

Tulpen Cellars

November 6, 2009

tulpen cellars

Paul Gregutt, paulg's blog: unfiltered & unfiltered, November 6, 2009

It's a well-worn truism that great wine is made in the vineyard. And there is no doubt that Washington's best bottles start there. But most often there is a collaboration between a talented grower and a dedicated winemaker. Or there is a vineyard operation with a winemaker on board. But rarely do you find a vineyard manager who takes that expertise and turns to winemaking.

Kenny Hart is a partner, with Rick Trumbull, in this small enterprise. Tulpen Cellars (tulpen is tulip in Dutch) released their first few hundred cases of wine last winter, and are now into their second vintage, made by Ken at Artifex. He is a Walla Walla native who manages an 'A' list of vineyard properties for clients such as Abeja, Dunham, Walla Walla Vintners, aMaurice, and others. One of the most popular and funny men in the business, it's a pleasure to sit down and taste through his wines, which show remarkable grace and elegance.

Despite their rather high alcohol levels, the Tulpen wines are aromatically complex, supple and immediately delicious. Much of the blending is done during fermentation, which gives them more time to meld together before being released, unlike many wines that are blended, bottled, and put out into the market before the flavors can really gel. "You have to have confidence in the vineyard," says Kenny. "I want the personality of the vineyard in the wine."

It's Fall release weekend here in Walla Walla, and I am about to rush out the door, but I want to get this posted. These new Tulpen releases are limited and highly recommended. The website still lists the 2005 vintages, but all are now 2006. Some quick notes:

Tulpen Cellars 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon

Walla Walla Valley; \$30

100% Cab – fruit from Yellow Jacket, Heather Hill, Double River. 15.2% alcohol. Shut down, tight, but supple mouthfeel. Grudgingly opens with compact layers of cassis, ash, and rock. High acid, sharp flavors, ageworthy.

Tulpen Cellars 2006 Merlot

Columbia Valley; \$30

Co-fermented with 4% Malbec. This is delicious, a nice mix of berries, toast, chocolate, mocha, with spice, a hint of pepper, and great balance. The alcohol hits 15%, but shows no heat, it's supple and the fruit is absolutely delicious.

Tulpen Cellars 2006 Coalescence Red Wine

Columbia Valley; \$30

70% Cabernet (Wallula and Lewis), 20% Merlot, the rest a blend of the other three Bordeaux grapes from a mix of vineyards. Dark, tight and loaded with fruits, this balanced, juicy wine has it all – elegance, length, finesse and mouth appeal. Blackberry and black cherry fruits dominate, with light suggestions of pretty leaf, tobacco, earth and some iron.

Tulpen Cellars 2006 Syrah

Columbia Valley; \$30

This is 76% Syrah (half Lewis and half Abeja) now co-fermented with 4% Viognier. The rest of the blend includes 10% Grenache and 10% Mourvèdre. Deep and refined, this beautifully integrated Syrah opens with scents of briar, berry, and cherry. Details of light pepper, iron and earth are buoyed by vivid acids. Complex, aromatic, and graceful.