

Oregon Wine, Washington Tasting Room

Panther Creek boosts business, bringing Willamette Valley Wine to Woodinville, Wash.

By Stacy Briscoe



Panther Creek Cellars features a tasting bar made from locally-sourced, reclaimed wood.

Panther Creek Cellars, which sources its grapes and crafts its wines in the heart of Oregon's Willamette Valley, has opened its new tasting room in the Hollywood District of Woodinville, Wash. Madelaine Morford, tasting room director and assistant general manager of Panther Creek, said the cluster of tasting rooms in Woodinville is home to just a few Pinot specialists. "We thought Panther Creek could fill the much-needed gap for Pinot Noir," she said. "Our goal is to expose the Washington wine drinker to Oregon Pinot Noir by having them visit our tasting room and experience our hospitality."

Boost to business

Previous to the new Woodinville location, Panther Creek had a tasting room in Dundee, Ore., and, before that, McMinnville, Ore. Both of those locations are now closed, and the winery has focused all its resources on the new location.

Panther Creek is a small-production winery making 7,500 cases annually, and Morford estimated that approximately 60% of its wine sales are direct-to-consumer (DtC). She said that because the Hollywood District sees a

regular flow of wine tourism throughout the year, the new tasting room, which officially opened the first weekend in June, has already been a big boost to the winery's business. "We've already increased in retail sales just due to the Pinot Noir demand that is occurring in Woodinville," Morford said.

Tricks of the trade

The new tasting room, which is open seven days a week, employs four part-time staff

members. Morford said that at the top of her list for ideal qualities in tasting room team members are customer service and people skills. "Wine knowledge can be taught, but it's hard to teach how to sell and how to make a great experience for guests," she said.

Morford said the team is trained to ask for the wine sales, but not to push — which she calls an important distinction. She wants guests to feel as if her hospitality staff is willing to help enhance their experience with Panther Creek's wine, but not force them into an unwanted purchase. Staff do not make commissions on individual wine sales but do get bonuses for signing up club members.

When asked about the perks of the wine club and how Panther Creek promotes longevity with its members, Morford said the discount is usually what makes people join, but access to exclusive wines and experiences are what make them stay. Members of the Grand Cru Wine Club get access to library wines and can use the tasting room space once per year for personal, special events. "People want to feel exclusive and special when they're members," Morford said.

Inside the tasting room

The tasting room staff manages sales, inventory, website and wine club through WineDirect software. Morford calls it an "all-encompassing software" that acts as a great tool for general management in both the tasting room and the winery.

For glassware, Panther Creek is using Riedel's Ouverture Magnum line, and Morford said another wine club perk is the use of the winery's logo Tulip Pinot Noir glasses, also by Riedel. To clean those glasses, the tasting room has installed a Champion Industries commercial glass washer.

A standout design feature in Panther Creek's new venue is that the tasting bar and wine displays are created from reclaimed wood from the Pacific Northwest. Morford said she sourced the reclaimed wood herself from a salvage yard in Seattle and PNW Timbers in Port Townsend, Wash. Complementary steel work was custom-built by Derek Voss of DVO Metalworks. 🍷



Demand for Pinot Noir is fueling increased sales at new location.