

Top 10 Washington Wines of the Month

January 23, 2011

Top 10 Washington Wines of the Month

Paul Gregutt, paulg's blog: unrefined & unfiltered, January 23, 2011

Here's a rundown of the top 10 Washington wines I've tasted during the past month. I won't print scores, but I am listing them in order from the highest on down. In case of a tie score, the cheaper wine is listed first. By any standard, these are all great wines.

Efesté 2009 Lola Chardonnay; \$30

Fruit sourced from the Evergreen vineyard once again proves that winemaker Brennon Leighton is as good as anyone making white wines in Washington. This can stand with the best Chardonnays from California – textural, creamy, a delicious mix of lemon custard, meringue, caramel, papaya and toasted coconut. This young wine just seduces from the instant it hits the tongue.

Buty 2007 Columbia Rediviva; \$48

From the winery's Phinny Hill vineyard, the Columbia Rediviva is 48% Cabernet Sauvignon and 52% Syrah. Complex and satiny, it's a riveting wine, inky and bursting with a sensuous mix of berry, cassis, mocha, loam, cinnamon and spice. Tremendous density and depth; despite its youth the wine curls around the tongue like thick smoke, showing more and more detail.

Chateau Ste. Michelle & Dr. Loosen 2009 Eroica Riesling; \$24

This vintage marks the return of Evergreen vineyard fruit as the main component of the Eroica blend. This wine just gets better with every new vintage. Young and fresh, it hits the palate with lip-puckering acidity, rolling on flavors of lemons, oranges, citrus rind, and then into mango and papaya. Though the residual sugar is listed at 1.6%, it shows only in a pleasing roundness in the lengthy finish. Delicious now, but entirely cellar-worthy for a decade or longer.

Tulpen Cellars 2007 Merlot; \$28

Once again the Merlot is the best of a very fine flight of Tulpen wines. More muscular than the Cabernet, it includes 10% Malbec and 5% Petit Verdot in the mix, resulting in a dense, dark wine loaded with black fruits. Polished tannins frame lightly layered in streaks of leaf, herb and earth. The alcohol tops 15%, but there is not a hint of heat in the finish.

Ross Andrew 2008 Boushey Vineyard Syrah; \$34

This perfectly captures this spectacular vineyard's flavor "stamp" – a beguiling mix of aromas, flavors and textures that begin with orange peel and moist earth and unfold across the palate in a graceful jumble. Streaks of compost, raw meat, tart berry and good funk run together seamlessly, creating a supple, continuously enjoyable wine that just doesn't want to quit. Notably, the alcohol is listed at just 13.8% – and it feels natural and fully-ripe at that level.

Buty 2009 65% Sémillon/27% Sauvignon/8% Muscadelle; \$25

Fragrant with cut grass, pea vine and sweet hay, leading into light fruit flavors of apple and pear. There are suggestions of sliced orange, and the creamy, textural mouthfeel derived from nine months of aging on the lees.

Chateau Ste. Michelle 2007 Cold Creek Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon; \$28

The Cabernet from Cold Creek is not only old vine, but in terms of tightness and definition, it suggests that it may be one of the most ageworthy wines from Washington state. This new vintage blends in 10% Merlot and 3% Syrah, and the wine is detailed with iron filings, pepper, bark, and dried earth notes. The

fruit is tight, tart, and racy – a suggestion of wild berry and spicy plum.

Beresan 2007 Viuda Negra Red; \$35

Though not indicated on the label, the new vintage of Viuda Negra (literally, “black widow”) is all estate-grown, Waliser vineyard fruit – a third each Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. For a red wine it is a real fruit bowl of unusual flavors – peaches, cranberries, cherries soaked in rum. Round and full, quite delicious and yet focused into a finish with persistent, ageworthy tannins, this will be hard to keep in the cellar, but well worth it if you do.

Efesté 2008 Eléni Syrah; \$36

This new offering from rising star Efesté showcases fruit from the original Red Willow planting – the first Syrah planting in Washington state, now almost 25 years old. It’s a wine of amazing grace, polish and depth – a young, still unevolved wine with a dense core of berry fruit flavors, a wrapping of mineral and steel, ripe and tightly wound tannins, and notes of coffee and graphite stacked through the long finish.

Sparkman 2009 Lumière Chardonnay; \$25

Creamy and crisp – a nice trick – this refreshing Chardonnay livens up the palate with a mix of herb, celery, apple, and Asian pear, rolling into a finish of caramel apple and toast. It has a light touch despite the 14.5% alcohol, and sits nicely in the back of the throat, inviting another glass.