

**Washington Wine Report
2007 Spring Release
Walla Walla, WA**



May 4th, 5th, and 6th 2007

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Overview

What follows is a summary of our trip to Walla Walla, Washington for the 2007 Spring Release Weekend. Spring Release, always the first weekend in May, is one the main event weekends in Walla Walla wine country.

The purpose of this report is:

- To provide information about an event weekend in Washington wine country, in this case, the Walla Walla Spring Release
- To help you plan a visit to Washington wine country by providing information about the wineries located there
- To provide ratings of Washington wines to help you pick out wines you will enjoy



The Blue Mountains and young vines outside àMaurice Cellars.

The report is broken down into several sections. The first, [Report Methodology](#), describes how the wineries and wines were selected and rated. The next section, the [Tasting Summary](#), provides a high level overview of the highlights of the weekend. The [Summary of Double Star Wines](#) provides a list of the wines that received double stars - our highest rating - during the tasting. Following this list, we provide individual reports of each of the wineries we visited. For each winery, we provide, where possible, information about: who owns the winery; who their winemaker is; what types of red wines they make; how many cases of wine they typically produce; and a list of Seattle stores that carry their wine or have been known to in the past. We then provide information about the wines we tasted at the winery. Finally, at the end of the report is a [References](#) section that contains a list of Washington wine resources.

Please send comments/suggestions/corrections to Sean Sullivan at spsulliv@yahoo.com. Feel free to distribute to anyone who may be interested.

Report Methodology

The Tasters: Sean, Lindy, Pat, Sara, Kim, Jim

How Wineries Were Selected: There are currently over seventy wineries in the Walla Walla area. It is therefore not possible to visit more than a handful of them on any given weekend. For this reason, we selected wineries on the following basis, not in this particular order:

- 1) High ratings in the Sullivan System for previous releases (see below)
- 2) High ratings in Wine Spectator for previous releases
- 3) Wineries proximity to each other

How Wineries Were Rated: Each winery is rated as a destination from one star (lowest) to four stars (highest). Please note that, in Walla Walla, not all winery locations are created equal. Locations can be grouped as follows: west of town, downtown, south of town, east of town, and the airport. Downtown wineries are, generally, wine bars. Airport wineries are typically in small, old military buildings that function as tasting rooms and production centers. Wineries elsewhere range from those with tasting rooms with vaulted ceilings in buildings surrounded by vineyards (Three Rivers) to winemaker's backyards (Yellowhawk). Given this, ratings of wineries were made relative to others in their location. To see a map of all Walla Walla winery locations, go to: <http://www.wallawallawine.com/visit/map.pdf>. Numbers identifying locations as defined by this map are listed in parentheses in the "Winery" section for each review.

How Wines Were Rated: All wines sampled were rated using the Sullivan System:

- A flawed wine. Refuse this wine if served.
- . A decent wine. Drink it if you must.
- + A good wine. Worth drinking.
- * An excellent wine. Convince a friend to buy some and share it with you.
- ** An exceptional wine. Buy it now and either tell all your friends about it or keep it very, very secret, depending on your personality and availability.

Our interest and therefore focus is overwhelmingly on red wines. In particular, we tend to favor New World-style red wines that are typically fruitier, smoother, and more full-bodied than their European counterparts. This is reflected in our ratings.

Please note this system is heavily affected by Poor Pour Syndrome (PPS). PPS occurs when too few drops of wine are poured into the glass to allow one to swirl and taste. Bouquet and taste are strongly affected due to increased oxidation. Many wineries, God bless them, combat PPS by pouring a generous taste. Those that do not do their wines a disservice.

Tasting Summary

3 days, 24 wineries, over 125 wines tasted.

Every six or seven years, winter temperatures in the Walla Walla valley drop to an untenable level for the vinifera vines that produce the grapes that make their way into the area's wines. 2004 was one such year, where below zero temperatures in January destroyed approximately seventy-five percent of the wine grape crop. While many Walla Walla wineries typically source grapes from a variety of areas outside the valley, few who rely solely on Walla Walla fruit were able to produce wine that year ([Spring Valley](#) was one notable exception).

After the freeze, oenophiles everywhere wondered how the young vines and even younger wineries would fare. While the summer of 2005 was warm and dry as one would expect, these warm days continued into the fall. The accompanying cool nights allowed grapes to hang on the vines and ripen more slowly than usual. With the first results of this vintage just starting to come to market, I am happy to report that 2005 may be the strongest vintage Walla Walla has produced. The 2005 wines proved equally successful for established wineries as well as newer wineries. However, one winery's 2005's were particularly impressive.

[Whitman Cellars](#) began making wine in 1998. In 2002, winemaker [Steve Lessard](#) moved from [Hedges Cellars](#), a well-established Red Mountain winery, to Whitman. Using grapes from renowned vineyards such as Seven Hills, Pepperbridge, and Red Mountain as well as a number of other sources, Lessard shows a deft touch both in creating single varietal wines, such as their cabernet, and in creating blends, such as their Bordeaux-inspired Narcissa. Whitman's table wine, The Killer Cab, is consistently a terrific wine at a very reasonable price. While excellent wine from Whitman is far from unexpected, the 2005's are nothing short of spectacular. Many of these wines have not even been bottled yet show remarkable power and expression, especially for such young wines. Three of these wines received a double star (**) rating, the highest in the [Sullivan System](#), with two others receiving a single star (*).

Again, many of the 2005's, including most of those from Whitman, have yet to be released. Fear not. Walla Walla will provide you with many fine wines to drink while you wait. Looking across vintages, of the other eighteen wines that received a double star rating, fifteen were from the following top producers: [Walla Walla Vintners](#) (4 double star wines), [Spring Valley](#) (3), [Cougar Crest](#) (3), [Seven Hills](#) (2), [Tamarack](#) (2), and [L'Ecole](#) (1). Newcomers [Couvillion](#) (1) and [Ensemble](#) (1) join [Amavi](#) (1) to round out the top wines.

Summary of Double Star Wines

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|
| ** | Amavi Syrah Seven Hills Vineyard 2004 | Dark, rich, wheaty wine. Spicy plum. Best wine of the group. | \$32 |
| ** | Cougar Crest Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2003 | Berry. Smoky. Spice. Blackberry. Opens up on the palate. Extended finish. 96% Cabernet; 4% Petit Verdot. | \$55 |
| ** | Cougar Crest Merlot 2003 | Spicy. Sweet. Birthday cake. A super rich and full wine. 80% Merlot; 20% Cabernet. | \$32 |
| ** | Cougar Crest Syrah Reserve 2003 | Jammy. Sweet with light spice notes. It's like a piece of dessert cake. 98% Syrah; 2% Viognier. | \$55 |
| ** | Couvillion Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 | Bottled February 14 th . Superb nose. Similar in style to the 2004. Slight anise aromas. Sweet oak. Black cherry. Hints of nut aromas. Still needs to settle down on the taste but is a very, very good wine. | \$25 |
| ** | Ensemble Release Number 2 | Light and even. Berry. Subtle spice. Anise. A great, full taste. A blend of grapes from '03 (8%), '04 (59%), and '05 (33%). 71 % Cabernet from Sagemoor, Lodmell, Cold Creek, Canoe Ridge, DuBrul, and Neuffer Vineyards. 59% Merlot from Neuffer, Taptiel, and DuBrul Vineyards. 13% Cab Franc from DuBrul and Neuffer Vineyards. | \$48 |
| ** | L 'Ecole Seven Hills Syrah 2005 | Huckleberry. Classic syrah, although not with the smoky nose found on many in Washington. Good mid-palate and finish. | \$36 |
| ** | Seven Hills Ciel du Cheval 2004 | Black licorice. Clove. All spice. Long, full finish. A spectacular, intense wine. | \$30 |
| ** | Seven Hills Pentad 2003 | Dark, dried fruit. Violets. Sweet, dried cranberry on taste. | \$40 |

Summary of Double Star Wines...Continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|
| ** | Spring Valley Derby 2004 | Wow what a nose! Herbal. Blueberry. Pepper up front. Vanilla tones. Not quite as full on the finish. 100% Cabernet. | \$50 |
| ** | Spring Valley Frederick 2004 | Bright. Spicy. Milk chocolate. Dark black fruit. Blackberry. Beautiful finish. Cold fermented for three weeks at 60 degrees, "An experiment" winemaker Serge Laville says. 59% Cabernet; 24% Merlot; 12% Cab Franc; 5% Petit Verdot. | \$50 |
| ** | Spring Valley Nina Lee 2004 | Wheaty. Blueberry. Blackberry. Hint of anise. As the wine opens up, big blackberry aromas on the nose. Fig. A beautiful wine that opens up on the palate. Violets. Light chocolate. Spicy. A nose that evolves and changes with every swirl. This is a great wine. 100% Syrah. | \$50 |
| ** | Tamarack DuBrul Reserve 2004 | Berry. Rich. Blueberry cereal. A nice wine. Give at least one year. | \$40 |
| ** | Tamarack Merlot 2004 | Wheat. Berry. A little spiciness to it. A smooth and even wine that is a spectacular value. Make sure to serve at a cool temperature. Taptiel (Red Mountain), Weinbau, DuBrul, and Bacchus (Columbia Valley) Vineyards. | \$28 |
| ** | Walla Walla Vintners Cabernet Franc Columbia Valley 2005 | Coffee. Rich. Coats the tongue. Classic Walla Walla Vintners. A dynamite wine that opens up and lingers. 76% Cab Franc (Cordon Grove, Dwelley, Sagemoor Farms, and Weinbau Vineyards); 24% Merlot (Cordon Grove, Killian, Spring Creek Vineyards). | \$25 |

Summary of Double Star Wines...Continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|---|-----------|
| ** | Walla Walla Vintners Cabernet Sauvignon Sagemoor Vineyard 2004 | Coffee. Chocolate. Cherry. Another excellent wine that has improved with some age. 76% Cabernet; 16% Merlot; 8% Cab Franc. | \$40 |
| ** | Walla Walla Vintners Merlot Walla Walla Valley 2005 | Mocha. Chocolate covered cherries. Another superb wine that explodes on the palate. Still needs a little time. 84% Merlot; 8% Cab Franc; 8% Cabernet from Dwelley, Killian, LeFore, Pepper Bridge, Sagemoor Farms, Seven Hills, Spring Creek, and Weinbau Vineyards. | \$28 |
| ** | Walla Walla Vintners Washington State Cuvee 2004 | Coffee. Rich. A stunner. Hats off to this dynamite wine. The best of the ones tasted at this winery with very intense competition. 55% Merlot (Goose Ridge, Killian, and Spring Creek Vineyards); 25% Cabernet (Cold Creek, Goose Ridge, Dwelley Jones Vineyards); 10% Cab Franc (Cold Creek and Kendall Vineyards); 7.5% Syrah (Goose Ridge); 2.5% Malbec (Snipes Canyon Vineyards). | \$28 |
| ** | Whitman Cabernet 2005 Tank Sample | Anise. Plum. Blackberry. Tobacco. Chocolate. | NA |
| ** | Whitman Merlot 2005 Tank Sample | Tobacco. Chocolate. Dark fruit. Anise. Sweet smelling. | NA |
| ** | Whitman Narcissa 2005 Barrel Sample | Spicy plum. Dark fruit. To be bottled in one week. Blackberry. Some blueberry. A great, great wine. 77% Cabernet. | NA |

Full report in order tasted follows.



| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Martin and Megan Clubb |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Martin Clubb |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 30,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Merlot, Cabernet, Syrah, Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Everywhere |

Winery: *** ½ West of town (4). L'Ecole 41's tasting room is located in a 1915 schoolhouse whose image, shown through the eyes of an elementary schooler, adorns their label. The building is surrounded by beautiful grounds with an outdoor deck space and picnic area.

Summary: L'Ecole consistently makes excellent wines. Unfortunately, as has happened on other occasions I have visited, all of the wines were a little too warm when sampled to show as well as they should have. Still, any trip to Walla Walla would not be complete without a stop here. In addition to their wines, L'Ecole's Spring Release event also boasts an outstanding cheese assortment and salmon torte from Raphael's Catering (Pendelton, OR).

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|
| + | Seven Hills Estate Merlot 2005 | Spicy. Dark fruit. A rich nose. Seems a little sharp on the palate. A little over-oaked. Overall a wine with a good nose that doesn't quite come through on the taste. Perhaps a little age will assist. | \$36 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley 2004 | Leather. Spicy. Oaky. Full and rich on the taste. Needs to settle down and open up. Still seems very young. | \$36 |
| ** | Seven Hills Syrah 2005 | Huckleberry. Classic syrah, although not with the smoky nose found on many in Washington. Good mid-palate and finish. | \$36 |

L'Ecole No. 41

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Ferguson Commemorative Reserve 2004 | Blackberry. Anise. Fairly strong and tannic. Mocha notes. Much better with some age on it compared to December '06. 48% Cabernet; 42% Merlot; 5% Cab Franc; 5% Petit Verdot from Klipsun, Bacchus, Dionysus, Weinbau, and Stone Tree Vineyards. | \$44 |



L'Ecole's winery and tasting room is located in a 1915 schoolhouse surrounded by beautiful grounds.

Reininger Winery

www.reiningerwinery.com



| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Chuck & Tracy Reininger and family |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Chuck Reininger |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 4,000 Reininger 5,500 Helix |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Merlot, Carmenere, Syrah, Malbec, Sangiovese |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$5, can be applied towards purchase |
| <u>Where:</u> | Pete's, Esquin, Champion Wine Cellars, City Cellars |

Winery: *** West of town (6). Reininger's location, on the drive in to Walla Walla, offers a very pretty barrel room, an outdoor deck space, and a spacious tasting area.

Summary: A trip to Reininger on an event weekend not only promises excellent wines at a beautiful location. Reininger also offers an assortment of wines and varietals that few can match. From carmenere to sangiovese to merlot, Chuck's Reininger and Helix wines always impress. A new offering this year is "Mr. Owl's Red Table Wine". This wine is named after cellarmaster Raul who Chuck's kids called "Mr. Owl" when they were too young to pronounce his name.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|-----------|
| + | Helix Aspera 2006 | Pear. A nice wine. 75% Chardonnay; 25% Pinot Gris. | \$18 |
| . | Helix Sangiovese Rose 2006 | Dried flowers. A little tart on the tongue. Mineral. I warmed up to this wine after a few tastes. 100% Sangiovese. | \$18 |
| + | Mr. Owl's Red Table Wine | Tobacco. Black olive. Pepper. Slightly tannic on the front but smooths out. 91% Merlot; 5% Cabernet; 2% Syrah; 1% Cab Franc; 0.5% Carmenere; 0.5% Sangiovese. | \$25 |

Reininger Winery

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|---|---|-----------|
| * | Reininger Merlot 2003 | Bittersweet chocolate. Sweet licorice. Cherry. Graphite. Nice nose. Overall a very nice wine. 96% Merlot; 4% Cab Franc from Ash Hollow, Spring Valley, and Seven Hills Vineyards. | \$30 |
| + | Reininger Cabernet Sauvignon Ash Hollow Vineyard 2003 | Cherry. Tobacco. Spice. A fairly rich and easy drinking wine. 100% Cabernet. | \$32 |
| * | Reininger Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 | Cherry. Sweet spice. Rose petals. Hints of cassis. Rich. Full in the mouth. Best of the group. Needs time still. 80% Cabernet; 15% Merlot; 5% Cab Franc from Pepper Bridge and Seven Hills Vineyards. | \$32 |
| + | Helix Columbia Valley Merlot 2004 | Spice. Plum. An easy drinking wine. Very good for the money. 95% Merlot; 5% Cabernet from Bacchus, Stillwater, Stone Tree, and Andrews Vineyards. | \$22 |



Pat and Sara Skillings
on the Reininger deck.

Reininger Winery

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------|
| . | Helix Pomatia 2003 | Strong campfire smell. You would think it's a syrah based on the nose, but it's not. Not as strong a wine as last year's. 50% Cabernet; 27% Merlot; 16% Syrah; 7% Cab Franc from Ash Hollow, Clifton Hill, Patina, Pepper Bridge, Phinney Hill, Pleasant, Sundance, and Seven Hills Vineyards. | \$20 |
| . | Helix Syrah 2004 | Ripe fruit. Green olive. Blueberry. 100% Syrah from Clifton Hill, Stone Tree, and Patina Vineyards. | \$22 |
| * | Helix Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | Cocoa. Black cherry. Just released and still a little green. Will be an exceptional wine for the money. 94% Cabernet; 6% Cab Franc. | \$22 |

Trio Vintners

www.triovintners.com



| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Tim Boushey, Denise Slattery, Steve Michener |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Tim Boushey, Denise Slattery, Steve Michener |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Unknown |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Sangiovese, Syrah, Zinfandel |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Winery |

Winery: ** Airport winery ([59](#)). Trio Vintners is located in a new three-plex constructed for start-up wineries.

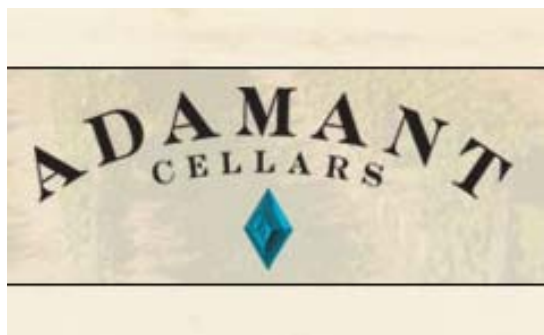
Summary: As the name suggests, Trio Vintners is a collaboration of three winemakers who recently graduated from the enology program at Walla Walla Community College. It was inspiring and humbling to meet these three individuals at the winery's opening. Each has followed their passion (and put themselves considerably in hock) to start this winery. "Living the dream" as one of them said somewhat apprehensively. We wish them well.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------|
| + | Riesling 2006 | Floral. Sweet. 100% Riesling from Lewis Vineyards. | \$12 |
| + | Rose 2006 | Crisp. Ruby red grapefruit. Full on the palate. 50% Mourvedre; 50% Sangiovese. | \$14 |
| . | Sangiovese 2005 | Artificial blueberry. Cranberry. Some stone. Chocolate aftertaste. A straight-forward wine. 83% Sangiovese; 17% Barbera from Milbrandt and Tasawik Vineyards. | \$18 |
| . | Syrah Boushey Vineyard 2004 | Soy. Spice. 100% Syrah. | \$24 |

Adamant Cellars

www.adamantcellars.com



| | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Devin Stinger |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Devin Stinger |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 1,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Winery |

Winery: ** Airport winery ([61](#)) located next to Trio Vintners and Lodmell Cellars.

Summary: Adamant Cellars is another new addition to Walla Walla wine country.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|
| - | 2006 Semillon | Smoky. Mineral. Something slightly untoward in this wine. Sharp on taste. Slight rotten egg smell. | \$20 |
| . | Rose 2006 | Slightly brown on color. Floral. | \$15 |
| + | Cabernet-Merlot 2006 Barrel Sample | Tobacco. Green pepper. Will be quite good. | \$29 |
| * | Syrah Spofford Station 2006 Barrel Sample | Blueberry. Dark, black fruit. A little spice. To be released in winter 2008. | \$35 |



Adamant, Trio Vintners, and
Lodmell Cellars.

Picture by Sara Skillings.

Waters Winery

www.waterswinery.com



| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Jason Huntley & James Brown |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | James Brown |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 4,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Syrah, Cabernet |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Winery |

Winery: ** Downtown tasting room ([15](#)). Note: Waters will be moving to a south of downtown location by harvest 2007.

Summary: James Brown, formerly of James Leigh Cellars, and Jason Huntley are ramping up their operation. They are currently making a large investment in a new winemaking and tasting facility south of downtown near Northstar, Va Piano, and Saviah Cellars. Designed by Seattle architect Joe Chauncey, the facility - expected to be open by Holiday Barrel Tasting - is being created with an eye toward sustainability.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|
| + | Viognier Columbia Valley 2006 | Honeydew. Sweet. A little too warm. 100% Viognier fermented in French oak and stainless steel. | \$20 |
| + | Rose 2006 | Super nose. Fruity. Watermelon. 75% Syrah; 25% Viognier from Forgotten Hills Vineyard. | \$16 |
| . | Syrah Columbia Valley 2005 | Blueberry. Some smoke. A little sharp still. | \$25 |
| + | Interlude 2005 | Light spice. Chocolate. Menthol. Berry. Black pepper. Great nose. Sharp on taste. Should be a good wine with a little more time. 56% Merlot; 36% Cabernet; 8% Cab Franc. | \$25 |
| + | Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley 2004 | Smoky. Blueberry. Green pepper. Needs to settle down a little still but is quite good. | \$40 |

Cougar Crest Winery

www.cougarcrestwinery.com



| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | David & Deborah Hansen |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Deborah Hansen |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Unknown |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Syrah, Cabernet, Merlot, Cab Franc |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$5 |
| <u>Where:</u> | Pete's, Broadway QFC, Esquin |

Winery: ** Airport winery ([48](#)).

Summary: You have heard me sing the praises of this sleeper winery before. Alas, as more and more people learn what the winery has to offer, the winery has too. As a consequence, Cougar Crest's reserve wines jumped from \$45 to \$55 a bottle. While this might not seem a surprise as price points creep up all over the state, the fact that it occurred within a vintage is bad form, although not without precedent. Thankfully, their non-reserve wines are every bit as good.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--------------------|---|-----------|
| . | Vivace 2005 | Honeydew. Pear. A little grass. A little too sharp on the tongue. 70% Viognier; 30% Chardonnay. | \$16 |
| . | Viognier 2005 | Pear. Hay. 100% Viognier. | \$20 |
| ** | Syrah Reserve 2003 | Jammy. Sweet with light spice notes. It's like a piece of dessert cake. 98% Syrah; 2% Viognier. | \$55 |
| * | Syrah 2003 | Smoky. Spicy. Rich. Wheat. Very good, although somewhat sharper on the taste than I remember. 98% Syrah; 2% Viognier. | \$32 |
| + | Dedication One NV | Blueberry. Sweet. 30% Cabernet; 21% Merlot; 20% Syrah; 13% Petit Verdot; 8% Lemberger; 5% Malbec; 3% Cab Franc. | \$20 |

Cougar Crest Winery

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|---------------------------------|--|-----------|
| * | Cabernet Franc 2004 | A super nose. A little wheat. Sweet and spicy. 100% Cab Franc. | \$32 |
| ** | Merlot 2003 | Spicy. Sweet. Birthday cake. A super rich and full wine. 80% Merlot; 20% Cabernet. | \$32 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 | Wheat. Olive. Very smooth wine, but not quite as big as some of the others. 96% Cabernet; 4% Petit Verdot. | \$32 |
| ** | Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2003 | Berry. Smoky. Spice. Blackberry. Opens up on the palate. Extended finish. 96% Cabernet; 4% Petit Verdot. | \$55 |
| * | Cuvee 2004 Barrel Sample | Sweet spice. Berry. To be released November 2007. | \$32 |

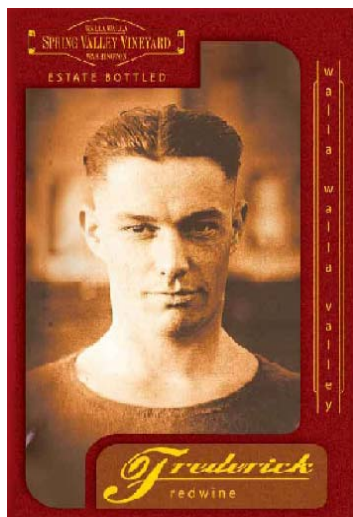
Note: All wines were warmer than when sampled in December. Make sure to serve them at 63-65 degrees for best results.



Sunset outside
Cougar Crest.

Spring Valley Vineyard

www.springvalleyvineyard.com



| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Corkrum, Derby and Elvin Families |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Serge Laville |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 3,700 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah, Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Pete's, Esquin, Broadway QFC, Leschi Market |

Winery: **** (72). Spring Valley is not only the standard bearer for Walla Walla wine, it also boasts the most scenic location of any winery in the valley. A drive out to the farm – now open only during event weekends – and a chance to sample their wines offer an experience none can touch. But it doesn't stop there. The family pictures that adorn their bottles. The family members who greet you on each visit. This winery is special.

Summary: While [Leonetti](#) and [Cayuse](#) receive all the press, Spring Valley is making wine every bit as good that you can actually find on the shelves. Their Uriah and Frederick have never been short of spectacular. Spring Valley is currently in the process of planting 60-70 acres of new vineyards. As a result, they expect to double their production within five years. While many a winery has faltered in making this transition, Spring Valley has the steady hand of [Ste. Michelle Wine Estates](#), who leased the winery in 2005, to guide the way. Though Spring Valley's downtown tasting room has regular hours, their farm, located adjacent to the vineyards, is now only open for event weekends. Make the trip. The location is stunning. An exceptional spread by Cheese Louise (Walla Walla) accompanies the wines.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------|---|-----------|
| + | Muleskinner Merlot 2005 | Bottled four weeks prior to tasting. Blackberry. Tart and tannic, showing its youth. Will be a very good wine but needs probably two years. 96% Merlot. | \$35 |

Spring Valley Vineyard

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|----------------|--|-----------|
| * | Uriah 2005 | Bottled four weeks prior to tasting. Fairly quiet on the nose, showing the recent bottling. Black currant. Exceptionally smooth on the taste. Needs time to open up and show itself. Give at least six months. 59% Merlot; 36% Cab Franc; 5% Petit Verdot. | \$50 |
| ** | Frederick 2004 | Bright. Spicy. Milk chocolate. Dark black fruit. Blackberry. Beautiful finish. Cold fermented for three weeks at 60 degrees, "An experiment" winemaker Serge Laville says. 59% Cabernet; 24% Merlot; 12% Cab Franc; 5% Petit Verdot. | \$50 |
| ** | Derby 2004 | Wow what a nose! Herbal. Blueberry. Pepper up front. Vanilla tones. Not quite as full on the finish. 100% Cabernet. | \$50 |
| ** | Nina Lee 2004 | Wheaty. Blueberry. Blackberry. Hint of anise. As the wine opens up, big blackberry aromas on the nose. Fig. A beautiful wine that opens up on the palate. Violets. Light chocolate. Spicy. A nose that evolves and changes with every swirl. This is a great wine. 100% Syrah. | \$50 |



On the road to Spring Valley Vineyard. Spring Valley is planting 60 new acres of vines.



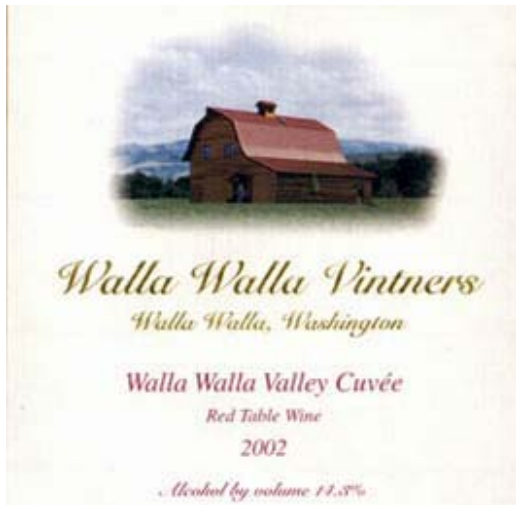
| | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Jill Noble |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Jill Noble |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Less than 600 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Merlot |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Winery |

Winery: ** ½ Near Spring Valley ([71](#)). No more spacious than many airport wineries, Couvillion distinguishes itself by being surrounded by woods instead of wineries.

Summary: Last spring marked winemaker Jill Noble's excellent first release. It was therefore with great anticipation that we arrived to see what her second had to offer. Alongside the 2004, the 2005 cabernet showed every bit the complexity with more structure than its predecessor. A true accomplishment. But please, don't just take my word for it. Contact the winery. These wines are not to be missed.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------|--|-----------|
| + | Sauvignon Blanc 2005 | Grapefruit on the nose and palate. Tart and refreshing. 25% Semillon. | \$18 |
| * | Sauvignon Blanc 2006 | Bottled four weeks prior to tasting. Grapefruit. Smooth and more refined than the 2005. Citrus. A very good wine. | \$18 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | A spicy, rich wine. Vanilla. Some black pepper. Rich and smooth with elegant tannins. | \$25 |
| ** | Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 | Bottled February 14 th . Superb nose. Similar in style to the 2004. Slight anise aromas. Sweet oak. Black cherry. Hints of nut aromas. Still needs to settle down on the taste but is a very, very good wine. | \$25 |



Owner: Myles Anderson and Gordon Venneri
Winemaker: Myles Anderson and Gordon Venneri
Cases: 4,500 to 5,500
Red Varietals: Cabernet, Cab Franc, Merlot, Sangiovese, Syrah, Blends
Tasting fee: No
Where: Pete's, Leschi Market, City Cellars, Esquin

Winery: ** 1/2. East of town (68). Walla Walla Vintners' tasting room is located in an old farm building east of Walla Walla. The tasting room has cement floors (winemaking occurs in this room), and bright lighting making it somewhat less atmospheric than it could be given the pretty surroundings.

Summary: Walla Walla Vintners makes wine with a remarkable consistency in quality and style. While known for their rich cabernets, Spring Release marks the return of two small release varietals that have been consistent favorites – the sangiovese and cabernet franc. As in past years, both these wines were excellent wines at reasonable prices.

Wines:

| Score | Name | Notes | \$ |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|------|
| * | Sangiovese Columbia Valley 2005 | Bright cherry. Spicy. A little earthiness. Slightly tart. A steal at this price. 83% Sangiovese (Dwelley, Kiona, Sundance, and Watkins Vineyards); 9% Malbec (Dwelley and Pepper Bridge Vineyards); 8% Syrah (Goose Ridge Vineyard). | \$22 |
| ** | Cabernet Franc Columbia Valley 2005 | Coffee. Rich. Coats the tongue. Classic Walla Walla Vintners. A dynamite wine that opens up and lingers. 76% Cab Franc (Cordon Grove, Dwelley, Sagemoor Farms, and Weinbau Vineyards); 24% Merlot (Cordon Grove, Killian, Spring Creek Vineyards). | \$25 |

Walla Walla Vintners

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|
| ** | Merlot Walla Walla Valley 2005 | Mocha. Chocolate covered cherries. Another superb wine that explodes on the palate. Still needs a little time. 84% Merlot; 8% Cab Franc; 8% Cabernet from Dwelley, Killian, LeFore, Pepper Bridge, Sagemoor Farms, Seven Hills, Spring Creek, and Weinbau Vineyards. | \$28 |
| ** | Cabernet Sauvignon Sagemoor Vineyard 2004 | Coffee. Chocolate. Cherry. Another excellent wine that has improved with some age. 76% Cabernet; 16% Merlot; 8% Cab Franc. | \$40 |
| ** | Washington State Cuvee 2004 | Coffee. Rich. A stunner. Hats off to this dynamite wine. The best of the ones tasted at this winery with very intense competition. 55% Merlot (Goose Ridge, Killian, and Spring Creek Vineyards); 25% Cabernet (Cold Creek, Goose Ridge, Dwelley Jones Vineyards); 10% Cab Franc (Cold Creek and Kendall Vineyards); 7.5% Syrah (Goose Ridge); 2.5% Malbec (Snipes Canyon Vineyards). | \$28 |

Walla Walla Vintners

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|---|-----------|
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2004 | Cherry. Chocolate. A little green. Give some time. 80% Cabernet (Cold Creek, Goose Ridge, Dwelley Jones, and Sagemoor Vineyards); 10% Merlot (Killian and Sagemoor Vineyards); 7% Cab Franc (Cold Creek Vineyard); 3% Malbec. | \$35 |



The farmhouse at Walla Walla Vintners.
Photo by James Decker.



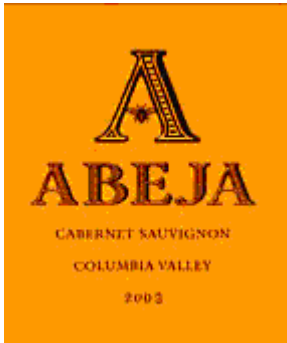
Owner: Schafer Family
Winemaker: Ned Norris & Anna Schafer
Cases: 1,300
Red Varietals: Syrah, Blends
Tasting fee: No
Where: Winery

Winery: ** ½ East of town ([67](#)), directly across from Walla Walla Vintners. The facility is small, but the surrounding area is beautiful on a nice day.

Summary: àMaurice is a winery dedicated to owner Tom Schafer's father, Maurice, whose signature adorns their label. Their viognier is one of Washington's best. Unfortunately, [PPS](#) made it hard to get a handle on the reds.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Viognier 2006 | Clear and crisp. Honeydew. Surprisingly subtle on the taste. Neutral barrel fermented and aged. | \$25 |
| + | Syrah 2005 | Wheat. Cashew. 100% Syrah from Lewis Vineyard. | \$34 |
| + | Premier Blend 2004 | Spicy. Oak. A little wheat. Mineral. An interesting finish. 49% Cabernet; 24% Merlot; 24% Cab Franc; 3% Malbec. | \$32 |



Owner: Ken and Ginger Harrison
Winemaker: John Abbott
Cases: 4,000
Red Varietals: Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah, Blends
Tasting fee: \$8, can be applied toward purchase
Where: Pete's, Leschi Market, City Cellars, Esquin

Winery: *** East of town ([66](#)). A gorgeous location with barrel room and bed and breakfast.

Summary: Established in 2000, Abeja has quickly become known for their spectacular cabernets. Find the cabernet a little more money than you like to spend? Look for this year's Bee Keeper's Blend which, at almost half the price, is (again almost) every bit as good. While the reds continue to impress, the chardonnay was a complete surprise. Having more or less given up on this varietal, Abeja's serves as a reminder that, in the right hands, it doesn't need to be a stick of butter.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|---|---|-----------|
| * | Chardonnay 2005 | An old-style acidic chardonnay. Hay. Lightly oaked. Nice and balanced. A very well made wine. | \$32 |
| * | Bee Keeper's Blend 2005 | White pepper. Almost buttery. A super even, easy drinking wine. A dynamite table wine. | \$21 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2004 | Wheat. Berry. Black pepper. Full on the taste. Still needs time but will be a very strong wine. | \$38 |

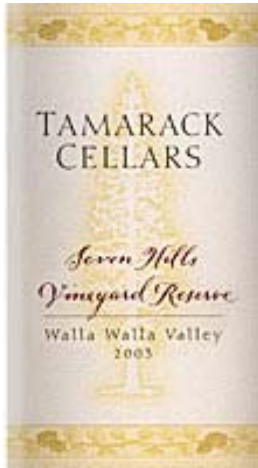
Abeja

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|-----------|
| * | Syrah Walla Walla Valley 2005 | Pepper. A good wine, although not a stunner. | \$32 |



Abeja's winery has beautiful grounds complete with a bed and breakfast.



Owner: Ron and Jamie Coleman
Winemaker: Ron Coleman
Cases: 5,800
Red Varietals: Cabernet, Merlot, Sangiovese, Cab Franc, Syrah, Blends
Tasting fee: \$5
Where: Esquin, Pete's

Winery: ** ½ Airport winery (54). Tamarack Cellars' tasting room is located in a restored World War II fire station. It's an open space with cement floors but does offer a little more charm than many of the airport locations.

Summary: While every year Tamarack's DuBrul Reserve is impressive, this year it was almost upstaged by their merlot. With grapes sourced from some of Washington's finest vineyards (Taptiel, Weinbau, DuBrul, and Bacchus), it is no surprise why. This is a great wine at a reasonable price that is also highly available in many local stores and supermarkets. Get thee hence!

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--------------------|--|-----------|
| + | Sangiovese 2005 | Cranberry. Raspberry. Rose hips. Tart. Reminds me of chewable vitamin C. 100% Sangiovese from Candy Mountain Vineyard, Columbia Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA). | \$25 |
| + | Firehouse Red 2005 | Rose hips. Malbec added to this year's blend. A good table wine. Grapes sourced from 15 vineyards spread across Washington's 7 AVAs. 31% Cabernet; 30% Syrah; 24% Merlot; 11% Cab Franc; 2% Sangiovese; 1% Malbec and Carmenere. | \$20 |

Tamarack Cellars

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Cabernet Franc 2005 | Wheat. A little chocolate. A smooth, even wine. 100% Cab Franc from Weinbau (Wahluke Slope AVA), DuBrul (Rattlesnake Hills AVA), and Destiny Ridge (Horse Heaven Hills AVA) Vineyards. | \$25 |
| ** | Merlot 2004 | Wheat. Berry. A little spicy. A smooth and even wine that is a spectacular value. Make sure to serve at a cool temperature. Taptiel (Red Mountain), Weinbau, DuBrul, and Bacchus (Columbia Valley) Vineyards. | \$28 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | Black pepper. Black cherry. A little chocolate. A full bodied wine. Heather Hill (Walla Walla), Taptiel, Clifton (Wahluke Slope), DuBrul, and Bacchus Vineyards. | \$32 |
| * | Syrah 2003 | Wheat. Berry. Spicy. A little tart on the taste but quite good. 97% Sagemoor Syrah. | \$28 |
| ** | DuBrul Reserve 2004 | Berry. Rich. Blueberry cereal. A nice wine. Give at least one year. | \$40 |



Outside Tamarack Cellars with the Blue Mountains in the distance.

Five Star Cellars

www.fivestarcellars.com



| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <u>Owner:</u> | David Huse |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Matt Huse |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Approx 3,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$5, refundable with purchase |
| <u>Where:</u> | Esquin, City Cellars, Champion Wine Cellars |

Winery: ** Airport winery ([56](#)). The winery has a nice bar-style tasting area.

Summary: Each event weekend, I arrive at Five Star Cellars excited to try their wines. A reasonably young winery, their cabernet and merlot have consistently received rave reviews. However, each time I leave a little disappointed. For a while I thought it was the Costco food selection. Have I become that high brow I wondered? I have in fact. However, I realized on this visit that was not the issue (at least in this case). It was the slight pours ([PPS](#)). While not uncommon for such a small winery, especially on an event weekend, it kills any tasting experience. So go to your local wine shop and pick yourself up a bottle if you want a proper taste. But on an event weekend...

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-----------------|--|-----------|
| + | Sangiovese 2005 | Strong, dark fruit. Cherry. A very good nose, although atypical of sangiovese. A little tart on the taste. Needs time. 96% Sangiovese; 4% Merlot from Neuffer and Pepper Bridge Vineyards. | \$28 |
| + | Syrah 2005 | A little spice. If you like Washington syrahs, give this one a try. 100% Syrah (66% Les Collines and 34% Spofford Station Vineyards). | \$30 |

Five Star Cellars

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Merlot Columbia Valley 2005 | Hints of chocolate. Blueberry syrup. Perhaps boysenberry. Good structure. Needs time to open up. The best of the group. 92% Merlot; 8% Cabernet from Seven Hills, Pepper Bridge, and Pheasant Run Vineyards. | \$32 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | Rich chocolate. Spice. Pepper. A great nose. 95% Cabernet; 5% Merlot from Cold Creek, Wallula, Canoe Ridge, and Dwelley Vineyards. | \$30 |
| + | Malbec 2005 | Green. Clove. 100% Malbec from Pepper Bridge Vineyards. | \$38 |



| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Zach Brettler |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Zach Brettler |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 1,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Syrah, Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$5, refundable with purchase |
| <u>Where:</u> | Esquin |

Winery: ** ½ Airport winery (57). As airport wineries go, SYZYGY offers a nice space with beautiful wood floors and lots of room to grow into.

Summary: SYZYGY, the term for the alignment of three celestial bodies, makes rich, full red wines.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Red Table Wine 2005 | Bottled February 1 st , 2007. Clove. Spice. A great nose. Overall a super wine for the money. 33% Syrah; 30% Cabernet; 23% Merlot; 12% Malbec. | \$22 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | Blackberry. Dark fruit. A little earthiness to it. Fig. Anise. Tomato leaf. Overall an excellent wine. From Sagemoor and Conner Lee Vineyards. | \$32 |

Buty Winery

www.butywinery.com



| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Caleb Foster and Nina Buty Foster |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Caleb Foster |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Approx 3,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$5 |
| <u>Where:</u> | Pete's |

Winery: * Airport winery ([58](#)). Very small room with a back room that functions as the winemaking nerve center. Just the wines ma'am.

Summary: Caleb Foster's Rediviva of the Stones is a wine unlike any I have tasted from Washington. Made from grapes whose vines reach down into a cobble-filled riverbed, this blend of cabernet and syrah hints of southern Rhone terroir. Alas, due to the 2004 freeze, very little of this wine was produced that year, and none survived to be sampled on Spring Release weekend.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-----------------------|---|-----------|
| + | Beast 2004 | A little green olive. Spicy. Tomato leaf. Somewhat sharp and tannic. | \$30 |
| + | Merlot-Cab Franc 2005 | Cola. Anise. Black currant. Violets. Needs to calm down a little still. | \$35 |

Note: [PPS](#) on the wines.

Stephenson Cellars



| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | David Stephenson |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | David Stephenson |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 1,300 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Syrah, Merlot |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Winery |

Winery: * Airport winery ([NA](#)).

Summary: Ever wonder what difference good wine glasses make? Find out for yourself. Start by pouring a sample into a milk glass. Next put it into a stubby wine glass. Finally, put it into a full-sized tulip-shaped glass. Make sure to put the exact same amount into each glass. Or don't, and see the difference this makes as well. The bottom line? Stemware matters. It doesn't need to be expensive, but it does need to be properly shaped. Unfortunately, the glass goblets Stephenson is using hardly gives their wine a chance.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------|---|-----------|
| . | Syrah 2004 | Musty. Artificial syrup on the nose. Seems like it might be flawed. | \$32 |
| - | Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | A little uneven on the nose. Canned vegetables. | \$28 |
| + | Red Table Wine | Some spice. Stewed tomatoes. A decent wine. 95% Syrah; 5% Cabernet. | NA |

Ensemble Cellars

www.ensemblecellars.com



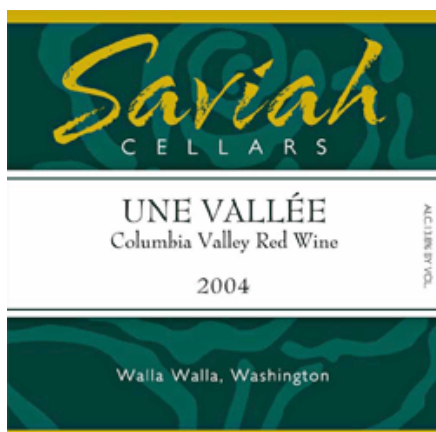
| | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Craig Nelsen |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Craig Nelsen |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 380 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$5 |
| <u>Where:</u> | Winery |

Winery: ** Airport winery ([52](#)).

Summary: Craig Nelsen is on a mission – to make one wine each year of the highest quality. While this may not seem unique, his approach is. Nelsen takes his best barrels from two or more successive vintages and blends them together into a high quality “non-vintage” wine. He names them sequentially (the current release is “Release Two”). The results are spectacular, competing with some of the best wines produced in the state.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|------------------|--|-----------|
| ** | Release Number 2 | Light and even. Berry. Subtle spice. Anise. A great, full taste. A blend of grapes from '03 (8%), '04 (59%), and '05 (33%). 71 % Cabernet from Sagemoor, Lodmell, Cold Creek, Canoe Ridge, DuBrul, and Neuffer Vineyards. 59% Merlot from Neuffer, Taptiel, and DuBrul Vineyards. 13% Cab Franc from DuBrul and Neuffer Vineyards. | \$48 |



Owner: Richard Funk & Family
Winemaker: Richard Funk
Cases: 4,200
Red Varietals: Syrah, Blends
Tasting fee: No
Where: Esquin, Broadway QFC, Pete's

Winery: ** ½ South of town ([36](#)). Saviah Cellars – located by the Oregon border – has a straightforward tasting room featuring nice artwork and a small barrel room.

Summary: The Jack, Saviah's red table wine, has previously been a non-vintage, low-priced standout. This year, Saviah released its first vintage Jack, denoted by the 2005 in the bottom right of the label picture. While the price has crept up, you can frequently find this wine on sale at the locations listed above. The star from Saviah this spring however was their first-ever reserve merlot. Still in the barrel (only two barrels were made), this is a wine to order direct from the winery as little, if any, will make it to retail stores. For their events, Saviah uses a measured pouring device. While this ensures that every pour is consistent, the wines would benefit from a slightly larger pour (see [PPS](#)).

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------|
| + | Star Meadow 2006 | Citrus. A good, crisp wine. | \$25 |
| + | Une Vallee 2005 | Very quiet, closed nose. Light vanilla. Hints of spice. Berry. Needs time to really show itself. | \$32 |
| + | The Jack 2005 | Cashew. Berry. An excellent value. 88% Merlot (Pepper Bridge); 6% Cabernet (McClellan Estate); 4% Carmenere; 2% Syrah. | \$18 |
| * | Syrah Walla Walla Valley 2005 | Spice. Berry. Almost chalky. Nose still fairly quiet. Needs time. | \$32 |

Saviah Cellars

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|-----------|
| * | Syrah Red Mountain 2005 | Light oak tones. Blackberry. Some licorice. Still needs time to open up but will be a great wine. | \$30 |
| * | Merlot Reserve 2005 Barrel Sample | Spice. Pepper. Chocolate. Great nose that will open up much further. This will be an exceptional wine. | \$35 |

Note: All wines need time to mature.

Va Piano Vineyards

www.vapianovineyards.com



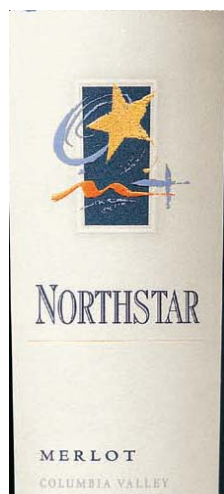
| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Justin and Liz Wylie |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Justin Wylie |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Approx 1,500 |
| <u>Red varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Syrah, Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$5 |
| <u>Where:</u> | Leschi Market |

Winery: *** ½ South of town ([38](#)). Take the turn in to Va Piano Vineyards and suddenly you are transported several thousand miles south to Napa. The rolling hills of vineyards. A winding road through them. A beautiful building at the end with a small, charming tasting room inside. This is what you want a visit to a winery to be. And the wines don't disappoint.

Summary: In 1999, Justin and Liz Wylie planted the vineyards that surround their Tuscan-styled tasting room. Last December showed the first results of their efforts in the form of barrel samples from their 2005 estate cabernet. The current plan is to release the first of the estate wines to wine club members later this year, while continuing to source grapes from other vineyards for wider distribution.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| + | Bruno's Blend II | Vanilla bean. Some earthiness. Cranberry. A full wine. 64% Syrah; 32% Merlot; 4% Cabernet. | \$23 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon (Lot 12) 2004 | Subtle anise. Spicy. White pepper. Cherry. A little puckering. 100% Cabernet (Lewis and Cold Creek Vineyards). | \$38 |
| * | Syrah 2005 | Classic syrah nose. Blackberry. Light smokiness. Light green pepper. | \$38 |



| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Ste. Michelle Wine Estates |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Northstar winemakers and Jed Steele |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Unknown |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Merlot, Cabernet, Syrah, Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | \$8, refundable with purchase |
| <u>Where:</u> | Esquin, Pete's |

Winery: **** South of town ([40](#)). Northstar boasts a beautiful facility in a shockingly beautiful location.

Summary: Northstar, a [Ste. Michelle Wine Estates](#) effort, was founded with the sole intention of creating a Right Bank-style merlot from Columbia Valley grapes. Having succeeded both in doing this and in establishing their brand, Northstar has expanded their offerings to include a Walla Walla Merlot, a blend wine, and now a syrah, cabernet, and cab franc. What happened to the merlot-only project? Not to worry. The merlot remains and the other varietals show consistency and depth. While the wines are spendy, they are all of high quality. My only complaint? The website says “Northstar Merlot wines are a collaboration between our winemakers and renowned California winemaker Jed Steele.” Okay, so who really makes this wine?

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|---|-----------|
| * | Stella Maris Columbia Valley Semillon 2005 | A nice, even wine. Slight oak to it. Citrus. Sweet lemon. Smoke. Mineral on the finish. Mostly Semillon. | \$20 |
| + | Stella Maris Red Wine Columbia Valley 2004 | Strong black pepper. Nice, light oak on the taste. A very good wine. 88% Merlot; 10% Cabernet; 2% Petit Verdot. | \$29 |
| * | Merlot Columbia Valley 2002 | Beautiful light spice aromas. Rhubarb. Blackberry on the taste. | \$41 |

Northstar Winery

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Merlot Columbia Valley 2003 | Tobacco leaf. Sweet tobacco on the finish. A little warm. 82% Merlot; 15% Cabernet; 3% Petit Verdot. Chosen from 17 vineyard and varietal lots. | \$41 |
| * | Merlot Walla Walla Valley 2003 | Bright raspberry. Earthy. Spice. Cherry. Even finish. Not my style, but a very good wine. 84% Merlot; 12% Cabernet; 4% Cab Franc. | \$60 |
| * | Syrah Columbia Valley 2003 | Green pepper. Classic Washington syrah nose. Lots of spice. Again, not my style, but a very good wine. 100% Syrah (71% Minnick; 29% Goose Ridge). First syrah from Northstar. | \$40 |



Northstar's
beautiful tasting
facility is
upstaged by the
surrounding
views.

Northstar Winery

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|--|---|-----------|
| * | Cabernet Franc Walla Walla Valley 2004 | Cranberry. Sour cherry. Probably the best of those tasted. 90% Cab Franc (Minnick); 7% Cabernet; 3% Petit Verdot. | \$40 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2003 | Chocolate. Wow what a rich tasting wine! First cabernet from Northstar. | \$60 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2004 | White pepper. Rich. Nutmeg. Cherry. Plum. Light toasted smell. Needs some time. A better wine than the 2003. 83% Cabernet; 9% Merlot; 8% Petit Verdot. | \$60 |

Note: All wines were slightly too warm. One could only imagine how much better they would have been as they were still impressive.

Rulo Winery

www.rulowinery.com



| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | Kurt and Vicki Schlicker |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Kurt Schlicker |
| <u>Cases:</u> | 3,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Syrah, Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Pete's |

Winery: ** South of town ([32](#)).

Summary: Rulo makes very solid value-priced wines.

Wines:

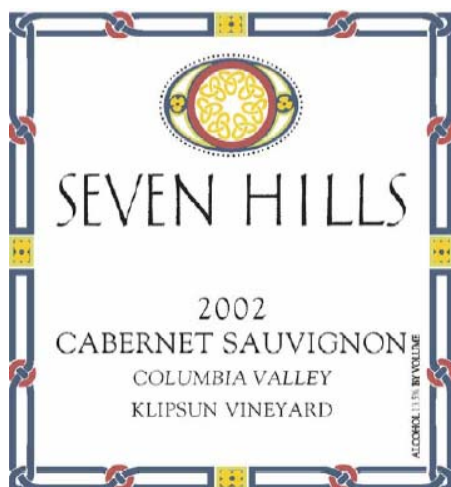
| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|---------------|---|-----------|
| + | Viognier 2005 | Peach. Lemon rind. A little mineral. Heavier than I like but still good. | \$18 |
| . | Combine 2005 | White grapefruit on the nose. Quite a zing. | \$15 |
| + | Rose 2006 | Ripe fruit. A good, refreshing rose. | \$15 |
| * | Syrca 2005 | Very smoky. Toasted. Stone. A great, evenly balanced wine. A steal at this price. | \$16 |
| * | Syrah 2004 | White pepper. Smoke. Spice. A little chocolate on the taste. Again, a steal. | \$20 |



Rulo Winery makes good reds at reasonable prices.

Seven Hills Winery

www.sevenhillswinery.com



| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| <u>Owner:</u> | McClellan and Hendricks families |
| <u>Winemaker:</u> | Casey McClellan |
| <u>Cases:</u> | Approx 10,000 |
| <u>Red Varietals:</u> | Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah, Blends |
| <u>Tasting fee:</u> | No |
| <u>Where:</u> | Esquin, Pete's |

Winery: *** Downtown winery (16). Of the downtown tasting rooms, Seven Hills is by far the most charming. Located in a 1904 lumber-planing mill, the winery boasts the same spaciousness and gorgeous floorboards of the Whitehouse-Crawford restaurant it is attached to. A walk downstairs takes you to their barrel storage area.

Summary: Seven Hills Winery was the surprise of the Holiday Barrel Tasting last December, boasting a series of expressive cabernets. Unfortunately, the new releases were largely misses. The malbec, which we also tried the night before at a restaurant, was uneven. The tempranillo, an unusual varietal for Washington, was not particularly impressive as a stand-alone wine. To check our work last December, we re-sampled the Ciel du Cheval and Pentad, both of which were as exceptional as we remembered. Bottom line, kudos for producing atypical varietals, but they have a ways to go to live up to Seven Hills' other offerings.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-----------------|--|-----------|
| + | Pinot Gris 2006 | Citrus. Nice smooth finish. A very good wine. | \$15 |
| * | Viognier 2006 | Pear. Coats the mouth. Not as much my style of a viognier but a great wine. 100% Viognier from Milbrandt Vineyard. | \$18 |
| - | Malbec 2005 | Harsh and green. Some chocolate. Overall, an uneven wine. Aged primarily in Hungarian oak. | \$28 |

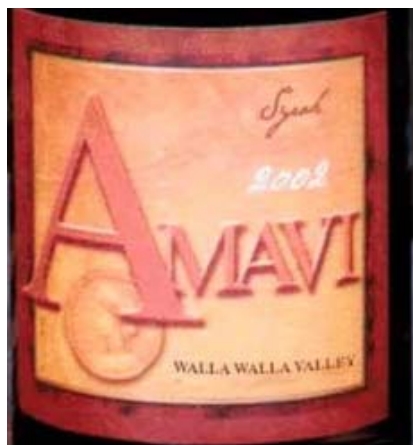
Seven Hills Winery

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|---|---|-----------|
| + | Tempranillo 2005 | Nutty. Tobacco. Cola. Slightly warm. Tart. Decanted 15 minutes. | \$28 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley 2004 | Prune. Spicy. Plum. Needs quite a bit of time still. 77% Cabernet (Dwelley Vineyard) and 23% field blend of Malbec, Carmenere, Petit Verdot (Minnick Vineyard). | \$30 |
| ** | Ciel du Cheval 2004 | Black licorice. Clove. All spice. Long, full finish. A spectacular, intense wine. | \$30 |
| ** | Pentad 2003 | Dark, dried fruit. Violets. Sweet, dried cranberry on taste. | \$40 |



Seven Hills Winery is located in a 1920's planing building adjacent to the Whitehouse-Crawford Restaurant.



Owner: Ray Goff, RG Hess, Eric McKibben, Jean François Pellet

Winemaker: Jean-François Pellet

Cases: Unknown

Red Varietals: Cabernet, Syrah

Tasting fee: \$5

Where: Pete's, Esquin

Winery: ** ½ Downtown winery (13). Amavi's tasting room is a reconstruction of a turn-of-the-century log cabin its owners saved from demolition.

Summary: Amavi's name comes from a combination of the Latin root words, "am" (love) and "vi" (life). Sharing a winemaker and vineyards with Pepper Bridge Winery, Amavi produces excellent red wines at reasonable prices.

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Semillon 2006 | Peach. A bright, good wine. | \$20 |
| + | Rose 2006 | Light, slightly brown color already. Bright, fresh fruit. Drink it now! 100% Cab Franc. | \$18 |
| * | Syrah 2005 | Wheat cereal. Light smoke. Toasted almond. Full. A great wine for the money. 47% Seven Hills; 15% Pepper Bridge; 32% Les Collines; 6% John Lefore Vineyards. | \$26 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | White pepper. Cereal. Toast. A super wine with a great, extended finish. A nice value. One of the best single star wines we've had. 76% Cabernet; 23% Merlot; 1% Cab Franc. | \$24 |
| ** | Syrah Seven Hills Vineyard 2004 | Dark, rich, wheaty wine. Spicy plum. Best wine of the group. | \$32 |
| * | Ice Wine 2005 | Strong pineapple. A rich, sweet wine. | \$32 |



Owner: John Edwards, Larry and Sally Thomason
Winemaker: Steve Lessard
Cases: 8,000
Red Varietals: Syrah, Cabernet, Merlot, Blends
Tasting fee: \$5, refundable with purchase
Where: Pete's, Esquin

Winery: ** ½ Downtown winery (11). Winery has a bar-style tasting room as well as a large barrel area utilized for tastings on event weekends.

Summary: Whitman has impressed before but never quite like this. The number of wines. The quality of the wines. Their 2005's were standouts. Smartly, Whitman offered futures for these wines which we took advantage of. A key element to Whitman's success at this event was serving their wines at the perfect temperature – sixty-three to sixty-five degrees. Ramona Verdegan added to the experience with her delicious homemade jellies (Ramona's Gourmet Kitchen, Stanfield OR on the web at www.ramonagourmet.com).

Wines:

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Merlot 2003 | Earthy. Spicy plum. Pepper. Slow, opens up, and what a finish! Great wine. | \$32 |
| * | Narcissa 2004 Barrel Sample | Wheat. Up front. Pepper. A little funkiness to it. A little cranberry on the finish. Can't wait for it to be released. 63% Cabernet, 13% Syrah, 12% Malbec, 10% Merlot, 2% Cab Franc. | NA |
| ** | Narcissa 2005 Barrel Sample | Spicy plum. Dark fruit. To be bottled in one week. Blackberry. Some blueberry. A great, great wine. 77% Cabernet. | NA |
| + | Viognier 2006 | Peach. A good wine. | \$19 |

Whitman Cellars

continued

| <i>Score</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Notes</i> | <i>\$</i> |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------|
| * | Del Rio 2004 | Funky, earthy, jammy wine. Marionberry. Tobacco. A great wine. | \$26 |
| * | Killer Cab 2005 Tank Sample | Pepper. Berry. Will be a very good value wine. | NA |
| ** | Cabernet 2005 Tank Sample | Anise. Plum. Blackberry. Tobacco. Chocolate. | NA |
| ** | Merlot 2005 Tank Sample | Tobacco. Chocolate. Dark fruit. Anise. Sweet smelling. | NA |
| * | Narcissa 2003 | Funky, more so than on its release. Tobacco. Pepper. Bittersweet chocolate. Wow has this wine grown up! 67% Cabernet; 20% Syrah; 8% Merlot; 5% Cab Franc. | \$24 |
| * | Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 | Spicy. Great wine. Slight funkiness to it. Blackberry. Wow! | \$36 |
| * | Syrah 2005 | Anise. Blueberry. Green pepper. Stone. Another superb wine. | NA |
| * | Merlot 2004 | Anise. Cherry. Very good wine. | NA |

References

Select Seattle-Area Wine Stores

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Seattle Address</u> | <u>Phone</u> | <u>Website</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|--|
| Esquin | 2700 4 th Ave S | 682.7374 | www.esquin.com |
| City Cellars | 710 N 45th St | 632-7238 | www.citycellar.com |
| Seattle Cellars | 2505 2nd Ave | 25.0850 | www.seattlecellars.com |
| McCarthy & Schiering | 2401 B Queen Anne Ave N | 282-8500 | www.mccarthyandschiering.com |
| Pete's Supermarket | 58 E. Lynn | 322-2660 | www.petes.cc |
| Madison Park Cellars | 4227 E. Madison | 323-9333 | |
| Champion Wine Cellars | 108 Denny Way | 284-8306 | www.championwinecellars.com |

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www.avalonwine.com
www.compasswines.com

Walla Walla Resources

www.wallawallawine.com
www.wallawalla.com
www.wallawalla.org
www.vineatrust.org