

# Columbia Crest Winery Upgrades with New Removal System and Sorting Equipment

## *2014 Marks an Earlier but Promising Harvest at the Winery*

Paterson, Wash. (September 4, 2014) – Just in time for an early harvest season, Columbia Crest Winery is producing some of its first wine vintages using a new state-of-the-art removal and sorting system, becoming one of the first wineries in the U.S. to use this type of technology at this scale. The first wines to go through new equipment are Columbia Crest's 2013 vintage wines, which started to release in the summer of 2014 (for the white wines).

"This new system is unique because it allows us to gently and more effectively handle the fruit into our facility," says winemaker Juan Muñoz Oca. "For us, it is about continuously innovating and improving wine quality. This starts in our 2,700 acres of estate vineyards with the best quality grapes, and moves into our cellar with the right equipment to make sure we are showcasing the fruit in its purest form."

Muñoz Oca continues that the new equipment will help take Columbia Crest's wines to the next level by delivering cleaner flavors, more focused wines and smoother tannins. "Before, the presence of leaves and stems created noise in the wines. Like music, the ability we now have to more precisely sort the fruit creates wine with a clearer, more harmonious expression. This will have a huge impact on the quality of our wines across the portfolio."

The new equipment at Columbia Crest comes at an exciting time for Washington winemaking, due to what's expected to be an above average harvest season. Washington's 2014 wine grape production is estimated to be the state's biggest year in history with approximately 233,000 tons, up 11% from 2013. That comes to 52,000 acres of grapes in production in Washington.

At Columbia Crest specifically, harvest is expected to be slightly earlier this year, with the first grapes – a Sauvignon Blanc varietal from the Horse Heaven Hills – being harvested during this first week in September.

"2014 is shaping up to be a warm to hot season with 1800 growing degree days (GDD), which is 100 GDD ahead of 2013. We have also gotten 3.4 inches of rain for the season so far," says Muñoz Oca. "The hot sunny days and sparse rainfall have helped produce small canopies and a healthy crop level. Overall, we expect spectacular quality wines for the 2014 vintage."

"I think reds will have great intensity this year, because of the warm season so far," comments Muñoz Oca. "The Horse Heaven Hills are looking promising with a healthy crop and great weather, which could translate into more refined tannins especially for our red wines."

### **More about the New Winery Equipment:**

The new system is split into three different crush pad areas – one each dedicated for red, white and reserve wines. The addition of the new equipment to the reserve tier complements the new small fermenters recently added to the winery that have innovative shapes and vessel materials including concrete, stainless steel and French oak.

#### **Reserve Crush Pad**

After being harvested, [Pellenc's Selectiv' Destemmer](#) gently destems and separates the whole grapes from the green material, which can negatively impact the wine quality.

Once the berries are separated from the stems, they are sorted in the [Delta Vistalys optical sorting machine](#). The Delta Vistalys can reach a performance of up to 10 tonnes/hour and uses a color camera to sort the berries. Continual analysis of the pictures enables the operator to fine-tune the sorting

process with extreme precision. As soon as the pictures have been analyzed, the unwanted parts are automatically removed by pneumatic high-frequency nozzles.

The new [destemming](#) system was designed by [Pellenc](#) in France, and the new optical sorting machine, the [Delta Vistalys](#), is manufactured by [Clemens Technology](#) in Germany.

### **Red and White High-Speed Crush Pads**

A sorting table that separates green material from the grapes automatically (at ~80 tonnes/hour) has been added to the red crush pad. For the white crush pad, the Columbia Crest winemaking team is now able to use both a belt conveyer and a screw conveyer to deliver the fruit to the presses. This allows for flexibility to either avoid skin contact to keep certain varieties crisp and sharp, or macerate when the wine style dictates. This new system is being used on the Columbia Crest [H3](#) and [Grand Estates](#) tier of wines.

The sorting table for the red varieties was designed and built by [Key Technology](#) in Walla Walla, WA, and the belt conveyer for the white varieties was designed and built by [CRF Metal Works](#) in Pasco, WA.

### **About Columbia Crest**

Founded in 1983, Columbia Crest has grown from a small winery in a relatively unknown wine region to one of the most significant wineries in the U.S. and a major force behind Washington State's emergence as a world class wine region. In 2009, *Wine Spectator* magazine named the Columbia Crest 2005 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon the No. 1 Wine in the World on its Top 100 list, the first time a wine from Washington State has received the ranking. More information about the winery can be found at [columbiacrest.com](http://columbiacrest.com).

**Editor's Note:** Images and additional information about Columbia Crest are available at: [smwe.com](http://smwe.com).

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