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The Wines of Washington State Revisited

Double Issue

Rise of Red Varieties New Faces Top Vineyards 500 Wines Reviewed

metabolism. All of these can prolong the growing curve to yield more evolved tannins and color compounds.

In the winery, greater attention is being given to sorting by hand and through the use of sophisticated machines like the Mistral™ and optical sorters to retain only perfect berries (Northstar). Softer extraction techniques, such as shorter macerations [10 days total maximum, as at Leonetti], delestage (rack and return), pulse-air, cooler ferments, micro-oxygenation and gentler punch-downs all contribute to wines that show much more integration, better drinkability, yet will age just fine.

Charlie Hoppes of Fidelitas, with many years experience first at Chateau Ste Michelle, says that "you need to act fast and press off before the tannins super-saturate. It's better to get the extraction without the alcohol at the beginning of ferments, because you really cannot fine [our] tannins away. I watch the ferments like a hawk!"

Discussing the clonal selection of Merlot in Washington with Dave Merfeld at Northstar, the Clone 3 (Indian Wells) continues to be one of the best, as well as being long established in Washington. More recently, new UCD selections 15 and 21 show excellent results, as does the ENTAV Clone 181 from Bordeaux, also found in premier vineyards in Napa Valley. Winemakers now use a more sophisticated approach to barrel selection, tasting through cooperage selections to find the exact barrel that will not add harsh tannins but yield 'silky' ones in combination with the particular wine. No longer is there a one-size-fits-all approach to barrel aging.

Generally, the best Merlots in Washington (Pepper Bridge Vineyard, Northstar, Buty Merlot-Cabernet Franc, Woodward Canyon, Kiona) are blended with other Bordeaux varieties, especially Cabernet Sauvignon, which is harvested 2-4 weeks later than Merlot and gains more polymerized tannins from longer 'hang time'. Only a few pure Merlots that display exceptional balance stand on their own (eg Seven Hills, Leonetti).

Top Merlot Producers

Abeja	Long Shadows
DeLille Cellars	Pepper Bridge
Fidelitas	Substance2
L'Ecole No 41	Tamarack Cellars
Leonetti Cellars	Woodward Canyon

Cabernet Sauvignon



Cabernet Sauvignon vines planted in 1956 at Otis Vineyard in the Yakima Valley are the oldest commercial Cab vines in Washington. (Photo by Arty Pankus/Great Northwest Wine)

Washington's first planting of Cabernet Sauvignon was at Otis Ranch in 1956 and at Harrison Hill Vineyard on Snipes Mountain around 1962. Both locations are relatively warm sites in a cooler area of the central Yakima Valley. These were followed within a few years by plantings at Champoux (née Mercer-1972) in the Horse Heaven Hills, Cold Creek (1972), northeast of Yakima Valley and west of Hanford, Celilo in the Columbia Gorge (1972), at Red Willow in the extreme west of Yakima Valley (1973), and Sagemoor, in a warm but isolated area north of Richland (1972-73). All of these were own-rooted plantings, using UCD Clone 8, a consistent, medium vigor, reliable clone which still represents 80% of Washington Cabernet plantings. Also, as older vineyards are being re-planted, mainly due to leaf-roll virus, and new vineyards are established, as seen at Col Solare and Woodward Canyon Vineyard, newer clones like UCD 22, 6 and 4, plus ENTAV 191 and 337 have been introduced with very good results.

Tasting a range of comparable Cabernet tank samples from 2012 at Chateau Ste Michelle's Canoe Ridge Estate Winery with winemaker Ray McKee back in 2013, we clearly recognized significant clonal differences of tannin density and character, aromas and texture, which will contribute greater nuance and dimension to future wines. Clone 337 for its fine-grained tannins and floral perfume, Clone 6 for its denser, fine tannins and strong graphite-minerality, and Clone 21 for its poise, fine perfume, and refined tannins definitely reveal a strong potential for increasing Washington Cabernet flavor complexity. The biggest problem with some of these (e.g. Clone 6) is that they are low yielding clones.

Given that Washington growers can do precision irrigation to control vigor, there is still an economic incentive to stick to the tried and true Clone 8, which can produce quite good wines up to five tons/acre. The finest wines, however, are derived from yields of three tons/acre or less, similar to the top vineyards of Bordeaux and Napa Valley.

A significant issue as noted in our tastings concerns the large increase in Cabernet production since 2011 derives strongly from new plantings. By the numbers, Cabernet

slightly off-dry wines, in our opinion, include CSM, EFESTE, Long Shadows, Woodward Canyon and Rasa. Very few wines had the botrytis element that often enriches German Rieslings.

Conditions permitting, a few producers make superb Riesling Ice Wines in the traditional manner--grapes frozen on the vine. Two superb ones that do are the Rasa Maestro and the CSM Eroica Riesling Ice Wine. Among the sweet, dessert style wines we tasted, we highly recommend those from Cote Bonneville, CSM Eroica Gold, and Pacific Rim. Conditions permitting, producers like CSM, Kiona and others also make superb decadent, botrytis-affected luscious dessert style Rieslings. Reviews of these excellent wines can be found in the Tasting Notes to this report.

Top Riesling Producers

Chateau Ste. Michelle
EFESTE
Long Shadows
Owen Roe
Pacific Rim

Chardonnay & Other White Varieties

Though Chardonnay is grown almost everywhere in Washington, nearly 75% of the plantings are in the Horse Heaven Hills and Yakima Valley AVAs. A few years ago, a trend began emphasizing non-oaked versions. There are excellent examples of this like Buty's 'Shard' 2017. But most of the finest wines are typically made in a judiciously oaked, elegant fresh yet moderately rich style not unlike good white Burgundy, though, perhaps richer.

Some of the best Chardonnays are coming from Yakima Valley vineyards, like 8 Bells 2017 Boushey Vineyard Chardonnay and Sleight of Hand's 2016 The Enchantress Yakima Old Vines as well as Pomum 2016 Chardonnay French Creek Vineyard. Another cooler climate AVA, Ancient Lakes, already famous for its Rieslings, shows increasing aptitude for Chardonnay as witnessed by the rich, emphatic yet minerally puncheon-aged 2016 EFESTE Lola Chardonnay. Long famous Chardonnay vineyards such as Connor-Lee, Celilo, Cold Creek and DuBrul continue to yield truly classic Washington wines for the likes of Chateau Ste. Michelle, Woodward Canyon, Owen Roe, Côte Bonneville, Buty and Gorman/Ashan.

Top Chardonnay Producers

Abeja	Owen Roe
Ashan (Gorman)	Pomum Cellars
Baer Winery	Slight of Hand
Buty Winery	Sixto
Chateau Ste. Michelle	The Walls
EFESTE	Woodward Canyon
L'Ecole No 41	
Lone Birch Winery	

Pinot Gris & Sauvignon Blanc

The third and fourth most planted white varieties in Washington, Pinot Gris (2123 acres) and Sauvignon Blanc (1451 acres) continue to thrive and expand their popularity while simultaneously showcasing distinctive styles in Washington that consumers find appealing. Washington Pinot Gris tends to be slightly fuller flavored, even when made in an Italian, non-oaked Pinot Grigio style compared to its cousins grown in Oregon. Most of the acreage is in the Yakima Valley and Horse Heaven Hills AVAs, with much of it being made by the larger wineries such as Chateau Ste Michelle, Mercer, Waterbrook and Columbia Crest, and sold for reasonable prices.

Sauvignon Blanc has actually seen a turn towards a style halfway between New Zealand's overt capsicum and celery fruit forwardness and a more generous Bordeaux-style melon-grapefruit richness. These wines reveal fuller citrus fruit flavors with fine acidity to make them ideal wines with seafood. In Washington, some key producers like L'Ecole 41 and Auclair and Chateau Ste Michelle, use some Semillon, combined with delicate oak aging and lees contact in barrel to craft more textured, richer wines. At the same time, the 2017 Gamache Vineyard and Woodward Canyon's 2017 Sauvignon Blanc reveal Sancerre-like pink grapefruit, white pepper flavors and a chalky texture with crisp finish. Both reflect the subtle textural definition from being aged in neutral oak barrels and not just in stainless steel tanks.

Sauvignon Blanc in Washington has carved a fine niche for itself as a serious alternative to Chardonnay due to its ability to maintain strong freshness and intense flavors even while being among the first varieties harvested each year. Additionally, it is less expensive than most Chardonnay.

Top Producers of Other White Varieties

Sauvignon Blanc & Blends

Avennia
Buty Winery
Columbia Winery
EFESTE
Fidelitas
Savage Grace Wines
Woodward Canyon

Viognier & Rhone Whites

Alexandria Nicole
DeLille Cellars
Jones of Washington
Mark Ryan Winery
Nefarious Cellars
Northwest Cellars
Reynvaan Family Vineyards
Rôtie Cellars
Rulo Winery
Syncline Winery

Other White Varieties*

Buty Winery	L'Ecole No 41
COR Cellars	Palencia Wine Company
Orr Wines	Savage Grace Wines
Idilico Wines	Syncline Winery
Kiona Vineyards	

* Albariño, Chenin Blanc, Grüner Veltliner, Semillon, White Blends



Jordon Dunn-Small and Sager Small

Woodward Canyon Winery was established in 1981 by Rick Small and his wife Darcey Fugman-Small. It was the second winery in the Walla Walla Valley, and the Smalls were instrumental in the process of obtaining federal approval of the Walla

Walla Valley Appellation in 1984. The winery has consistently produced premium, age-worthy Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Bordeaux-style blends as well as Chardonnay. From the outset, it was determined that quality would take precedence over quantity. Rick and Darcey’s children, Jordan and Sager, share in the ownership of Woodward Canyon and are transitioning into leadership roles in the winery and vineyard as their parents step back from the day to day operations.

Victor Palencia



Victor Palencia is the owner and winemaker of Palencia Wine Co, one of the newest wineries in Walla Walla. Born in Michoacan in 1985, he migrated to the US with his family and graduated high school in Prosser in 2005. He later earned a degree at Walla Walla

Community College with a scholarship from Leonetti Cellars. After working at Willow Crest and Apex Cellars in Prosser, he was hired as director of winemaking at J&S Crushings in Mattawa, a custom crush facility that currently produces 1 million cases of wine annually. With access to some of the state’s top vineyards, he launched Palencia Wine Co using J&S custom crush facilities to produce his wine. It is a tiny company, producing less than 500 cases, but Victor has big dreams.

Amy Alvarez-Wampfler



Since January 2016, Amy Alvarez Wampfler has been the associate winemaker at Abeja Winery. She works alongside her husband, veteran winemaker Dan Wampfler, in producing the wine at this highly regarded winery. Amy has a well-established reputation as a high quality white wine maker. After earning a degree in winemaking and viticulture at Walla Walla Community College, she landed an internship at Ste. Michelle

Wine Estate and from there moved to Colombia Crest where she served as winemaker for the large barrel-fermented Chardonnay program. Before moving to Abeja, she also worked as General Manager and winemaker at Sinclair Winery.

Will Camarada



Will Camarada serves as co-winemaker for Andrew Will Winery on Vashon Island with his father Chris. Will is 29 years old and a graduate of the University of Washington. After working in Seattle as an environmental scientist, he returned to

Vashon to assist his father as co-winemaker at Andrew Will Winery.(Photo Andy Perdue)

Elizabeth Boucier



Elizabeth Boucier is Assistant Vigneron at Cayuse Vineyards in Milton Freewater Rocks District. She studied winemaking and viticulture at Walla Walla Community College and California Polytechnic State University. Before joining Cayuse, she interned in Argentina.

John Sigmar



John is Assistant Winemaker and Chris Petersen’s right-hand man in the cellar at Avennia. His interest in winemaking grew during a trip to Walla Walla with a group of friends. He is a 2015 graduate of the Walla Walla Community College winemaking program where he interned full time for 2 years at Dunham Cellars.

Chris Petersen was the first graduate of the Walla Walla Community College Enology and Viticulture program.

a fleshy finish, enhanced by a touch of residual sugar which helps to balance the light tannins and give the wine richness. Medium ruby garnet color. Medium body. Some wood-spice, oak aromas add interest and for a wine that is clearly meant to be drunk by itself (or with pizza and burgers!), it succeeds quite nicely. **14 Hands 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley (\$12) 89** Medium ruby- shows some maturity. 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Merlot, 2% other select varieties. Clear cabernet berry, dark cherry and dried herbal aromas accented by very solid oak vanilla toast accents. Medium body, well balanced flavors showcasing the bright cherry, herbs and slightly smoky oak. The tannins are in the background and give the wine nice texture, some 'chew', and add definition to the finish. Well done, if definitely not for keeping beyond a year.



Abeja (bumblebee in Spanish) was founded in Walla Walla in 2001. It was launched by the talented veteran winemaker, John Abbot

in partnership with Ken Harrison and other investors. Under John Abbot, Abeja produced stunning wines, European in character, giving priority to Cabernet Sauvignon. Abeja grapes have been sourced from its Mill Creek estate vineyard and other vineyards in Walla Walla and Columbia Valley. In 2016, veteran Daniel Wampfler, who previously worked for Chateau Ste. Michelle's Canoe Ridge and Colombia Crest, as well as Dunham Cellars, became winemaker at Abeja. He was joined by his wife Amy Alvarez Wampfler as Associate Winemaker, formerly with Columbia Crest and Sinclair Estate Vineyard. Abeja wines are first-class. www.abeja.net

Abeja 2013 Chardonnay Washington State (\$40) 93 This barrel fermented Chardonnay exhibits gorgeous balance and texture. Light notes of smoke and flint appear on the nose with citrus and orchard fruit notes, giving way to a mineral-laden, superbly balanced and integrated palate. A precise, focused wine that's showing optimally 5 years after the vintage. **Abeja 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley (\$52) 91** Medium dark ruby. Rich dark fruit aromas and flavors, plum and black currant. Soft on the attack, silky mouth feel, nicely balanced, with good acidity and a long finish. Tannins are firm. It needs a few years of cellar aging for maximum drinking pleasure. **Abeja 2014 Merlot Columbia Valley (\$45) 92** Medium dark ruby. This Merlot offers rich dark fruit aromas and flavors, plum and black currant. Soft on the attack, it reveals a silky mouth feel and is nicely balanced, with good acidity and a long finish. Tannins are firm and need to soften further with cellar aging. **Abeja 2013 Syrah Walla Walla (\$48) 90** Sourced from Mill Creek Vineyard. Big smoky earthy aromas. Dark ruby. Very ripe and concentrated on the palate with dark lush fruit flavors and herbal notes. It has firm tannins and a long persistent finish.



Airfield Estates Winery is a story of four generations of family farming. In the early 1900s H. Lloyd Miller acquired the property for

the current estate. He spearheaded the Roza Canal Project which brought high mountain irrigation water to Airfield Ranch and the rest of the Yakima Valley below. During WWII a portion of the property was leased to the Army Air Corps and used as a training base for pilots. Son, Don Miller planted the first wine grapes in 1968, and his son Mike Miller transitioned the ranch into its current configuration of 830 acres of wine grapes and 350 acres of Concord juice grapes. Originally, wine grapes were sold exclusively to other wineries until Mike started Airfield Estates Winery in 2005. The family legacy continues as the baton has passed to owner and winemaker Marcus Miller. The family vineyard currently grows 26 varieties of wine grapes. Production focuses on Bordeaux, Rhone and Italian blends and single varietal wines – all 100% estate grown. A few of the original base airplane hangers are still used as storage facilities. Airfield produces excellent value wines. www.airfieldwines.com

Airfield Estates 2017 Sauvignon Blanc Yakima Valley (\$15) 90 Stylistically grassy wine. Fresh and crisp with good acidity and fruit flavors and persistent finish. **Airfield Estates 2017 Chardonnay Yakima Valley (\$15) 89** Light. Yellow straw. Sweet floral accents. Mouth filling, with good weight and, orchard fruit flavors. Fresh finishing with ripe pear flavors. Flavorful and easy drinking. **Airfield Estates 2017 Riesling Yakima Valley (\$15) 88** The 2017 Riesling displays hints of diesel with light sweet peachy notes. Light sweet wine, off dry, but nicely balanced with good acidity. **Airfield Estates 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Yakima Valley (\$18) 90** This Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve offers aromas of dark red fruit with hints of earth and toast. It is nice and savory on the palate showing concentrated dark fruit a firm backbone and a bold finish. A serious wine for the price. **Airfield Estates 2015 Merlot Yakima Valley (\$18) 89** The 2015 Merlot offers blue and red fruit with hints of spice and toasted oak. It is silky on the attack but has a rather tannic palate, finishing on a sweet extracted note. **Airfield Estates 2015 Syrah Yakima Valley (\$18) 88** Dark red fruit, hint of chocolate and loam on the nose; loamy earth on the attack. A touch bitter. Spicy finish but not a complete wine. **Airfield Estates 2015 Red Wine Yakima Valley (\$18) 90** This red blend consists of 57% Cabernet Sauvignon, 28% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc and smaller amounts of Petit Verdot and Malbec. It is big and bold, yet elegant with a full-bodied mouthfeel, pronounced tannins, and distinct flavors of plum, dark berry, spice, and a touch of herbaceousness. **Airfield Estates 2016 Dauntless Yakima Valley (\$18) 92** Dauntless is an outstanding blend of 62% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Malbec, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot. This fine Bordeaux blend presents an array of black cherry, blackberry, and toasted oak with a perfumed nose, a spicy silky palate and firm tannins that carry through to a long finish.