

Magazine Archives: Dec. 31, 2015 - Jan. 15, 2016



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10 to Watch in Washington

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NATIVE SUN / PURPLE STAR

Kyle Johnson hit a grand slam with his second vintage of Native Sun. After a debut 2009 that attacked the palate with too much tannin, the 2010 stepped up to the plate with a stunning expression of Red Mountain Cabernet. Johnson's deft hand at winemaking, honed at the defunct Olsen Vineyard winery, tames the region's burly tannins. Once a viticulturist at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Johnson hung out his own shingle when Olsen's owners offered him and his wife the space for their own label. Native Sun uses grapes from Kiona's Heart of the Hill vineyard, fermenting them with wild yeasts and punching down the caps by hand. Their second label, Purple Star, uses barrels that don't make the cut for Native Sun and other purchased grapes for a line of wallet-friendly regional blends.

- 94 **NATIVE SUN** Cabernet Sauvignon Red Mountain 2010 \$65
90 **PURPLE STAR** Cabernet Sauvigno Columbia Valley 2012 \$18

ÀMAURICE

It didn't take long for àMaurice wines to start appearing on top-tier wine lists. The winery's signature style aims for high acidity and high-toned character, focusing on secondary notes to maintain delicacy. At 1,475 feet, the Schafer family site, planted in 2006, is one of the highest-elevation vineyards in the Walla Walla AVA, comprising 13 acres of Bordeaux and Rhône grape varieties. A second range of wines comes from well-established vineyards throughout the Columbia Valley, but the stars are the estate wines for their vivid [avors and presence. The àMaurice Syrah Walla Walla Valley Fred 2012 is vividly expressive, with clotted cream-accented black currant, blueberry and boysenberry [avors gaining momentum as they play against gently nubby tannins.

- 94 **ÀMAURICE** Syrah Walla Walla Valley Fred 2012 \$42
94 **ÀMAURICE** William Ivey Columbia Valley 2012 \$40

EIGHT BELLS

Three home winemakers decided to go pro in 2009, parlaying their experience making wine in their garages into a promising venture that has been producing Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah from Washington and Pinot Noir from Oregon. Tim Bates, Andy Shepherd and Frank Michiels, who worked at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Seattle, got access to some outstanding vineyards through the Boeing Wine Club and took courses through Washington State University's enology extension program. They're still getting good grape sources, with their top wines hailing from Red Willow Vineyard, a venerable site in Yakima Valley.

- 92 **EIGHT BELLS** Syrah Yakima Valley 8 Clones Red Willow Vineyard 2012 \$32
91 **EIGHT BELLS** Cabernet Sauvignon Yakima Valley David's Block Red Willow Vineyard 2011 \$35

B. LEIGHTON

Brennon Leighton cut his winemaking teeth at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates and made some Top 100-worthy wines at Efeste before joining Charles Smith in 2012. In part he was hired to bring experience with white wines to a new Chardonnay project. That became Sixto (see below), but as part of the deal, Smith also offered Leighton and his longtime winemaker, Andrew Latta, a chance to create their own label, setting aside grapes from sources the winery was already using. Latta's wine is still aging, but Leighton's, under the B. Leighton label, is out. The wines are distinctive for their open textures and pure fruit character at the center. The lineup, all from Olsen Brothers Vineyard in Yakima Valley, includes a Petit Verdot, a Syrah and a Grenache.

93 B LEIGHTON Syrah Yakima Valley Olsen Brothers Vineyard 2013 \$45

92 B LEIGHTON Petit Verdot Yakima Valley Olsen Brothers Vineyard 2013 \$55

LUKE

Seattle native Thomas Vogege launched Zero One Vintners in 2006 with his wife, pivoting from a career selling wines for the likes of Gallo and Robert Mondavi in California. Donning his winemaker cap he began establishing relationships with growers in the Columbia and Walla Walla valleys. His new label, Luke, focuses on Wahluke Slope. The Columbia River wraps around a long ridge in this subregion of Columbia Valley. Some locals nickname it "Luke," but by any name it's known for generous and expressive Syrahs and Cabernets. These two varieties make up this krst release, a blend from Milbrant's Clifton Hill and Clifton Bluff vineyards. Vogege hopes to grow the brand, while keeping prices accessible. -Augustus Weed

90 LUKE Cabernet Sauvignon Wahluke Slope 2012 \$25

PASSING TIME

Former NFL quarterbacks Dan Marino and Damon Huard are the proprietors of this new label. Back in 2003, Huard, who grew up in Yakima Valley, was looking to buy a vineyard with Marino, his Miami Dolphins teammate, and two other quarterbacks, Drew Bledsoe and Rick Mirer. That deal fell through, but Bledsoe connected with Leonetti proprietor Chris Figgins to start Doubleback (krst vintage: 2007) and Mirer went on to found Mirror Wine Co. in Napa Valley (krst vintage: 2008) with winemaker Rob Lawson. Marino and Huard teamed with winemaker Chris Peterson of Avennia, aiming for the rich, supple style Horse Heaven Hills Cabernet is known for. The inaugural 2012 vintage hits pay dirt.

93 PASSING TIME Cabernet Sauvignon Horse Heaven Hills 2012 \$75

PROPER

David Houle, a financial advisor, and Conor McCluskey, who runs an e-mail marketing business, both live in Colorado Springs, Colo., but their wine-loving hearts are in The Rocks district of Walla Walla. Big fans of Cayuse Syrahs, grown in the same area, they and their wives partnered with three other couples in 2006 to buy an 8-acre cherry orchard. Trees were pulled out and four acres of Syrah planted in 2007. They sold most of the initial 2009 harvest, but after tasting the small batch they made separately they decided to team with Sean Boyd, proprietor and winemaker of Rôtie Cellars, to start their own label in 2010. Every vintage since has rated outstanding, consistently attaining a deft tension between richness of fruit, mineral and black olive overtones. An additional 2.5 acres will be coming into production next year.

93 PROPER Syrah Walla Walla Valley 2013 \$42

RESULT OF A CRUSH

This is Reynvaan's sister winery, literally. Reynvaan Walla Walla Syrahs are among the top-rated Washington wines each year, but sisters Amanda Reynvaan and Angela Reynvaan Garratt created their own label in 2011 to bottle a range of red blends and rosés from culled barrels and other sources. The lipstick-kiss image on the label may suggest that the wines are less than serious, but despite the light tone Result of a Crush makes no compromise in terms of quality. The prices are more modest, but the wines are still impressive. Current offerings include a rich blend of Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon spiced up with Viognier, as well as a rosé. Their brother Matt is the winemaker.

92 RESULT OF A CRUSH Washington 2012 \$28

SIXTO

Charles Smith, whose K Vintners dekes big Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon in Washington, embarked on a project in 2012 to upgrade the state's Chardonnay. He added Brennon Leighton to bring white wine expertise to the winemaking team, and they set about looking for vineyards that would produce something distinctive. They settled on three relatively high-elevation sites. Roza Hills, in the Rattlesnake Hills AVA, is the warmest, producing the broadest wine; Moxee Vineyard, at the northwest end of Yakima Valley, makes for a crisp style and nerve; and Frenchman Hills Vineyard, farther north on Royal Slope, plays its creamy texture against flavors of citrus and passion fruit. Smith's idea was to exploit Chardonnay terroir in Washington, and this is a good start. What's in the barrel for 2013 and 2014 may represent an even higher step up.

94 SIXTO Chardonnay Washington Roza Hills 2012 \$55

93 SIXTO Chardonnay Washington Moxee Vineyard 2012 \$55

TENET

Chateau Ste. Michelle pioneered the idea of partnering with experienced Old World vintners to bring new perspectives to Washington wine. Previous joint ventures produced Eroica Riesling with Dr. Loosen and Col Solare reds with Antinori. Tenet allies Ste. Michelle winemaker Bob Bertheau with Michel Gassier, owner of Château de Nages in Costières de Nîmes, and his enologist, Philippe Cambie. The aim, to apply a French sensibility to Rhône varieties in Washington, achieves its goal with a Syrah called The Pundit and a Châteauneuf-du-Pape-inspired Grenache blend called GSM. Focused flavors without extra weight, as well as tension between the dark flavors and crisp structure, are immediately apparent in these first wines from 2013. The Pundit offers a deft style that's very accessible.

93 TENET GSM Columbia Valley 2013 \$70

92 TENET Syrah Columbia Valley The Pundit 2012 \$25

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[Washington Alphabetical Listing](#)
[Argentine Evolution](#)
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