

## Washington State – Its Current Status

### Tasting – Grand Cru Vineyards

I attended three illuminating seminars at the Society of Wine Educators 2014 Conference in Seattle which addressed differing aspects of Washington's wine production. I will use "Washington" in this report to refer to the Pacific Northwest state. Two sessions lucidly presented by Sean Sullivan of The Wine Enthusiast covered all the current details of Washington's growing districts including those Sean identifies as "emerging appellations." I have summarized these facts below. The third session, presented so very ably by Bob Betz MW of the eponymous winery, proposed wines deemed "grand cru" vineyards. I was indeed impressed by the reds, most of which were Bordeaux blends. They exhibited not only authority and substance, but also – and more importantly – harmony, suppleness and careful oak integration, even when the wood was entirely new. While these red wines have an alcohol content of around 14.5%, they carry it deftly and do not taste heavy or hot (unlike many California equivalents). These wines prove once again that great wine is the result of *both* the right vineyard *and* skillful handling.

#### A Review of the Washington Wine Industry in 2014

Based on data presented by Sean Sullivan

Key figures:

- 800+ wineries vs. less than 100 in 1987 = a "wild west" of vinous activity
- Top 20 wineries = 90% of production
- 350+ growers
- 50,000 acres on way to 80,000 by 2020?
- 210,000 tons crushed
- ~ 12.5 million cases = 4% of total U.S. volume

Top 5 varieties by tonnage = 75% of total WA (over 40 varieties planted)

1. Riesling
2. Chardonnay
3. Cabernet Sauvignon
4. Merlot
5. Syrah

## Tasting Notes of Roger C. Bohmrich MW

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### Key facts:

- Nearly all vineyards located in eastern WA – i.e., Columbia Valley which crosses Oregon border
- Cascades provide rain shadow effect: 240” of precipitation over Olympic Peninsula vs. less than 12” in Columbia Valley
- All vineyards are irrigated given arid/semi-desert conditions – water relatively available (at least for now!)
- WA AVAs: Coolest is Ancient Lakes (2,811 GDD > 50 F), hottest is Red Mountain (3,108 GDD)

### Soils:

- Basalt from volcanic eruptions 17 to 6 million years ago
- Missoula floods – repeated occurrences, 400-ft. waves spread thick deposits
- Silt and sand (loess)

### Emerging appellations:

- **Ancient Lakes** of Columbia Valley, Central WA  
1,400 acres under vine/cooler, shorter season  
Missoula flood soils, sand, caliche (calcium carbonate)  
80% white (Riesling dominant)/20% red
- **Columbia Gorge**, overlaps Columbia River & Oregon  
Wide climatic range from maritime to continental, 36” to 10” rainfall, parts dry farmed  
Missoula flood soils, silt  
2/3 white (Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer)/1/3 red
- **Snipes Mountain**, sub-AVA of Yakima Mountain  
900 acres under vine/continental climate, 7” rainfall, warmer & cooler locations  
Missoula flood soils, loess, gravels  
Equal parts white/red wine, 30 varieties planted – profile yet to be defined
- **Wahluke Slope**  
5,200 acres under vine  
Continental climate, one of warmest areas, 6” rainfall

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Missoula flood soils, sand (another source: an alluvial fan)  
2/3 red (Cab Sauv, Merlot)/1/3 white

- **Horse Heaven Hills**, along Columbia River  
11,000 acres planted at elevations of 300' to 800' ft.  
Continental climate, 6" to 9" rainfall, ~ 3,000 GDD  
2/3 red/1/3 white

### Washington's Grand Cru Vineyards Presented by Bob Betz MW

Bob's pithy observations about Washington:

- WA is located between Bordeaux & Burgundy in latitude
- Contrary to (uninformed) common wisdom, WA's winegrowing region is "not cold, not wet"
- Heat accumulation is the major defining parameter in WA vineyard quality
- WA enjoys longer day length in the peak of summer = smaller berry size

#### **Ashan Chardonnay 2012, Celilo Vineyard – Columbia Gorge \*\*\***

*Light yellow gold. Very clean, high-toned white fruit scent together with creamy oak and notable intensity. The palate is focused, linear and lean, finishing very dry with an understated finish. Misses some center and flesh.*

#### **Chateau Ste. Michelle Chardonnay 2012, Cold Creek Vineyard – Columbia Valley \*\*\*+**

*Yellow gold. Restrained aroma expressing controlled toast and yellow fruit, well-integrated with moderate concentration. In the mouth, this Chardonnay is direct with a persistent presence of citrus and white fruits as well as oak highlights. Clean and dry, this Chardonnay is well-made and balanced, yet straightforward rather than complex.*

#### **Cote Bonneville Bordeaux blend 2007, DuBrul Vineyard – Yakima Valley \*\*\*\***

*Moderately dense very dark red with purple rim. Clean aroma just beginning to evolve offering a mix of dark fruit and a clearly identifiable signature of Bordeaux varieties. The palate is particularly well-knit and composed, with good weight, understated dark fruit and well-integrated oak. Well-balanced, ending with a ripe, embedded structure. 57% Cab Sauv, 43% Merlot aged 23 months in new French oak. 14.2% alcohol.*

### **Pepper Bridge Vineyard Blend 2010, Pepper Bridge Vineyard – Walla Walla Valley \*\*\*\*(+)**

*Dense black red with purple rim. Clean, sweet, fragrant aroma of black plum with a dusty note, moderately generous. The wine is harmonious and shows skillful integration and noteworthy poise on the palate. Very clean and supple, with very fine acidity and tannin. 51% Merlot, 37% Cab Sauv, 10% Malbec, 2% Petit Verdot. Matured 18 months in 46% new French oak. 14.5% alcohol.*

### **Andrew Will Red blend 2011, Champoux Vineyard – Horse Heaven Hills \*\*\*\*(\*)**

*Dense purple dark red. The inviting aroma boasts healthy, mature dark fruit, a suggestion of spice and gentle warmth. In the mouth, this Merlot-influenced blend is polished, harmonious and supple, exhibiting beautiful integration and particularly delicate acidity and fine-grained tannin. A generous, sensual wine. 54% Merlot, 28% Cab Franc, 18% Cab Sauv matured 18 months in oak.*

### **Efeste EMMY 2011, Stonetree Vineyard – Wahluke Slope \*\*\*\*(+)**

*Nearly dense black purple. High-toned aromatics dominated by crushed wild berries and dark fruits typical of Mourvedre. The wine is mouth-filling, but in no way excessive, as well as polished and persistent. There is a precisely calibrated, elegant backbone with delicately chalky tannins. 71% Mourvedre, 16% Grenache, 13% Syrah aged 14 months in used French barrels. 15% alcohol, which is not apparent.*

### **Avennia “Arnaut” Syrah 2011, Boushey Vineyard – Yakima Valley \*\*\*\*(+)**

*Dense black purple. Reserved aroma, pure and deep, of softly scented mature black berries and fruits. The wine is superbly calibrated and seamless, with a generous, plush core of black fruit. Subtle and supple finale with an elegant, hidden structure. 100% Syrah aged 16 months in 15% new French oak. Bob says this is the Phelps clone, supposedly originating with Guigal in the Rhône.*

### **Betz Family Winery “La Cote Patriarche” 2010, Red Willow Vineyard – Yakima Valley \*\*\*\***

*Dense black purple. Expressive, warm and nuanced aroma of red and black fruits along with smoky and meaty accents. In the mouth, this authoritative red is concentrated and delivers layered fruit qualities and noteworthy substance. There is a firm yet ripe, complementary structure of acidity and moderate tannin. This 100% Syrah demands a number of years in bottle to show its best. Matured for 12 months in 50% new oak.*

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### Walla Walla Vintners Cabernet Sauvignon 2011, Sagemoor Vineyard – Columbia Valley \*\*\*\*(\*)

*Dense very dark red with purple edge. Multifaceted, revealing and concentrated nose marked by red and black fruit overtones and a dusty Cabernet highlight. The palate impresses with its exceptional integration and equilibrium. Ample but not heavy with developing complexity and clean, defining acidity and moderate tannin in the finish. Keep to 2017 to 2020. 78% Cab Sauv, 12% Merlot, 10% Cab Franc which saw 22 months in 55% new French oak. 14.4% alcohol, 3.7 pH.*

### Januik Cabernet Sauvignon 2011, Ciel du Cheval Vineyard – Red Mountain \*\*\*\*(\*)

*Dense black purple. Highly expressive, complex aromatics marrying red and black fruit with quality oak. In the mouth, this superb red is focused and beautifully balanced. Well-defined and fresh, with lingering wood spice and fruit notes. Still young and clearly has a great deal in reserve. Terrific quality and potential. Keep to 2018 to 2022 or longer. 88% Cab Sauv, 12% Merlot. Matured 21 months in new French oak. 14.4% alcohol, pH 3.77 (a pH in this range is one of the secrets of top Bordeaux reds).*

