

Willamette Valley Vineyards joins The Waterfront Vancouver

Winery's tasting room, restaurant, retail shop target mid-August opening



Illuminated barrel booths are among the seating options at the new Willamette Valley Vineyards restaurant at The Waterfront Vancouver.

By SARAH WOLF The Columbian

Come mid-August, Willamette Valley Vineyards will join the ranks of several other wine-tasting rooms along Vancouver's waterfront.

The facility will not only be a tasting room but a restaurant and retail shop, as well. The Oregon winery signed a 10-year lease for the space, which is located above the Maryhill Winery tasting room in The Don building, in March of last year.

Construction in the space began within the last nine months, said Carissa Cook, development director at Willamette.

The company is opening two other similar restaurants and tasting rooms this year. It also owns numerous other vineyards and tasting rooms across the Northwest in addition to its flagship location in Turner, Ore. Unlike many wineries, its stock is publicly traded, with shares listed on the Nasdaq exchange under the symbol WVVI.

While the restaurant is nearly complete, there isn't an official opening date, although mid-August is the target.

The second-floor restaurant will offer about 90 seats inside and 50 on the patio, which overlooks the Columbia River and riverfront walkway. Willamette expects to hire 30 to 40 employees at the new location.

"We're expecting to be pretty busy," said Cook. The restaurant and tasting room will serve between 20 and 30 different wines.

One unique element is a wall with a built-in wine-blending system, so patrons can attempt their own Metis blends. The blend is made from four to five different grape varietals. The varietals are kept in tapped barrels in a wall of the restaurant.

Blending machines are also at the company's properties in Turner, Lake Oswego, Ore., and the restaurant that will open in Happy Valley, Ore. The restaurant will offer a full food menu.

"Our wine has a sense of place and we're doing the same thing with our food," said Cook. "So we're really local focused, really trying to create the flavors of the Pacific Northwest."

Food will be available family style with shareable plates, plus a prix fixe option. The prix fixe meal will be three courses, each paired with a wine.

In addition to the restaurant and wine tasting, folks will also be able to buy bottles of wine — at winery pricing — at the new location.

"So if people just want a couple of bottles of pinot noir, they can come in and do that," said Cook.

Willamette will also offer Club Willamette, which is a subscription model. Customers pay a monthly fee of \$49 and receive a 20 percent discount on wine, a complimentary tasting once a month for them and three friends, and first access to different winery events. All the money paid to the wine club also goes directly into the customer's account as a credit to buy wine.

"If you're planning to come here regularly and you're planning to buy wine, it just unlocks a discount for you," Cook said. Additionally, the restaurant will offer a small craft cocktail menu and will have two beers on draft.

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Photos by AMANDA COWAN/The Columbian Employees gather for training at the Willamette Valley Vineyards Vancouver restaurant, which is expected to open later this

month. An inbarrel wine-blending machine will give patrons the opportunity to make their own Metis blend.



Willamette Valley Vineyards is above the Maryhill Winery at The Waterfront Vancouver.



AMANDA COWAN/The Columbian The restaurant also has a large patio overlooking the Columbia River.