

WASHINGTON WINES: 24 HOT NEW RELEASES

seattle

THE PREMIER SEATTLE MONTHLY

AUGUST 2007

2007

WASHINGTON WINE GUIDE

In case you haven't heard, Washington wines have arrived—with 500 (and growing) wineries, there are plenty of reasons to celebrate the history, people and places that have put our state on the wine map. Join us in a preview of the hottest new varietals, pioneering winemakers, swank wine bars and where to taste our favorite new releases

BY Shayn Bjornholm, Shannon Borg,
Christina Kelly, Sara Dickerman

AND YEMAYA MAURER WITH BECCA BERGMAN AND JENNY FOX



PURPLE CAFÉ AND WINE BAR'S DRAMATIC WINE TOWER MAKES TASTING WINE A SPECTACLE. BELOW, BRANDON GILLESPIE, OWNER OF WEST SEATTLE'S WINE BAR BEÀTO

THE WINE BAR BOOM

With so many new wine bars around town, how to choose? Check out some of our favorite places to sniff, swirl and sip **BY SARA DICKERMAN**

WHY IT TOOK WINE bars so long to get their footing here I don't know—all I know is in the past year and a half, they've become nearly as ubiquitous as the coffee shop. Local mini-chain **Purple Café and Wine Bar** (with locations in Woodinville, Kirkland and Seattle; thepurplecafe.com) was a pioneer of the form, convincing a trendy crowd who might be more inclined to cocktails that there is a lot of pleasure to be found in sipping wines. And now wine bars are cropping up in every neighborhood from Capitol Hill (**Poco Wine Room**, 1408 E Pine St.; 206.322.9463; pocowineroom.com) to Columbia City (**Verve**, 3820 S Ferdinand St., Suite 102; 206.760.0977; vervewinebar.com). It's good news for wine aficionados and novices alike—through tasting flights, tasting note cards, winemaker events and, most importantly, lots of wines by the glass, these vino-centric bars are making it much less daunting to learn about wine.

Setting the gold standard, as far as I'm

concerned, is five-year-old **Portalis Wine Shop and Bar** (Ballard, 5205 Ballard Ave. NW; 206.783.2007; portaliswines.com). There, owner Jens Strecker presides over a crew of well-versed wine geeks and mixes neighborhood-bar warmth with seriously interesting pours from around the world. Portalis has all sorts of wine bar virtues: a tiny 1-ounce taster serving for those truly afraid of commitment, a great selection of dessert wines by the glass, good bar snacks, free Sunday afternoon wine tastings and a Wednesday night deal when the \$12 corkage fees are waived on all the wine shop's bottles. Just to show that wine bars have all kinds of moods, **DiVino** (Ballard, 5310 Ballard Ave. NW; 206.297.0143; divinoseattle.com) has taken over Portalis' original location just up the street and pours retro-futuristic 1960s Italian design—all white and shiny and a little bit cheesy—into bricky Old Ballard. It's friendly and fun, with plenty of interesting Italians to slurp.



Italian has been the big theme as wine bars expand in the city. Most notably, the West Seattle restaurant and wine bar **Beato** (West Seattle, 3247 California Ave. SW; 206.923.1333; beatoseattle.com) was opened by Italian wine aficionado Brandon Gillespie (see review, p. 156). There's much more to Italian wines than Tuscany, and Beato's list is full of well-chosen regional vino, which could be daunting but for a particularly well-trained staff that can help you negotiate the offerings—which change every two weeks.

Bricco della Regina Anna (Queen Anne, 1525 Queen Anne Ave. N; 206.285.4900; briccoSeattle.com) isn't exclusively Italian

in selection, but chef/owner Kevin Erickson and wine director Jesse Hufstader have a fondness for the food and wine of the region. Brizzo manages to be elegant in appearance but totally neighborly. In fact, Erickson claims his customers come in on average two times a week; to keep them from getting bored, the 30-odd by-the-glass selections change every day or so, and instead of tasting flights, Brizzo offers half-glass pours—"create your own flight," says Erickson. Brizzo's hearty food options include charcuterie, panini, lasagna and an excellent (and excellently maintained) cheese selection.

Most wine bars tend to be warm and earthy in décor, but if you feel like browsing wines in a more sleek environment, there is **TASTE** (Downtown, 1300 First Ave.; 206.654.3245; tastesam.com), the cool, modern slice of a restaurant in the new Seattle Art Museum. There, the bar is spacious, and the wine list is the most meticulously organized I've seen. Wines are listed by tasting notes—"Vegetal Reds," for example, or "Floral Whites"—but also by varietal, in case you're looking for a more familiar guidepost. Also look for TASTE's Flights and Bites selection (\$18, price changes according to selection), featuring three tastes of wine paired with three bites of food.

The latest addition to the downtown wine bar scene is the ambitious **The Local Vine** (Belltown, 2520 Second Ave.; thelocalvine.com), which at press time promised to feature 100 wines by the glass from the Northwest and around the world, with a small plates menu focusing on local products, created by chef Jason Wilson of Crush.

At **Cellar 46** (Mercer Island, 7650 SE 27th St., Suite 120; 206.407.3016; cellar46.com), a wine shop/bar combo, owner Ryan Allison doesn't want you to forget that he's got big wines on hand. Big-format bottles such as various magnums (which can hold the equivalent of two to eight bottles of wine) tower in niches, and a wall of wine nearly reaches the shop's high ceilings. The wine shop/bar combination grew out of owner Allison's online business, awinestore.com, which after 12 years of operation had amassed a serious collection, particularly Northwest wines. Cruise the wine bar menu and you'll see moderately priced Washington Cabernets by the glass listed alongside



CELLAR 46 ON MERCER ISLAND COMBINES A TASTING ROOM WITH A WINE SHOP AND WINE STORAGE.

a \$1,500 bottle of California's cult Screaming Eagle. Though that gesture is a little like driving the Bentley to soccer practice, if you ask me, there are plenty of more moderately priced bottles to discover as well.

Farther out on I-90 at the Issaquah Highlands, there may still be tar paper on the houses nearby, but **Sip** (Issaquah, 1084 NE Park Drive; 425.369.1181) already has a bustling scene. On a recent evening, small groups gathered around Sip's huge, groovy,

boomerang-shaped bar, and the room was animated with conversation. While the couple next to me chose between two bottles of super Tuscans, our bartender, who looked like he probably rides home on a motorcycle, steered us to a beautifully crafted Baer Winery blend. Sip offers half glasses, in case it's you driving home from the foothills, and four-taste flights with jockey names—"Pinot Envy," for example—in case it's your companion at the wheel.

JOIN THE CLUB

WINE CLUBS AND EVENTS ARE POPPING UP ALL AROUND THE SOUND

As Washington state's reputation for quality wine grows, the opportunities to learn about and taste wine are on the rise. Many wineries offer wine clubs where subscribers receive a selection of wines from the winery a few times a year. But more and more, other local clubs are offering a wider range of wine tastings and education, including lectures, parties and monthly subscriptions complete with tasting notes and, increasingly, recipes for great food to accompany your new favorite wines.

WINECOW (WINE CONNECTION OF WASHINGTON)

This club focuses on having fun with wine and eliminating its "snob" reputation—while promoting great-quality wines with an emphasis on those from the Pacific Northwest. WineCOW also throws occasional wine parties, like last year's Putt-n-Pour, held at the Interbay golf course. Subscribe to the WOW Club (Wines of Washington) and you'll receive two to four bottles every other month, plus tasting notes, winemaker

comments and food-pairing suggestions for one of two price options: two bottles, \$50-\$80; four bottles, \$120-\$160. Redmond, 824 154th Ave. NE; 866.292.8533; winecow.com

WOODINVILLE WOMEN & WINE

WW&W's appealingly worded mission is to "celebrate the friendship of women with wine and wine education." The event-based WW&W holds frequent tastings and talks around the area. Event costs vary from \$40-\$135. Join their e-mail list (robin.akkerman@willowslodge.com) for notification. 425.424.2902; annealberg.com/woodinvillewomenandwine

WAY OF THE VINE

Tabetha Warren's recently established wine subscriptions focus on the natural and sustainable. She seeks out small producers and chooses biodynamic and organic wines. Subscribers can choose from the World Wine Club, which each month focuses on one region, such as the Rhône

Valley or the Willamette Valley (\$60-\$75 monthly), or the Feast Reds subscription, featuring regionally selected red wines (\$80-\$100 monthly). 206.859.3523; wayofthevine.com

DAVID LECLAIRE'S WINE EVENTS

When you sign up for LeClaire's free email reminders, you'll find out about the many wine tasting events and seminars he hosts, including the popular Shoes & Sips in November, where you can bid on shoes and taste wines at the same time. How cool is that! Visit vinolover.com for more information.

OLYMPIC CELLARS

WINE CLUB Maker of the popular Working Girl wines in addition to premium varietals and occasional seasonal whimsies, Olympic Cellars has offered a wine club since 2001. Three times a year, subscribers select any four bottles of Olympic Cellars wine at a 20 percent discount. Port Angeles, 255410 Highway 101; 360.452.0160; olympiccellars.com Jenny Fox