

Airfield Estates ready to open Waterfront Vancouver tasting room

Winery's history-themed site plans grand opening March 7 in RiverWest building

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Airfield Estates tasting room assistant manager Audrey Goodine picks out a bottle of wine. (Alisha Jucevic/The Columbian)

Upon entering the newest tasting room at The Waterfront Vancouver, visitors are met with a historic sign that for decades lay in the dirt on Airfield Estates Winery in Sunnyside. Chipped paint still clinging to the tin reads, “Airport Ranch.”

Airfield Estates holds its grand opening on March 7 at the RiverWest building at 760 Waterfront Way, and it will be the third tasting room at the Waterfront, soon to be joined by at least two others. But the history of Airfield Estates' farm, which once hosted World War II pilot training, is what's going to set this tasting room apart from the others, said Tracy Jones, hospitality and sales manager.

"We want everyone to hear the story of Airfield Estates," Jones said. "We're different. What will set us apart is our rich history."

The white-painted, barn-themed room at the new tasting room offers a partial view of the Columbia River through south-facing windows. The room holds 49 and will eventually have outdoor seating, Jones said. For now, they are still picking out sound-absorbing material for the ceiling.

"We're just working out the kinks before the grand opening," she said.

Airfield Estates will hold its grand opening from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., and a musician from Prosser who's written songs about Airfield Estates will be playing music, Jones said. In the first months after opening, the tasting room will serve charcuterie boards; in the future, it will serve paninis.

Bottle prices range from about \$15 to \$50, and the tasting room will offer 17 of the winery's 21 varietals, which include red, white and the recently released Sangiovese Rose: "That one's going to be a huge hit," Jones said. The winery will also release a sparkling wine in June or July.

Wine club memberships are free, but new members must buy at least six bottles when signing up, and they must buy 24 bottles in a calendar year. The club perks include free wine tastings, a 20 percent discount on wine and a 10 percent discount on glass pours at tasting rooms.

Before the grand opening, Jones will hang up old pictures in the tasting room of Airfield Estates' ranch in Sunnyside. The ranch was purchased by H. Lloyd Miller around 1920. In 1941, he leased part of the land for Army Air Corps pilots during World War II. The flight school built a 70-foot-tall water tower, airplane hangars and other military buildings, which Miller acquired after the war.

The ranch and farm have stayed in the family ever since. It once grew potatoes, onions, alfalfa, asparagus, and oats; it wasn't until 1967 that second-generation owner Don Miller planted grapes.

The farm encompasses 883 acres, and the winery business is now owned and operated by fourth-generation owners. More than half of the grapes grown at Airfield Estates are also sold to other wineries, including Chateau Ste. Michelle. It also grows Concord grapes for Welch Foods Inc.

Marcus Miller, president of Airfield Estates, said he chose to open the Vancouver tasting room because he has family living here, and he's been visiting since he was a kid. When he discovered The Waterfront Vancouver development, he knew it would draw crowds.

“We know the greater Portland and Vancouver area loves its wineries in the Gorge, but it’s a challenge to get there,” he said.

The Vancouver tasting room will be the company’s third; it also has locations in Prosser and Woodinville. Airfield Estates hired eight people for the new tasting room, and it may hire up to four more for events.

Airfield Estates joins [Maryhill Winery](#) and a joint tasting room from [Pepper Bridge Winery and Amavi Cellars](#). Brian Carter Cellars and Naked Winery are also slated to open at the Rediviva Building and the Kirkland Tower, respectively, in coming years.

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Jones said that the other wineries will allow visitors to bounce around to the different spots at the Waterfront.

“I think we can all help each other,” she said.



