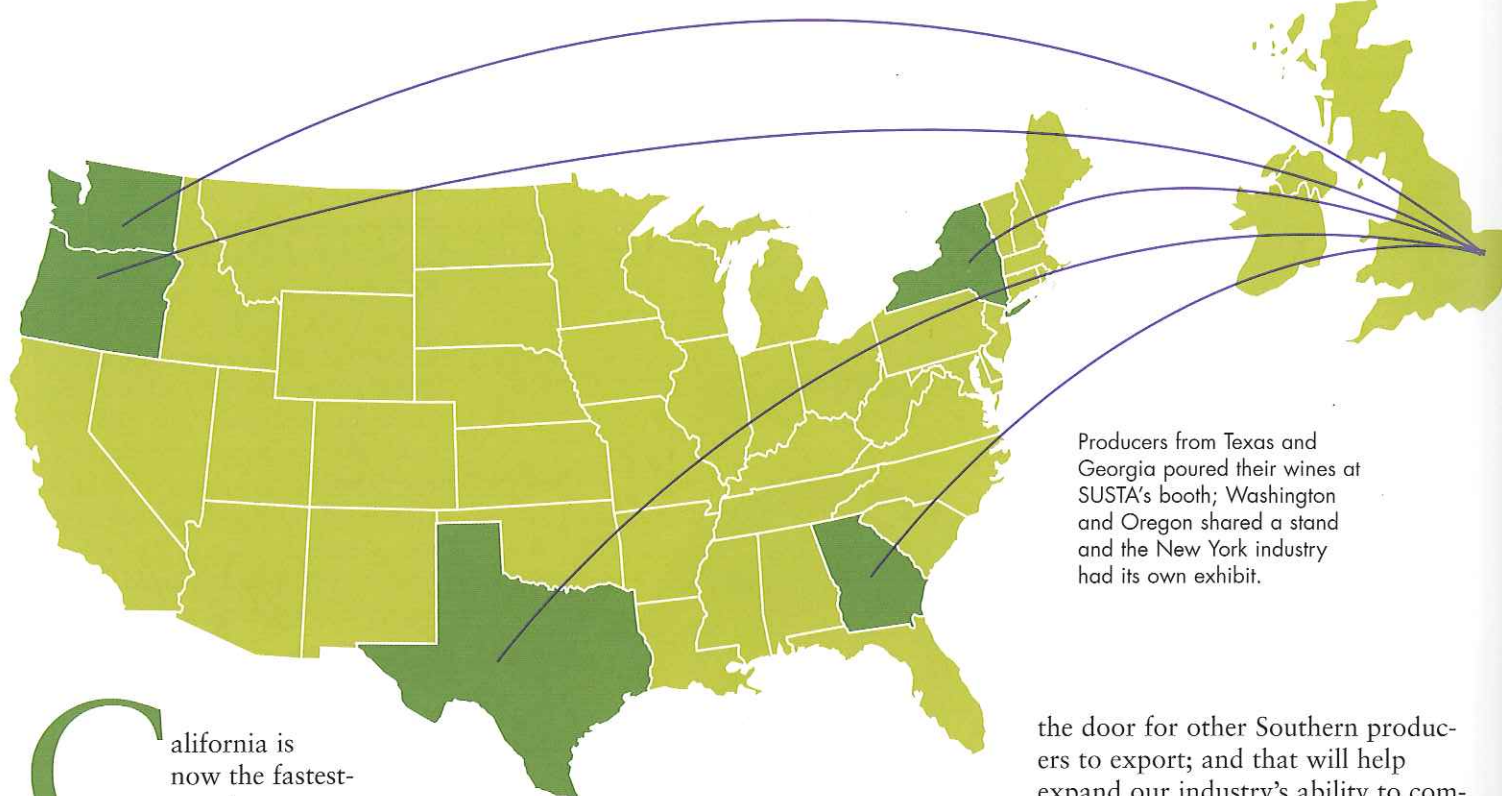


# London Calling

## Smaller wineries outside California target the UK

Gary Werner



Producers from Texas and Georgia poured their wines at SUSTA's booth; Washington and Oregon shared a stand and the New York industry had its own exhibit.

California is now the fastest-growing category on British wine shelves, so the sound of more U.S. accents moving through the London International Wine & Spirits Fair should be no surprise. But it is surprising how many American wine producers from outside California made the trip to Britain this year.

One example is Persimmon Creek Vineyards, a 7-year-old, family-run company making just 2,000 cases in the hills of northeastern Georgia. Proprietor Mary Ann Hardman says her current sales already extend from top Atlanta restaurants and selected Whole Foods stores through to private customers. "So we don't have much more to sell," she admits. "But we are always looking for placements that will do the most to help spread the word about our efforts. That's why I'm here in London: Good listings in the UK contribute to the credibility or veracity of our wines everywhere they're sold."

Ed and Susan Auler of the pioneering Fall Creek Vineyards near Austin, Texas, came to the show for a similar reason. Their 40,000-case winery sells mainly to distributors and the trade across Texas, with smaller accounts in New York, Washington, D.C., and other key U.S. markets. "And we've also had an intermittent presence in London over the past 20 years," Ed Auler says. "But now we want some continuity here. That doesn't mean selling a particular number of cases per year. It's really about 'creating a rumor of our existence,' as we used to say. You have to plant seeds in the right places to support continued brand growth; and listings in a city like London can represent one of those places.

"With that said," he continues, "this is not just about us. The message we're trying to convey to the world here is that our region can produce world-class wines. Doing so will open

the door for other Southern producers to export; and that will help expand our industry's ability to compete better in every market."

This larger, regional message was crucial to the presence of both Persimmon Creek and Fall Creek at the London fair this past spring. Neither business could have justified even the basic cost of the stand that they shared for the three-day show—about \$7,000. But with the active support of the Southern U.S. Trade

### HIGHLIGHTS

- With California wines the fastest growing segment in the UK's wine market, other U.S. winegrowing regions are eager to grab a piece of the action.
- At the London Wine & Spirits Fair, delegations from the Pacific Northwest, New York and the Southern U.S. were well received.
- European attention to these lesser-known wine regions is favorable for the entire U.S. wine industry.



The Oregon Wine Board joined with the Washington Wine Commission to host an impressive installation that drew significant attention to Pacific Northwest wines.

Association (SUSTA), they were able to promote their individual brands—and their state wine industries—to British trade buyers.

“It can be very hard for smaller companies to take a chance on finding a distributor overseas,” says SUSTA representative Terry Orvalle. “So we wanted to help them at least try it. At the same time, people in the UK are not really aware that we make wine in places like Texas and Georgia, so we can accomplish a real educational function, too.”

“Finally,” she continues, “this is a great market research opportunity. We can learn about the wider wine business world while we’re here. So while it’s an expensive event, I’m not sure you can put a price on what we gain from the experience.”

Orvalle’s sentiment was echoed by representatives from the New York Wine & Grape Foundation (NYWGF), which spent \$15,000 on a 226-square-foot stand to showcase a dozen producers and nearly 40 different labels. “It’s a significant investment,” says NYWGF vice president Susan Spence. “But it’s important to raise global awareness of our

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wines, and also to learn more about the international market. We have a growing industry in New York, and we can't wait to learn about exports until we've got warehouses full of unsold wine."

Wolffer Estate was one of the wineries presented in the New York stand at the show. But unlike many small U.S. producers on the floor, this 16,000-case, Long Island-based business already has a foothold in the market. "We've recently taken on board a UK agent," says Wolffer sales manager Peggy Lauber, "and they're receiving a shipment of 200 cases to target higher-end on-premise accounts. Of course, Europe is a logical step for us: Our owner is German and our winemaker is German, and we produce wines in a cool-climate style that should fit well in the European market. But I also hope our presence will help to get the word out about the work we are doing collectively in the New York state wine industry."

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*"We wanted to show that Oregon and Washington are serious about developing their exports on a long-term basis."*

—Mike Coveney, Hilltop Wines

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Another effort at the fair to get the word out about American wine from outside the Golden State was the stand co-sponsored by the wine industries of the Pacific Northwest. This impressive, 861-square-foot, \$100,000 installation hosted more than two dozen brands and drew significant attention. According to Mike Coveney of Hilltop Wines, which has represented the Oregon Wine Board and the Washington Wine Commission in the UK since last year, "We set out to make a statement: We wanted to show that Oregon and Washington are serious about developing their exports on a long-term basis. This is why we were positioned on the floor next to big

names such as Constellation. I mean, we could have easily looked like a poor relative, but that wasn't the case. We've had such a great response."

"And I think that response comes from having the right range of brands here," says Katie Stoll of the Oregon Wine Board. "What I mean is larger-scale wineries offering lower price-points, as well as really boutique producers who make only hundreds or a few thousand cases at the higher end. We are offering the whole spectrum in order to build a critical mass of brands with truly stable distribution in this market."

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*"You have to target markets you can build, and which can help build you."*

—Ron Lachini, Oregon

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One of the Oregon wineries in the stand was Lachini, a 4,000-case business producing high-end Pinot Noir in the northern Willamette Valley since 2001. Ron Lachini says he sells almost all of his wines in small shipments to on-premise accounts in 33 markets across the U.S. "Many of them are getting just a pallet of wine," he says. "But you have to target markets you can build, and which can help build you. That's one of the reasons I'm here in London. If you want to win aspirational consumers, you need broad credibility, and you need to be in this market. Actually, I think that applies individually as well as collectively. So that's why most of us are here."

Coveney adds, "Of course, none of these efforts are an attempt to replace the wines of California with those of Washington or Oregon or wherever. That can't happen. Instead, they are about recognition for a great complement to California wines. And I believe recognition of the broader U.S. category will enrich both the international wine market and the American wineries that participate in it."■

*(Gary Werner is a freelance wine industry journalist based in London, and a regular contributor to publications including Decanter, Harpers, The Drinks Business and Wine & Spirit. Contact him through edit@winesandvines.com.)*

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