

# Washington Wine Report

## Focus – Kerloo Cellars and Rôtie Cellars

If you asked people to guess the biggest consumer of Walla Walla's [Va Piano Vineyard](#) grapes, they would be quite surprised by the answer. It is not, as you might think, Va Piano or any other Washington winery. In fact, it is not a winery at all. According to Ryan Crane, assistant winemaker at Va Piano Vineyards, the biggest consumer of these grapes is his dog Rigs, who accompanies him as he walks through the vineyards.



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Ryan Crane of Kerloo Cellars

Crane, along with Sean Boyd, represent the next generation of Walla Walla winemakers. Crane's [Kerloo Cellars](#) launches this month while Boyd's [Rôtie Cellars](#) launched earlier this year. Crane and Boyd share a parallel trajectory that led them to start their own wineries. Both left other careers to pursue a dream. Both work as assistant winemakers at established Walla Walla wineries. Both are young; both are making some of the most exciting new wines coming out of Walla Walla; and both are bound for success.

Crane was living in Seattle in 2006 when he decided to drop everything and move to Walla Walla with his wife Renee and Rigs. Like many winemakers, Crane was first exposed to the wine industry working at a restaurant. After a stint in wine sales at Columbia Distributing and some dabbling with winemaking, Crane decided to take the plunge in July of 2006. Crane describes the decision as a "now or never" moment.

Crane spent a good deal of time researching enology and viticulture schools. In making his decision to move to Walla Walla, he says "It basically came down to one question and that was where did I see the most opportunity, and without question it was Walla Walla." Once in Walla Walla, Crane studied at the local enology and viticulture program. After working a season at [Forgeron Cellars](#), he called up Justin Wylie – winemaker at Va Piano Vineyards – and inquired about a position at the winery. In April of 2007, Crane joined Va Piano as assistant winemaker. While he focused on Va Piano's wines, Crane also set his sights on starting his own winery.



Sean Boyd of Rôtie Cellars

Just down the road from Va Piano Vineyards where Crane works is [Waters Winery](#). Waters was founded in 2005 by Jason Huntley and Jamie Brown. While Waters makes excellent Cabernet, Viognier, and Rose, the winery is best known for its earthy, vineyard-designated Syrah. Sean Boyd serves as assistant winemaker at Waters. Like Crane, he decided on a life change and a move to Walla Walla.

Boyd, a geologist by trade, had been working as a field representative for an oil and gas exploration company when he started feeling the pressure of a busy travel schedule. While he loved the work – working seven days a week, seven months of the year - he and his wife Annie quickly realized with the birth of their daughter Marlee that the schedule would no longer work.

Boyd had been interested in wine and had collected it for some time before he decided he wanted to try to make wine. Until a friend invited him out to Walla Walla to check out the wine scene there, he had seldom tried Washington wines, preferring French wines instead. This trip, however, changed the course of Boyd's life. Boyd says after the trip he and his wife "decided we needed to focus on what we love in this world, and it always came back to family, friends, cooking and wine."

In 2005, Boyd and his family decided to move to Walla Walla. Similar to Crane, Boyd enrolled in the local community college program. His original plan was to start making wine after finishing school. However, when Boyd met Waters' Jamie Brown and [Saviah Cellars'](#) Richard Funk he accelerated that plan and started making wine immediately. Boyd says he was drawn to Brown's and Funk's dynamic personalities, personalities he says that are reflected in their wines. He became assistant winemaker at Waters later that year.



2007  
97% SYRAH | 3% VIOGNIER  
WASHINGTON STATE

One of Walla Walla's strengths as an emerging wine region is that it remains a small town. Everybody knows everybody. When you go to get your coffee in the morning you see the winemaker who was pouring you a glass at the winery the day before. As with Napa Valley in its early days, Walla Walla's many winemakers often work together and share their experience, equipment, and grapes. It is not surprising then that Crane and Boyd are not only making some of Walla Walla's most exciting new wines, they are also close friends.

Though Crane and Boyd both lived in the same neighborhood in West Seattle for a number of years, they did not meet until they moved to Walla Walla to pursue their dreams. After crossing paths numerous times at Va Piano and Waters, they eventually broke bread, shared some wine, and hit it off immediately. Crane describes Boyd as an "amazing person", and Boyd sometimes wonders if he and Ryan knew each other in a former life. The two are close enough that when Ryan and Renee bought a house, they had certain requirements. Crane says "till this day (Renee) says we bought it due to the beauty of the home but truth be told we bought it because Sean lives six houses down from us."

Although living near Sean Boyd was a requirement for the Cranes in choosing a house, in choosing a name for their winery, Ryan and Renee wanted a name that represented them and their story. After looking at a series of words related to Crane, they settled on Kerloo – the call of the crane. In terms of style, Crane says "My style with Kerloo wines is to craft varietally correct wines that showcase a 'sense of place' with respect to the vineyards in which they are grown. I want to create wines that are palate challenging across the board and hold true to the varietal."



While Crane has focused his first releases on single vineyard and single AVA wines, Sean Boyd has blended fruit from multiple different vineyard sources and AVAs for Rôtie Cellars' inaugural releases. In combining the fruit from different areas Boyd says "I think the complexity lies in Washington state as a whole not as individual AVA's. What makes them special are the vineyard managers coupled with terroir."

Rôtie Cellars' name comes from Côte-Rôtie, a French appellation in the Northern Rhône region. Boyd describes himself as a "Rhône guy" saying "I wanted to make the wines I love to drink." The Rhône region is located in Southern France and is comprised of two distinct regions, the North and the South. The Northern Rhône region produces Syrah – the only red grape allowed by the Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) – which is often co-fermented with the aromatic white grape Viognier. The Southern Rhône region produces red blends which, again by law, can include Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignan, and Cinsault.

Instantly likeable, Sean Boyd exudes excitement about winemaking. He also bears more than a passing resemblance to Saviah Cellar's Richard Funk in look, smile, and enthusiasm. Boyd comes off as down-to-earth and a man who is happy, humble, yet confident in his work.

Rôtie Cellars inaugural red releases include both a Northern Blend and a Southern Blend. In creating these wines, Boyd says "I wanted to focus on Rhône varietals in Washington and making them in a traditional, natural, low oak, low

alcohol, balanced way.” Boyd’s style shows restraint, letting the fruit and land speak largely for themselves. Rôtie Cellars’ Northern Blend is 97% Syrah co-fermented with 3% Viognier. The wine has a thrilling nose with raspberries and bittersweet chocolate. The Southern Blend, by comparison, is a blend of Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvedre. The wine is laden with earth and minerals surrounded by violets and raspberries. Both wines are standouts.



Boyd with daughter Marlee

For these wines, Boyd used vineyards in the Walla Walla, Horse Heaven Hills, and Columbia Valley AVAs. Boyd looks for each vineyard to add something different to the final product. Alder Ridge, for example, appeals to Boyd for its chalky, heavy tannins. Boyd credits Alder Ridge, located in the Horse Heaven Hills AVA, as the impetus for starting Rôtie Cellars, saying “The vineyard manager at Alder Ridge started this whole winery by agreeing to sell me two to three acres of Grenache.”

Like Rôtie Cellars, Kerloo is also launching its winery with two reds, in this case, two Syrahs from the 2007 vintage. The first is from Les Collines Vineyard. Les Collines lies in the foothills of the Blue Mountains east of Walla Walla. With elevations as high as 1,380 feet and higher-than-average rainfall for the area, Les Collines exhibits a unique terroir and produces grapes that go in to some of the most exciting Syrahs being produced in Washington including [Gramercy](#) and [Trust Cellars](#). Kerloo Cellars’ 2007 Les Collines Syrah has an exuberant nose perfumed with violets, lavender, and fresh berry fruit matched with a velvet mouthfeel. Crane describes the 2007 Les Collines Syrah as “an aromatic

powerhouse that ‘smacks’ around your senses from the first time you swirl and sniff.”

The second wine is the 2007 Walla Walla Valley Syrah. This Syrah is 80% from Va Piano Estate Vineyard and 20% from Les Collines. Though only about five miles away from Les Collines, the Syrah from Va Piano Vineyard is considerably different, exhibiting more power. Whereas the Les Collines is lithe on the palate, the Walla Walla Syrah displays a dense flavor profile and a rich, compelling texture. Crane says of the 2007 Walla Walla Syrah “the chalky gritty tannins are much more aggressive but in balance with the perfect acidity to hold the wine together and be age worthy.”

Like Boyd, Ryan Crane is passionate when talking about wine. A former wrestler, Crane is wiry, affable, and intelligent. He describes himself as a research junkie and his knowledge of winemaking is impressive, equally conversant in both the science and the art.



Renee Crane (front) works the bottling line

While Crane and Boyd are excited about their first releases, both are looking to the future. Crane is perhaps most excited about his 2008 Tempranillo which is still in the barrel. While a few wineries have had success with this varietal, it has yet to come in to its own in Washington. Sampling the 2008 Tempranillo, whose fruit was sourced from Stone Tree Vineyard on the Wahluke Slope and Les Collines Vineyard, shows reason to be excited. Although Kerloo has plans to add a Cabernet and Malbec in the future, Crane says Walla Walla Syrah will always be the focus of what he does.

Boyd, on the other hand, is most excited about his 2008 Grenache. This wine, which comes from Alder Ridge Vineyard like the 2007, will provide the backbone for the 2008 Southern Blend. Although fairly quiet when sampled from the barrel, the wine is layered on the palate and shows promise. Boyd doesn’t envision any major expansions or changes to his lineup in the near future and plans to keep the winery the same size. However, for the 2008 vintage he will have a “Vin de Pays” – a French term meaning “country wine” – that will be a mixture of Syrah and Mourvedre.

Crane and Boyd have played an integral role in each other's new wineries, assisting where needed as well as offering



Alder Ridge Grenache vines

advice and encouragement. While both are making wine with quite different styles, like brothers, both are as proud of what the other has accomplished as what each has accomplished individually. Describing the Kerloo wines, Sean Boyd says the wines are "great representations of what Walla Walla Valley wines are about – distinct and seductive." While impressed with Kerloo's inaugural releases, he says he "cannot wait" for Crane's Tempranillo. Crane says of Rôtie Cellars "Sean is so dialed into his blocks that his wine sincerely speaks to you...His inaugural vintage '07 is not only an extremely well crafted wine, but carries beautiful weight, elegant balance and the perfect structure of fruit, acid

and tannins. "

In addition to having different styles from each other, Crane and Boyd also have brought approaches to their new wineries that differ from the wineries where they are currently employed. Some differences are small. Some are large.



Rigs awaiting the 2009 harvest

Crane uses different yeast than Va Piano for his wine. He also prefers to blend his wines after they have aged in the barrel, whereas Va Piano winemaker Justin Wylie prefers to blend his wines up front and then age them in the barrel. Waters Winery has focused much of its attention on single vineyard Syrah and varietal offerings. Boyd prefers sourcing fruit from a number of different vineyards, blending them, and producing non-varietally labeled wines. Wine from all of these wineries are distinct, yet all distinctly Washington.

As if starting a winery were not enough, Sean and Annie's daughter Marlee will soon have a playmate as Ryan and Renee are expecting their first child in December. One thing is sure. They won't have to walk far to play together.

While both Crane and Boyd have been hard at work on their new wineries, Crane's dog Rigs has been forced to spend most of the year away from the vineyard following two knee surgeries. Crane jokes "Cayuse has a label called the Bionic Frog, but remember I now have the Bionic Dog with two steel plates in his rear legs!" On the mend, Rigs is now back walking the vineyards with Crane, just in time, Crane adds, for this year's harvest.

## Wines:

### **Kerloo Cellars Les Collines Syrah 2007 \$32 ★★**

An exuberant nose perfumed with violets, lavender, and fresh berry fruit with a layer of light game underneath. On the palate, a deft display of vibrant fruit with a velvet mouthfeel. A zing of acidity draws together this exceptional wine. Les Collines Vineyard Blocks 30 & 50. 14.4% alcohol. 70 cases produced.

### **Kerloo Cellars Walla Walla Valley Syrah 2007 \$32 ★★**

On the nose, a bouquet of lilacs sprinkled with a dusting of earth. Fruit aromas, along with touches of spice are there, but are brooding in the background. As the wine opens, the fruit and light game notes emerge. A dense flavor profile and a rich, compelling texture. An excellent wine that promises to continue to improve in the bottle. 80% Va Piano Block 4; 20% Les Collines Block 30. 14.7% alcohol. 115 cases produced.

### **Rôtie Cellars Southern Blend 2007 \$35 ★**

A drop dead gorgeous nose with earth and mineral aromas surrounded by violets and a heaping of raspberries. Beautiful acid balance with a focus on the fruit and the land. The oak is there but is far out of the way. A long finish caps it off. 55% Grenache; 35% Syrah; 10% Mourvedre. 14.2% alcohol. 400 cases produced.

### **Rôtie Cellars Northern Blend 2007 \$35 ★**

Dark in color. Beautiful fruit (raspberries), bittersweet chocolate and exhilarating seed aromas on a thrilling nose. An intricate taste that plays effortlessly across the palate. A long, lingering finish that hangs and hangs. 97% Syrah co-fermented with 3% Viognier. 14.2% alcohol. 400 cases produced.

Note: Both Kerloo Cellars wines were originally sampled in the barrel. Sampled after bottling, both are tight and need additional bottle time or twelve plus hours decanting.

Photos courtesy of Kerloo Cellars and Rôtie Cellars.

## **Wine Rating System**

- ★★ 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.
- ★ An excellent wine. Convince a friend to buy some and share it with you.
- + A good wine. Worth drinking.
- A decent wine. Drink it if you must.
- A flawed wine. Refuse this wine if served.
- NR** Not Rated. Given to wines too young to be properly evaluated.

This system is a deliberate departure from the popular, but somewhat harmful, 100 point system. For you addicts out there, the (rough) correspondence to Wine Spectator's system is: ★★ (92-100); ★ (89-91); + (86-88); • (80-85); - (< 80).