

# The Seattle Times

THE GRAPEVINE • by Andy Perdue

A longtime love of winemaking leads to a dream job (and love) at the exclusive Abeja Winery & Inn

## Rising Stars: Amy Alvarez-Wampfler

**A**MY ALVAREZ-WAMPFLER oversees the winemaking of one of the most exclusive wineries in the Walla Walla Valley. It's a dream job, because she operates the cellar of Abeja Winery & Inn, working alongside her husband, veteran Washington winemaker Dan Wampfler.

Alvarez-Wampfler, 38, started her career at Columbia Crest, moved to Walla Walla to head up winemaking at Sinclair Vineyards, then took a job at Abeja in January 2016.

**EDITOR'S NOTE**  
This is the third installment in our four-part series on rising stars in the Washington wine industry.

in Paterson, Alvarez-Wampfler became enamored with wine, and moved to Walla Walla to attend Walla Walla Community College to earn a degree in winemaking and viticulture.

After graduation, she applied for an internship at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, where Dan was working at the time as Chateau Ste. Michelle's research winemaker. Soon, Alvarez-Wampfler took over Columbia Crest's barrel-fermented chardonnay program, quickly gaining a reputation for crafting high-quality white wines, as she oversaw more than 10,000 barrels of wine annually.

Eventually, she and Dan started seeing each other, marrying in 2009. One of

Alvarez-Wampfler's parents were harvesting strawberries when her mom went into labor, so she was born in Mount Vernon, but grew up in Yakima. After landing a job in 2003 in Columbia Crest's tasting room



Amy Alvarez-Wampfler is the co-winemaker, with her husband, Dan Wampfler, of Abeja Winery in Walla Walla.

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their dreams was to one day work side-by-side.

In 2010, she landed at Sinclair as general manager. About the same time, Dan was hired as head winemaker at Dunham Cellars. They were crafting award-winning wines about 20 minutes from each other.

Their dream came true in late 2015, when Dan was hired to take over the

cellar at highly regarded Abeja, and Amy joined him a few months later. The couple make winemaking decisions together now, and during harvest they can get to their vineyards, no matter where they are in the vast Columbia Valley. ☞

*Andy Perdue is a wine author, journalist and international judge. Learn more about wine at [greatnorthwestwine.com](http://greatnorthwestwine.com). Reach him at [andy@greatnorthwestwine.com](mailto:andy@greatnorthwestwine.com).*

### THREE TO TRY

Here are three Abeja wines worth seeking out. They'll be found at high-end wine shops or through Abeja's tasting room, or by joining the winery mailing list.

**Abeja Winery 2017 Viognier**, Walla Walla Valley, \$34: Making a viognier this good, with sleek balance and laden with citrus and tropical fruit, is nearly impossible. Abeja's secret: estate grapes and exacting control from vine to bottle.

**Abeja Winery 2015 Heather Hill Cabernet Sauvignon**, Walla Walla Valley, \$52: Among my favorite red wines last year, this vintage doesn't disappoint, thanks to bold flavors of black cherry and cocoa powder, backed by layered complexity and finely textured tannins.

**Abeja Winery 2017 Chardonnay**, Washington, \$42: A stunning example of this variety, a signature wine for Abeja, with smoky notes of ripe pear, Golden Delicious apple and pineapple, all backed by perfectly balanced acidity and mouth weight that make it perfect with scallops drizzled with an elegant beurre blanc sauce.