you'll find **Chinook Wines** (509-786-2725; [chinookwines.com](http://chinookwines.com)) offering expertly crafted, reasonably priced wines to pair with foods, and **Hightower Cellars** (509-588-2867; [hightowercellars.com](http://hightowercellars.com)), with elegant red wines made by Tim and Kelly Hightower at their stunning Red Mountain facility.

Choosing just a handful of wineries to visit from more than 50 in the Yakima Valley is like choosing among the crown jewels, but here's my short list of Yakima Valley wineries that are worth your time and trouble. Begin your tour at one or two of the tasting rooms in or near downtown Yakima. These include **Desert Hills Winery** (509-453-0503; [deserthillswinery.com](http://deserthillswinery.com)), **Donitelia Winery** (509-452-9900; [donitelia.com](http://donitelia.com)), and **Kana Winery** (509-453-6611; [kanawinery.com](http://kanawinery.com)).

Located in the historic Larson Building in downtown Yakima, **Kana Winery** emphasizes Rhone varietals and single-vineyard wines. Its tasting room offers wines by the glass or bottle, "happy

hour" six days a week, and periodic art and music open-house events. Sample intriguing wines such as Dark Star Red Table Wine (a Rhone-style blend) or Old Vines Lemberger.

The Rattlesnake Hills AVA, located on the north side of the valley above Zillah, Granger, and Outlook, was established in 2006. The 15 wineries of the Rattlesnake Hills Wine Trail (888-375-7498; [rattlesnakehills.com](http://rattlesnakehills.com)), include such highly regarded wineries as **Portteus Vineyards** (509-829-6970; [portteus.com](http://portteus.com)), **Hyatt Vineyards** (509-829-6333; [hyattvineyards.com](http://hyattvineyards.com)), and **Eaton Hill Winery** (509-854-2220; [eatonhillwinery.com](http://eatonhillwinery.com)).

**Sagelands Vineyard** bills itself as the "western gateway to Yakima Valley" and is just 10 minutes east from downtown Yakima along I-82. Sagelands offers panoramic views of the Valley and Mount Adams. Winemaker Frederique Spencer, a native of the Provence region of France, focuses on making a variety of reasonably priced wines, including quality Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon from the "four corners" of the Columbia Valley—Horse Heaven Hills, Wahluke Slope, Walla Walla Valley, and Rattlesnake Hills. Her Cabernet Sauvignon Four Corners is an elegant wine with bold fruit and toasty oak and vanilla notes, and a veritable bargain at just \$16. (800-967-8115; [sagelandsvineyard.com](http://sagelandsvineyard.com))

Take Exit 52 off I-82 to reach **Claar Cellars'** family-oriented, Old World-style tasting room at the western edge of Zillah. Audrienne and Russell Claar first planted grapes above the Columbia

River farther east near Pasco in 1980. The next generation of Claars, Christa Claar Whitelatch and husband Bob, established the estate winery there in 1997. French born-and-educated winemaker Bruno Corneaux makes about 14,000 cases of wine annually, including award-winning Riesling and Corneauxcopia, a barrel-select red blend. (509-829-6810; [claarcellars.com](http://claarcellars.com))

From Exit 63 follow the signs to **Tefft Cellars**, which started in 1991 and makes a wide variety of wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Italian varietals, port, sparkling, and dessert wines—even darned-good boxed wines—under the expert direction of owner and founder Joel Tefft. Enjoy vineyard views from the tasting room and picnic deck, or spend the night at the Outlook Inn Guest House, a cozy villa with three bedrooms and a secluded deck. Tefft Cellars proudly identifies all its wines with the Rattlesnake Hills AVA. Medal winners include Villarocca (a "super-Tuscan"), Villa Toscana (a Chianti-style blend), and Saints Wine, a dessert wine modeled after Vin Santo. (888-549-7244; [tefftcellars.com](http://tefftcellars.com))

Many wineries cluster around the burgeoning town of Prosser, including **Thurston Wolfe Winery**, which was chosen 2007 Washington Winery of the Year by *Wine Press Northwest* magazine. Here winemaker Dr. Wade Wolfe specializes in unusual varieties such as Lemberger and Petite Syrah, and also makes PGV, an outstanding blend of Pi-





KIONA VINEYARDS WINERY

PETE ECKERT, YOST GRUBE HALL ARCHITECTURE

At **Snoqualmie Vineyards**, named the 2006 “Washington Winery of the Year” by *Wine Press Northwest*, Joy Andersen crafts beautiful wines from both certified organic and non-organic grapes. Wines made with organic grapes in a certified organic facility are identified as “Naked,” and include Riesling and Chardonnay, along with “Nearly Naked” Gewürztraminer. (509-786-2104; [snoqualmie.com](http://snoqualmie.com))

Among the wineries in this area, the principal draw is **Desert Wind Winery**. The \$3.5-million “mega winery” is designed in dramatic early-Pueblo style and housed in two buildings. The tasting room/hospitality center includes a 3,600-square-foot Southwestern-style tasting room and gift shop with an imposing stone fireplace and views of the Yakima River, a 3,265-square-foot banquet facility, a 2,500-square-foot restaurant with a demonstration kitchen, and four guest rooms. The 16,200-square-foot production facility is located next door. La Mesa at Desert Wind offers wine-country cuisine with produce sourced from local farmers, all paired with Desert Wind wines. Doug and Jo Ann Fries, of Duck Pond Cellars (Oregon) fame, manage the vineyards while son Greg serves as winemaker. Don’t miss a sample of his Ruah, a full-bodied, Bordeaux-inspired blend with lush blackberry fruit, or Bare Naked (unoaked) Semillon or Chardonnay. (866-921-7277; [desertwindvineyard.com](http://desertwindvineyard.com))

On to Red Mountain, a small slice of land at the east end of the Yakima Valley that represents one of the most exclusive and desirable AVAs in the country. From I-82 take Exit 96 to Benton City, but don’t cross the bridge into the city. Instead, immediately turn right on Hwy 224 heading towards West Richland and follow the signs to Red Mountain. Here you’ll find imposing architecture at **Col Solare Winery** (open to small groups by appointment only), a joint venture between Washington’s Ste. Michelle Wine Estates and Italian winemaker Marchese Piero Antinori (509-588-6806; [colsolare.com](http://colsolare.com)), and **Terra Blanca**, with

not Gris and Viognier, and Sweet Rebecca, an orange Muscat dessert wine fortified with brandy. Yum! (509-786-3313; [thurstonwolfe.com](http://thurstonwolfe.com))

Nearby to Thurston Wolfe you’ll discover **The Winemaker’s Loft**, one of the newest facilities to open in the Yakima Valley. Located at Vintners Village, this winemaking studio for small-production wineries took three years and \$2 million to build. Here you’ll find tasting rooms and studios including big labels such as Apex Cellars and newer wineries such as Michael Florentino Cellars. Winemakers share equipment, storage facilities, and knowledge at the dramatic, Tuscan-style, V-shaped villa, while wine tourists enjoy one-stop shopping and getting up close and personal with the people who craft the wine. (509-786-2705; [thewinemakersloft.com](http://thewinemakersloft.com))

In downtown Prosser, and well worth a visit, is **Hinzerling Winery**, the oldest winery in the valley (founded in 1976), where winemaker Mike Wallace is known for his fabulous ports and sherries. The Vintner’s Inn next to the winery is a two-room bed-and-breakfast, where you can immerse yourself in the wine country experience. (800-727-6702; [hinzerling.com](http://hinzerling.com))

**Open All Year!**

**TRAILER INNS RV PARK**  
YAKIMA'S DESTINATION LOCATION

- Large Shaded Pull Thru's
- Indoor Pool & Hot Tubs • 53 Super Sites
- Full Clubhouse, Bathrooms, Laundry, Free Cable T.V. & Phone Hook-Ups
- High Speed Wireless Available

SEASONAL RATES  
(509) **452-9561**  
[Trailerinnsrv.com](http://Trailerinnsrv.com)

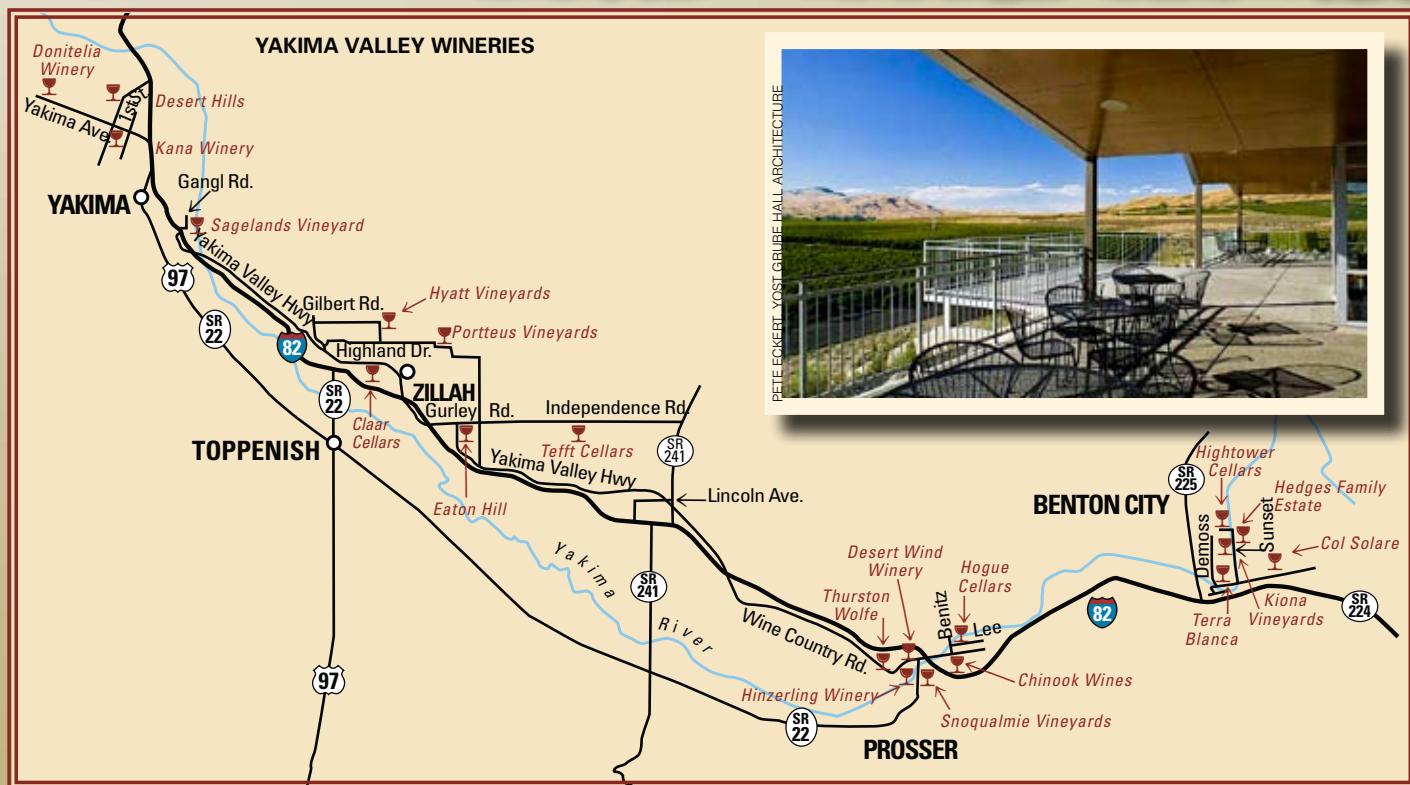
YAKIMA PARK - Off N. 1st St. Interchange, I-82 & US 12  
1610 North First Street • Yakima, Washington 98901

**Toppenish**  
The City of Murals & Museums  
in Yakima Wine Country

Old West town with over 70 historical outdoor murals

Mural-in-a-Day • Rodeos • Unique museums  
Casino gaming • Pow wows • Wildlife refuge  
Golf • Affordable lodging • Unique shopping

For free guide: 800-863-6375  
or [www.toppenish.net](http://www.toppenish.net)



panoramic views of the Yakima Valley and the perfect terrace for a wine-inspired picnic. Cobble walkways invite guests to wander past a small pond or waterfall, into the courtyard or grotto, or through the vineyards and the meticulously landscaped grounds. Owner/winemaker Keith Pilgrim, along with wife and partner ReNae, purchased their 300 acres on Red Mountain in 1993. The first estate grapes were harvested in 1997 and today Terra Blanca produces about 32,000 cases of wine per year. More than 80 percent of the winery's production is made up of red wines. Don't miss Keith's deeply satisfying, estate-grown Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, or Chardonnay. (509-588-6082; [terrablanca.com](http://terrablanca.com))

Notable neighbors on Red Mountain include **Kiona Vineyards and Winery**, owned and operated by the Williams family, gutsy pioneers in this once-remote region. John and Ann Williams, along with son Scott, specialize in elegant estate-bottled Merlot, Lemberger, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Chardonnay, and Dry Riesling, among other varietals. (509-588-6716; [kionawine.com](http://kionawine.com))

**Hedges Family Estate** is another

family-run operation that specializes in sumptuous blends of estate-grown red varietals (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah) and reasonably priced CMS blends made from grapes grown elsewhere in the Columbia Valley. Started by Tom Hedges and his French-born wife Anne-Marie,

this self-described "wine estate on Red Mountain" features a chateau surrounded by gardens and vineyards and blessed with incredible views of Red Mountain and the Yakima Valley. (509-588-3155; [hedgesfamilyestate.com](http://hedgesfamilyestate.com))

## Yakima Valley

### FESTIVALS

#### ELLENSBURG

May 2009

#### Wonderful Washington Wine & Cuisine

888-925-2204

[cwuce.org/wine-education](http://cwuce.org/wine-education)

#### YAKIMA

June 2009

#### Sunshine & Wine Festival

509-248-7160

[sunshineandwine.com](http://sunshineandwine.com)

#### YAKIMA VALLEY

November 28-29, 2008

#### Thanksgiving in the Wine Country

800-258-7270

[wineyakimavalley.org](http://wineyakimavalley.org)

February 2008

#### Red Wine and Chocolate

800-258-7270

[wineyakimavalley.org](http://wineyakimavalley.org)

### VISITOR INFORMATION

#### TOPPENISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PO Box 28, Toppenish

800-863-6375; [toppenish.net](http://toppenish.net)

#### WINE YAKIMA VALLEY

800-258-7270

[wineyakimavalley.org](http://wineyakimavalley.org)

