

Washington Wine Report

2008 Washington Wines of the Year

Selection During 2008, I sampled over 500 Washington wines. While this might seem like an extraordinary number, given that there are more than 500 wineries in Washington making, say, ten wines a piece, it is less than one tenth of the wine being made in the state. But that is the joy of Washington wine. There is so much good wine out there.

In selecting these wines, I evaluated based on score, price, and my overall excitement about the wine. In terms of excitement, I focused on wines that stood out in the weeks and months after I sampled them. I included wines that I rated during the 2008 year regardless of whether they were released in 2008 or 2007. The majority were released this year, and all were available on the shelves in 2008. I tried to only list one wine per winery. However, I made some exceptions, particularly in the case of Long Shadows.



Sean Sullivan
www.wawinereport.blogspot.com

There are, of course, many excellent wineries and wines that I have not been able to visit and sample. Of note, I did not sample any of the new releases from top producers Cayuse and Leonetti. While their omission from any list of top Washington wines may seem criminal, I will gladly serve my time for this offense and drink these wines at the end of my sentence when they have some bottle age on them.

In terms of my top wines of 2008, there was Quilceda Creek 2005 Cabernet, Corliss Estates 2003 Cabernet, and everything else. The wines from these two wineries were so exceptional that they are quite simply in a class by themselves. I will have a write-up on Corliss Estates in my Walla Walla Holiday Barrel Tasting 2008 Report due out in January 2009.

No. 1 Quilceda Creek 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley \$115 ★★



An outrageous, superb nose with tar, rich black fruit, cracked black pepper, light toast, and a little dark chocolate and truffles. An exceptional, lithe body with an extended finish. More refined than the 2005 Red Wine, especially on the tannins. This wine is also earthier than the Red. I thought about this wine literally for weeks after trying it. 97% Cabernet; 3% Merlot. Champoux, Galitzine, Klipsun, and Taptiel vineyards. 3,400 cases produced.

No. 2 Corliss Estates Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 \$75 ★★†



Tons, literally tons of black cherry along with earth and bittersweet chocolate. This is an undulating wine that is perfectly balanced and has a beautiful finish. It is a super thick, chewy wine that takes multiple swallows to consume and then lingers on and on forever. A perfect mixture of subtlety and strength. This is a wine you will dream about when you go to sleep.

No. 3 Ensemble Release No. 3 \$45 ★★



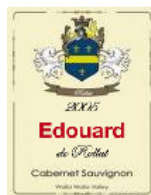
A rich wine marked by blackberry, anise, clove, and chocolate aromas. An even, refined mid-palate with a long finish. Bottled in March 2008. 66% Cabernet (Sagemoor, Lodmell, Cold Creek, Red Mountain, Canoe Ridge, DuBrul vineyards); 18% Merlot (DuBrul, Neuffer, Sagemoor Weinbau vineyards); 13% Cab Franc; 3% Petit Verdot. 56% 2003; 31% 2006; 13% 2004.

No. 4 Long Shadows Chester Kidder 2004 \$50 ★★



A perfect balance of body and structure along with beautiful tannins. The nose is exceptional, loaded with carob, chocolate covered berries, white pepper, clove, spices, and earth. 58% Cabernet; 29% Syrah; 10% Cab Franc; 3% Petit Verdot. 14.7% alcohol. 1,797 cases produced.

No. 5 Chateau Rollat Edouard de Rollat 2005 \$62 ★★



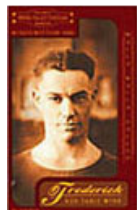
A superb nose with cinnamon, spice, chocolate, and black pepper. A pleasing earthiness on the taste with a good structure and finish. Overall a very impressive effort. 75% Cabernet; 20% Merlot; 5% Cab Franc. Seven Hills and Pepper Bridge vineyards. 14.2% alcohol.

No. 6 Long Shadow Pirouette 2005 \$50 ★★



A rich and luscious wine with nicely balanced tannins. Toasted scents accent spice, bright fruit, and chocolate covered cherry aromas. A great, full taste on a gripping wine. 57% Cabernet; 20% Merlot; 14% Syrah; 5% Malbec; 4% Cab Franc. 14.6% alcohol. 1,693 cases produced.

No. 7 Spring Valley Frederick 2005 \$50 ★★



Rich chocolate wrapped around bright red fruit. A great nose with just a touch of earthiness. An age-worthy wine that is perfectly polished with beautifully integrated tannins. 54% Cabernet; 40% Merlot; 5% Cab Franc; 1% Petit Verdot. Aged 20 months in 100% French oak, 56% new. 15.9% alcohol. 1,300 cases produced.

No. 8 Poet's Leap Late Harvest Botyris Riesling 2005 \$50 ★★†



White grapefruit covered with sugar marks a stunning wine that succeeds at being sweet without being cloying or over the top. This is a beautiful, refreshing dessert wine. 11% alcohol. 15% residual sugar. 56 cases produced.

No. 9 Owen Roe DuBrul Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 \$60 ★★



A rich, dark gorgeous nose that is loaded with fruit along with anise and spice. As the wine opens up, espresso comes through very strongly after about 15 minutes. One of the most evolving noses of any wine I have had. On the taste, there is coffee and touches of chocolate. A pretty, elegant wine that is very refined but has a lot of structure. The finish is outrageously long. 14.2% alcohol. 5,976 cases produced.

No. 10 Mark Ryan Water Witch Klipsun Vineyard 2006 \$45 ★★



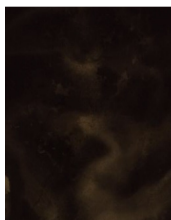
The wine leaps from the glass with lots of spice, dark fruit, floral notes and loads of anise. A big, fruit forward taste and gripping tannins wrapped around a black cherry core. Give at least 2 to 3 years. 58% Cabernet; 42% Merlot. 14.3% alcohol. 375 cases produced.

No. 11 K Vintners Morrison Lane Syrah Walla Walla Valley 2006 \$45 ★★†



A beautiful, complex nose with black and green olives and olive pits mixed with light, high floral aromas and anise. If it sounds strange, it is, but it works. This wine has a lot of power and depth on the taste. The wine shows remarkable variability in the aromas both when it is swirled and not swirled.

No. 12 21 Grams Walla Walla Valley 2005 \$125 ★★



Bright red fruit with cinnamon, tobacco, and spice. A very nicely put together wine with an exceptional mid-palate and finish. 89% Cabernet; 11% Petit Verdot. Pepper Bridge, Cold Creek, and Sagemoor vineyards. 80 cases produced.

No. 13 Andrew Will Champoux Vineyard 2006 \$59 ★★



A light, almost elusive nose with pencil shavings, ink, floral notes, and an almost syrupy component. Gripping tannins on a taste that packs a punch. Give this wine 3-4 years in the bottle minimum before consuming. 57% Cabernet; 35% Cab Franc; 8% Merlot. 14.6% alcohol. 1,030 cases produced.

No. 14 Gorman Winery The Bully Red Mountain 2006 \$42 ★★



Blackberry and other dark fruit mix with black licorice, chocolate, and spice on this subtle, restrained wine. Smooth and becomes bigger as it opens up and reveals an extended finish. 80% Cabernet; 10% Merlot; 10% Petit Verdot. 15% alcohol. 400 cases produced.

No. 15 Saviah Cellars Malbec 2005 \$30 ★



What a whopper! A rich nose loaded with spice and chocolate with hints of toast. An exceptional wine that coats the palette. Has evolved quite a bit since I first tasted it in the barrel. McClellan Estates Vineyard. 25 cases produced.

No. 16 Cougar Crest Anniversary Cuvee 2005 \$32 ★★



A full, rich wine in a classic Cougar Crest style that is marked by spice, wheat, and milk chocolate. An excellent finish that lingers on. 44% Cabernet; 38% Merlot; 18% Petit Verdot. Cougar Hills and Stellar vineyards.

No. 17 Amavi Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 \$28 ★★



A gorgeous wine marked by dark fruit, cinnamon, and clove. Silky in texture, this wine opens up and expands beautifully on the palate with a finish that sails on and on. Although best after decanting thirty-plus minutes, it showed remarkably well even on first pour. 76% Cabernet; 18% Merlot; 5% Syrah; 1% Cab Franc. Pepper Bridge, Seven Hills, Les Collines, and LeFore vineyards. 14.1% alcohol. 3,941 cases produced.

No. 18 Columbia Crest Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 \$27 ★



The nose is less fruit forward with more of a spice component, particularly cigar box and black licorice. The fruit, particularly blackberry, is layered under the spice. The nose shows light coffee grounds as the wine opens up. This wine, at least initially, has a much bigger body than the Owen Roe 2005 which was sampled at the same time. Black licorice on the taste and beautifully refined tannins that glide across the tongue. Needs 2+ years to be at its best. 14.2% alcohol. 5,500 cases produced.

No. 19 Chateau Ste Michelle Boreal Syrah 2005 \$30 ★★



A beautiful Rhone-style wine that is exceptionally smooth with a good mid-palate and finish, and a nose that is like placing a vase of Stargazer Lilies on the table.

No. 20 Va Piano Semillon 2007 \$22 ★★



A medium-bodied wine that is perfectly textured with just the right balance of sweetness. Hints of Dijon and lemon and a long finish.

No. 21 Bunnell Family Cellars À Pic Stonetree Vineyard 2005 \$28 ★★



A perfectly put together wine with a beautiful taste and finish. The nose is surprisingly subtle with light barbequed green pepper aromas. Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Cinsault. 200 cases produced.

No. 22 Dumas Station Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 \$25 ★



Sour cherry and fig predominate on the nose with touches of sweet oak. A lush, medium-bodied wine with a slow attack that expands and continues to a satisfying, blackberry finish. 300 cases produced.

No. 23 Tamarack Sagemoor Reserve 2005 \$50 ★★



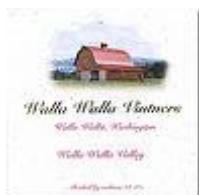
Wheat, raspberries, and bright red fruit wind through this wine. An exceptional mid-palate and a tart, extended finish.

No. 24 McCrea Non Sequitor 2006 \$20 ★



A gigantic, full-bodied wine loaded with spice and dark spicy fruit. Coats the tongue and has a long, long finish with raspberries, mineral, and a pleasing tartness. Overwhelmingly outsized for the price. A steal. 14.8% alcohol. 33% Grenache; 31% Syrah; 18% Mourvèdre; 15% Cinsault; 3% Counoise. 312 cases produced.

No. 25 Walla Walla Vintners Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla 2005 \$36 ★



A classic Walla Walla Vintners wine with chocolate covered cherries alongside s'mores and faint hints of wheat. Good and tart on the finish. 79% Cabernet Sauvignon (Dwelley, Lefore, Pepper Bridge, Sagemoor, Seven Hills, and Tokar Mill Creek vineyards); 6% Cab Franc; 6% Merlot; 3% each Carmenere, Malbec and Petit Verdot. 731 cases produced.

No. 26 Whitman Narcissa Red 2004 \$24 ★★



Jumps out of the glass with blackberry layered with black pepper. A richly textured, luscious wine that is packed with fruit and spice. 63% Cabernet; 13% Syrah; 12% Malbec; 10% Merlot; 2% Cab Franc.

No. 27 Morrison Lane Nebbiolo 2003 \$35 ★



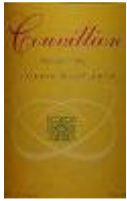
A complex nose with fig, spice, and mature red wine aromas. An excellent taste and an extended finish with a touch of spice at the end.

No. 28 Five Star Merlot 2006 \$32 ★



The nose evolves continuously with an almost sweet aspect with candied fruit, rose hips, and kisses of chocolate. Beautifully refined with silky tannins. 98% Merlot; 2% Malbec. 14.2% alcohol.

No. 29 Couvillion Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 \$25 ★



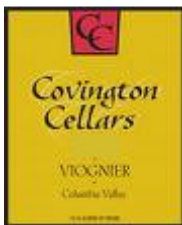
Winemaker Jill Noble follows up her inaugural release with a strong second vintage. A pleasing spiciness topped with black pepper, chocolate, and oak notes. Anise shows through as the wine opens up. A very well put together wine with a good body and a tight finish.

No. 30 Novelty Hill Roussanne Stillwater Creek 2006 \$22 ★



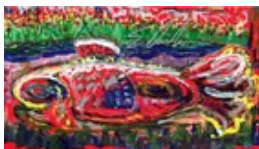
The nose is marked by mineral and floral notes. There is an almost spicy quality to both the nose and taste. The taste is smooth and opulent. Some oak shows through on the nose and mid-palate as the wine warms up. 100% Roussanne. 13.5% alcohol. 485 cases produced.

No. 31 Covington Cellars Viognier 2007 \$20 ★



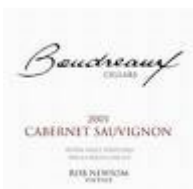
Mineral, peach, and melon on the nose and taste. The wine has a fairly heavy, almost syrupy, quality. It is a fairly sweet wine, almost a dessert style. 13.5% alcohol. 100% Viognier fermented in stainless steel. 188 cases produced.

No. 32 Dunham Double River Syrah 2005 \$65 ★★†



A meaty, gamey, beautiful Rhone style wine with just hints of menthol. The taste is light and lively wrapping power and beauty into one. An exceptional effort.

No. 33 Boudreaux Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 \$50 ★



A big nose with cola, light soy notes, fig, and spice. A chewy wine that needs lots of time to grow up but will be exceptional. Consider extended decanting if drinking in the near future. 80% Cabernet; 6% Merlot 4% Cab Franc; 3% Malbec; 3% Petite Verdot; 2% Syrah; 2% Sangiovese. Alcohol 13.5%. 1400 cases produced.

No. 34 Gilbert Cellars Estate Syrah 2005 \$26 ★



A classic Washington syrah with aromas of green pepper and the smell of wood after the campfire has gone out. Opens up and expands on the mid-palate with a good finish. 260 cases produced.

No. 35 Januik Red Wine 2006 \$20 ★



Spice, dark fruit, and mineral on an exceptionally even wine with rich, smooth tannins. Pencil shavings on the nose and taste. 43% Merlot; 23% Cabernet; 15% Syrah; 11% Cab Franc; 6% Petit Verdot; 2% Malbec. 14.2% alcohol.

No. 36 Grae Eagle Red Wing 2005 \$25 ★



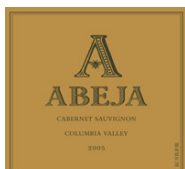
Packed full of dark fruit with baking spices, licorice, and cola. The wine is beautifully smooth and full with soft tannins and an extended finish. A very impressive wine for the money. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. 14.8% alcohol. 916 cases produced.

No. 37 Betz La Serenne Syrah 2006 \$60 ★



A light nose with blueberry and cured meat. Stunningly evenly balanced and smooth with pleasantly restrained fruit and an almost creamy texture. A very long finish. 525 cases produced. 14.5% alcohol.

No. 38 Abeja Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 \$42 ★



A big nose with wheat, smoked meat, black pepper, and spice. An exceptional mid-palate and a long finish. 85% Cabernet; 8% Cab Franc; 7% Merlot (Heather Hills, Sagemoor, Hedges Red Mountain, and Wallula vineyards).

No. 39 Trust Syrah 2006 \$28 ★



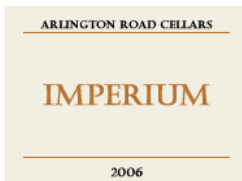
Blackberry, wheat, white pepper, and spice alongside other berry aromas. A nice dry, medium-bodied wine.

No. 40 Syncline Cellars Subduction Red Columbia Valley 2007 \$18 ★



A beautiful, rich nose with spices, blueberries, black currants, and floral aromas. Round and lush on the palate. 35% Syrah; 21% Mourvedre; 16% Grenache; 15% Cinsault; 13% Counoise. 14.1% alcohol. 1,750 cases produced.

No. 41 Arlington Cellars Imperium Riesling 2006 \$28 ★★



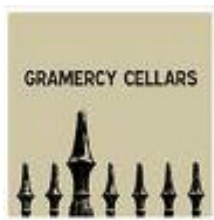
This wine delivers. It is almost completely clear in color. On the nose, the wine has honeydew melon and a very faint aroma of cut grass. On the taste, there is just a touch of sweetness. An absolutely delicious wine.

No. 42 Rulo Syrca 2006 \$18 ★



Light smoke and nuts wrapped around a black cherry core. Nice and even on the palate.

No. 43 Gramercy Syrah Lagniappe 2005 \$32 ★



A light to medium-bodied wine with a great, distinctive nose with mineral, earth, and stone. Opens up nicely with a good finish. 97% Syrah; 3% Viognier.

No. 44 Woodward Canyon Estate Sauvignon Blanc 2007 \$24 ★†



Clear in color revealing the lack of oak used during fermentation and maturation. The wine has a pleasing nose with grapefruit, hay, and lemon. An extremely enjoyable wine that is crisp and easy on the palette. 100% Sauvignon Blanc. 13.4% alcohol. 324 cases produced.

No. 45 L'Ecole Perigee Seven Hills Vineyard 2005 \$49 ★



Rich blackberry, espresso, and toffee aromas with silky tannins. 56% Cabernet; 36% Merlot; 8% Cab Franc. 14.5% alcohol. 1,594 cases produced.

No. 46 Syzygy Saros 134 Columbia Valley 2005 \$45 ★



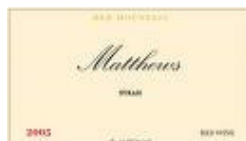
A pleasing nose with vanilla, white pepper, and spice. Up front on the palate and then settles down and sails. 44% Tempranillo; 44% Malbec; 12% Cabernet. Conner Lee, Stone Valley, Sagemoor vineyards. 217 cases produced.

No. 47 Ardenvoir Semillon 2007 \$22 ★

No Picture
Available

Touches of lemon and yeast on the nose. The taste is marked by a hint of honey, a beautiful smoothness, and a crisp, tart finish. 13% alcohol.

No. 48 Matthews Red Mountain Syrah 2005 \$50 ★



A complex nose with tobacco, dried prunes, a bit of licorice and some dark spices. This is a full-bodied wine with a great mid-palate. Overall an excellent effort. 14.9% alcohol. 823 cases produced.

No. 49 Forgeron Cellars Zinfandel 2005 \$30 ★



Wheat and nut aromas. A great medium-bodied wine. 100% Zinfandel (Alder Ridge, Clifton & Les Collines vineyards). 14.6% alcohol. 485 cases produced.

No. 50 DeLille Cellars Chaleur Estate Blanc 2007 \$34 ★



Lots of lemon and toasty, spicy oak aromas. Smooth and dry on the palate with light pineapple and citrus. A creamy mouthfeel without seeming over-oaked. 61% Sauvignon Blanc; 39% Semillon. Boushey, Sagemoor, and Klipsun vineyards.

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.

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); + (85-88); • (80-84); - (< 80).

† This symbol next to the rating indicates the review will be published in the upcoming Walla Walla Holiday Barrel Tasting 2008 Report due out in January 2009.