

Five Incubators Creating the Next Generation of Winemakers

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Wine & Ratings

By Bridget Shirvell



John Rivenburgh (right) after harvest at Kerrville Hills Winery Incubator in Texas / Photo courtesy of Kerrville Hills Winery

There's no magic recipe for turning grapes into wine that will launch a successful brand. Passion, perseverance, talent and luck are all necessary but, even then, it's still difficult.

Winery incubators try to make it easier. Popping up in wine regions all over the world, winery incubators help take some of the risk out of starting a business for up-and-coming winemakers by providing the space, equipment and often resources for business management. In the process, they're creating communities of producers.

Here are five facilities to know.

1. The Collective at RD Winery



A bottle of wine made at The Collective at RD Winery / Photo courtesy of The Collective at RD Winery

Outgrowing a production facility is an excellent problem for any startup, but for Bertus and Alli van Zyl of Belong Wine Co., it was still a problem. The couple behind the tiny Napa Valley company wanted to expand the number of bottles they were producing and find a location to host wine tastings.

However, since Belong Wine Co. is neither of their full-time jobs, and they had a young child at home, they needed to keep costs low as they grew.

The solution turned out to be The Collective at RD Winery, located just across the street from Bertus' full-time job. Started in 2020, the collective now supports 15 wine, cider and beer producers. The space also allows producers to come together and explore what's next.

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The collective can bottle 280,000 cases each year, 5,000 of which are RD's. The rest of the space is set aside for other producers.

After they toured the facility, Bertus and Alli decided to produce their first vintage there in 2020.

“It’s such a fun place to be, and we’re very grateful to be there,” says Bertus. “It has such a collaborative feel, and days there often turn into a situation where you pour your wines for another winemaker and share ideas.”



2. The Teliani Collection

Georgian wines have been getting more international attention in recent years, especially as so many U.S. consumers embrace orange wine. Yet just over 900,000 bottles of Georgian wine were imported to the U.S. in 2020. That number might sound large, but that same year France exported more than 20 million bottles of just Champagne to the U.S. alone. This means finding a bottle of Georgian wine outside of the country is often a challenge.

And so, Georgian winery Teliani Valley partners with smaller winemakers that lack the resources to bottle and export their own wines. Teliani Valley distributes the wine under the Teliani Collection Wine People label to Maryland-based Georgian Wine House, a wine importer bringing more than a dozen Georgian wine brands to the U.S.

Revenue goes to their commercial wineries and to helping the small winemakers grow.

3. 456 Wineries



Larkmont seedless grape variety vines at Highland Community College's research vineyard / Photo courtesy 456 Wineries.

From demystifying the permits process to talking winemaking strategies, Kansas-based 456 Wineries is dedicated to helping up-and-coming winemakers launch their businesses.

“We’re here to educate folks and help the industry grow,” says Scott Kohl, manager of 456 Wineries. “This gives producers a shot at starting a winery while taking some of the risk out of the process.”



Red Rock Hill / Photo courtesy of 456 Wineries

A part of the Highland Community College viticulture and enology program, 456 Wineries can grant up to six Kansas producers space for tanks and provides shared room and equipment for a crusher, press and pumps, as well as a tasting room where visitors can sample wines from the wineries that use the incubator.

Each producer, some of whom are former Highland Community College students, can use the incubator for up to five years.

Communal Tasting Rooms, Co-ops and Other Businesses Giving Wineries a Leg Up



4. Piper Avenue

An avenue near Walla Walla's regional airport is home to winery incubator Piper Avenue. Funded by state grants and the Port of Walla Walla fund, the Piper Avenue incubator began as a way to help graduates of Walla Walla Community College's enology and viticulture program get started in the early 2000s.

The winemakers are given below-market monthly rents and a space they can use for a maximum of six years. The avenue has also become a destination for wine tasters.

5. Kerrville Hills Winery Incubator



John Rivenburgh at Kerrville Hills Winery / Photo by Jeff Bush

When winemaker John Rivenburgh was getting started, he found the guidance from others in the industry invaluable.

Now, Rivenburgh wants to help others succeed. He purchased Texas-based Kerrville Hills Winery in 2019 and turned it into an incubator for winemakers to learn and practice different winemaking techniques, and to get help launching and operating their businesses.

“It’s been very rewarding; we’re not making a lot of money yet but we’re having a good time and bringing legitimate wine to the state,” says Rivenburgh.

The facility is located about 45 minutes outside San Antonio. Of the current nine winemakers using the incubator, one is a retired oil executive, and another is a former welder.

“We’ve built this cool community of different people from all different backgrounds and socioeconomic levels,” says Rivenburgh.

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