

**Taking a gander at the Goose Ridge team: owner/president Bill Monson; his wife, Darci Monson; his sister Valerie Monson; his mother, Suzanne Monson; and his sister Molly Monson-Stutesman and her husband, Rob Stutesman.**

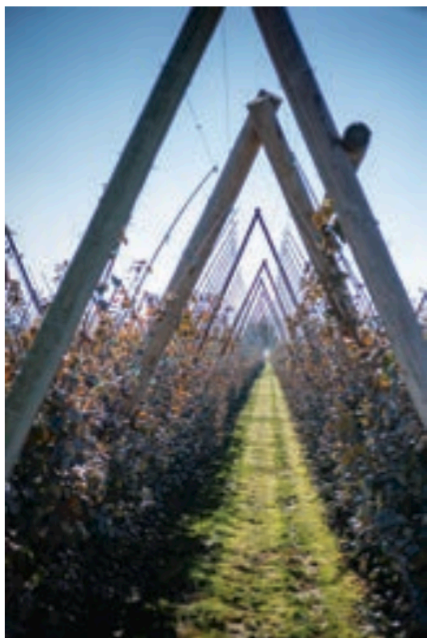


What may be Washington State's most exciting wine region right now isn't the well-known Walla Walla Valley but a sagebrush-speckled expanse that sips on just 6 or so inches of annual precipitation. Here in the arid Columbia Valley, there's still an aura of potential, as new varietals continue to be planted and sub-AVAs are established that will encapsulate its vast variations in soil type, microclimate, and other winegrowing conditions. It's already home to such up-and-coming appellations as Red Mountain, where producers are digging in and carving out a reputation.

One of the largest family-run operations in the region, Goose Ridge Vineyards strives to emphasize the uniqueness of the Columbia River Plateau through its compelling wines. Prior to becoming a sprawling estate on the outskirts of Benton City, the Goose Ridge property was open country—an untamed stretch of land nestled among topographical outcroppings that include Candy Mountain, Red Mountain, and Badger Mountain. As company president Bill Monson says, it was a place where the local old-timers would come and shoot geese during hunting season.

During a visit early last November, I immediately saw that the winery was and still is aptly named. The sky was filled with V-shaped masses of migratory birds ditching the dramatically cooling autumn weather for something more approachable to the south. Sprawling new subdevelopments outside of the nearby cities of Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland trickled into the landscape and there was steady traffic on I-82, but overall, the area still felt pretty rugged.





**The V-shaped trellising at Goose Ridge resembles the formation of geese in flight.**

The Monson family settled here four generations ago and began building an estate devoted to diversified agriculture. Many of their original projects continue—cattle ranching and orchard tending, for instance. But the lion's share of the massive property is devoted to grape growing, with some 2,200 acres of vineyard all told. While a healthy chunk of each year's grape yield is sold to other producers, Goose Ridge still manages to keep some for itself. "None of the fruit leaves this site," Monson notes; instead, it's funneled into the main production area at the base of the hill and turned into custom crush lots for customers as well as wine for a number of Goose Ridge labels. These include g3, StoneCap, and Tall Sage as well as VIDO Vodka and Cascadian Outfitters, the brand's strong entry into the canned market.

"My father always taught us that to be successful in farming, you need to diversify your crops. We are always looking for new ways to innovate and expand," says Bill's daughter Taylor Monson, who serves as Goose Ridge's director of national sales and marketing. Like so many in her family, she attended Washington State

University before returning to help with the business. And it remains a diverse one, dealing primarily in wine but also in commercial crops of cherries and apples, cider, and spirits. One of its latest projects came about unexpectedly: Just as the company was kickstarting its spirits line with VIDO, an estate-grown Cabernet grape vodka made in honor of Bill's late father, Arvid "Vido" Monson, the pandemic

arrived. Practically overnight, there was a much more pressing need for ethanol and the distilling equipment Goose Ridge had access to. Enter a substantial hand-sanitizer enterprise that offered some much-needed protection to the community.

Goose Ridge continues to turn out sanitizer, but wine production remains at the heart of the family business. The Monsons' team has four tasting rooms





**This vodka, made with estate-grown Cabernet grapes, honors Bill Monson's late father, Arvid "Vido" Monson.**

to run in Walla Walla, Richland, Woodinville, and Leavenworth on top of overseeing a distribution chain with placements all over the country. They also recently launched Destination Brands, an umbrella organization that will encompass all of

the aforementioned labels, including VIDO Vodka (see also page 114). Given that Goose Ridge planted its first vine as recently as 1998 and debuted its maiden vintage the following year, the scale of its growth is impressive.

Perhaps most excitingly, a new AVA called Goose Gap is pending approval, a development the Monsons have spent years advocating for. It will help draw attention to the place the family has called home for well over a century—a place that Goose Ridge winemaker Andrew Wilson says possesses the big, tannic qualities of neighboring AVAs like Red Mountain while maintaining its own distinctive freshness. It'll be interesting to see how Goose Ridge's experiments with grapes like Roussanne and various Cabernet Sauvignon clones evolve going forward.

Pouring in the barrel room with the 2020 harvest mostly behind him, Wilson walked me through the current releases. He has been part of the Pacific Northwest wine scene since 2003, doing stints at lauded producers like Long Shadows and Forgeron Cellars. He was the general manager at Artifex Wine Company in Walla Walla before landing at Goose Ridge, where he's supported by assistant winemaker Casey Cobble and consulting winemaker Peter Devison, among others.

Wilson is justifiably proud of



**Peter Devison**  
is consulting  
winemaker for  
Goose Ridge  
Vineyards.

Cascadian Outfitters, which has released some of the most aromatic and balanced canned wines to be found in the ever-growing sector. Also of note is the g3 2018 Merlot, with its nice mix of brightness and umami; a pleasant barrel-fermented g3 2018 Chardonnay; and the 2016 Vireo, a blend of Cabernet, Merlot, and Syrah whose finesse was earned in part by 26 months in barrel.

Yet he's even more excited about where the 2020 vintage is headed. Calling it "intense," Wilson noted that while the growing season had its share of issues—from spring frost and lower yields to, of course, a pandemic—he believes that challenging vintages are the most rewarding, not only in the winemaking stage but also in the glass. Besides, the team could count on

both their collective experience and their viticultural wealth to ensure that Goose Ridge remains a label to watch, especially as its vines mature and its appellation attracts increased attention far beyond state borders. **LT**



**Cascadian Outfitters represents Goose Ridge's entry into the canned market.**

# upfront

story by Mark Stock  
photos by Kim Fetrow

*FLYING HIGH*

IN THE

# Columbia Valley

A VISIT TO  
WASHINGTON'S  
GOOSE RIDGE  
VINEYARDS