

# Bubbling Up

A SPARKLING-WINE BOOM IGNITES IN OREGON.

BY AMBER GIBSON

*The Willamette Valley is best known for its luscious Chardonnays and elegant Pinot Noirs, the two primary grapes in Champagne. Yet for years, only two Oregon brands — Argyle Winery and Soter Vineyards — have been producing méthode champenoise sparkling wine on a commercial scale.*

That's all changing thanks to Radiant Sparkling Wine Company, the country's first such mobile unit. In just two years, founder Andrew Davis has landed nearly 30 clients, including Adelsheim Vineyard, Sokol Blosser and Stoller Family Estate. Many of their first vintages will be disgorged and available for sipping this year.

There are two major obstacles when it comes to making sparkling wine: It requires expensive, specialized equipment, and it is a much more technical process than producing still wine. "The investment goes two or three years deep before you realize if you've got it right," Davis explains. He brings bottling services to each winery then, after secondary fermentation, disgorges, washes, labels and packages the wine at a separate location.

The concept has long been popular in Champagne. "Smaller grower-producers don't have their own equipment," Davis explains, "so each village or region will have someone doing what I'm doing: facilitating the production of sparkling wine for small producers."

Rollin Soles released his first vintage, 2013 RMS, under new label ROCO Winery last autumn using Radiant's equipment. Considered the Dom Pérignon of the Willamette Valley, he cofounded Argyle in 1987, putting Oregon sparkling wine on the map. Davis apprenticed under Soles there, and he and his wife, Corby, are investors in Radiant.

Rollin was also a moderator at Oregon's first sparkling-wine symposium last spring. "We need to stand together to improve understanding and achieve consistent quality," he notes. "Sparkling wine is a wine of patience and joy, and it's a very slow learning curve to determine how really great sparkling wine is supposed to taste. It's been a 30-year process for me, and I'm not done yet."

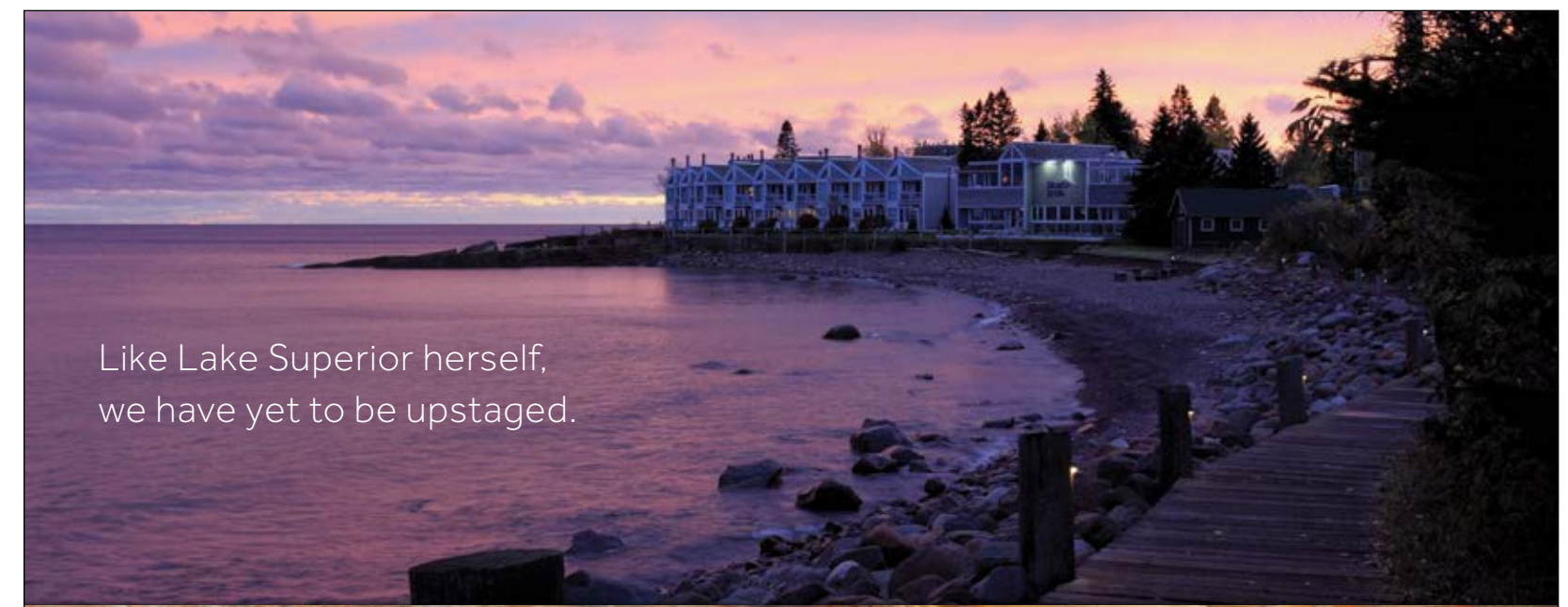
"There seems to be a New World–Old World analog at the highest level of winemaking," adds Davis. "People compare Oregon to Burgundy, California to Bordeaux. But sparkling doesn't have that analog; there's nothing at the same caliber as Champagne. Oregon is capable of that." ●



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