

# No reservations? No problem for a Mother's Day fête

Scott Greenberg

## THE VINE GUY

Thank goodness I called to get directions to the restaurant, otherwise, I would have been unduly embarrassed to find out that my attire was wholly unacceptable. You see, I was about to join one of the most well known, and modest, wine-makers in the state of Washington for lunch at the Prime Rib and I was not wearing a coat or a tie. I wasn't even wearing a collared shirt. But a quick (and lucky) visit to my drycleaners quickly remedied half of the situation. The Prime Rib solved the other half by kindly loaning me a blue blazer (two sizes too large) so I could gain admittance to the restaurant.

### Great lengths

All of this effort might seem a little excessive, but I was about to meet with David Lake, Dean of Washington Winemakers, who was equally surprised by the lengths I was willing to go to in order to honor this appointment. And it was worth it.

David Lake, Master of Wine, is one of only two Master of Wine (MW) winemakers in the country, which is extraordinary since there are only 246 MWs in the world.

But even more impressive, David received his MW in 1975 when there were just under a hundred in the world.

In order to receive the prestigious MW designation, an individual has to sit through three days of written and practical examinations about the societal, economic and gastronomic implications involving wine as well as having to properly identify more than 100 wines from varietal, country of origin, producer and vintage. Wow.

### Romancing the wine

Speaking to David is like listening to a romance novel unfolding before you (his British accent is pure enchantment).

The son of a military intelligence officer in service to the queen, David grew up spending time in England as well as traveling the world, finally settling in Montreal long enough to receive a bachelor's degree from McGill University.

Through a quirky turn of events, David eventually landed in California, where his passion for wine and viticultural sciences led him to enroll in Enology classes for one year at the University of California at Davis.

In 1978, he moved to Oregon to put his newfound winemaking knowledge to work at Eyrie vineyards with the legendary David Lett.

Working his way up the northwest coast, David joined Columbia Winery, in Washington State, in 1979, taking over the winemaking duties from Dr. Lloyd Woodburne.

Since then, David has been making world-class wines from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Chardonnay, Viognier and other varietals.

He was the first winemaker in Washington state to release a series of vineyard-designated wines and the first to produce Syrah, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Gris in the state.

### Dean of winemakers

In fact, David has brought so many new varietal clones to the area and incorporated so many new winemaking techniques that it's no surprise the Washington wine community has dubbed him the "Dean of Washington Winemakers."

While Columbia Winery is physically located in Woodinville, Washington, just north of Seattle, the

vineyards are all located in the Columbia and Yakima Valleys in the south central part of the state, where the Yakima, Columbia and Snake rivers flow through. As a matter of fact, most of the vineyards actually share the same latitudes as some of the best know wine producing regions of France.

### All about Washington

And while the winery uses many of the same varietals as the French, make no mistake, Lake is all about making wines in the "Washington style."

Here are a few of my favorites from my lunch with Lake. Retail prices are approximate.

We started off our lunch with a delightful aperitif, the 2003 Gewurztraminer, Columbia Valley (\$9). The grapefruity nose leads to bright fruit flavors of guava and citrus. The abundant acidity provides both balance and crispness to the ripe fruit flavors on the finish. A plate of sushi would do this wine justice.

Next, we tucked into a plate of Oysters Rockefeller with the 2002 Chardonnay, Columbia Valley (\$12).

Green apples were in play on the soft nose while hints of apple, honeydew melon and buttery toast played out on the palate.

The finish was kept nice and clean by the crisp acidity and notes of vanilla on the back end. It was a perfect complement to the seafood.

You can't go to the Prime Rib and not have red meat. So the steak sandwich sang out for red wine.

The 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley (\$15) filled the bill. Red cherry scents filled the glass as well as it filled the mouth. Additional flavors of red raspberries, sage and anise rounded out the profile on the way to the compact but pleasant finish.

The 2001 Syrah, Columbia Valley (\$14) packs quite a punch for the price.

This dark purple wine is brimming with flavors of raspberries, black plums, black olives and a touch of tobacco. Soft tannins, that will allow this wine to age quite nicely over the next three or four years, support the balanced finish.

I would encourage you to try this wine with a bit of lamb.

### Wine Guy's favorite

I save my personal favorite for last. The 2000 Syrah, Red Willow Vineyard, Yakima Valley (\$40) is part of David's "Signature Series" of wines.

### Sourcing the grapes

David sources all of his grapes for this wine of the famed 120-acre Red Willow vineyard, located in the remote northwestern corner of the Yakima Valley.

He selects the best grapes from seven different terroirs located within the vineyard to make this special cuvee. Aromas of plums, pepper and roasted meats mingle on the nose.

The smooth, elegant style delivers delightful blackberry, cassis and Asian spices while hints of tobacco sneak in on the long, graceful finish. A couple more years of storage would certainly add greater depth to this beauty.

So there you have it. A formal lunch with a delightful legend with wines to match. I am just glad the restaurant didn't have a dress code that required me to show up in top hat and tails.

Let me know if you have a favorite vineyard in Washington you'd like to share. Email me at [scott@vineguy.com](mailto:scott@vineguy.com).

# Hike the only U.S. rainforest with a botanist

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can still explore far off the beaten track in the only tropical forest in the U.S. national forest system. It is one of the oldest nature reserves in the Western Hemisphere.

The town of Naguabo, a 90-minute drive from the capital, San Juan, is one of the wettest places on the island, receiving some 200 inches of rain a year. Its residents are called "enchumbaos," or the soaked ones.

The Cubuy section of Naguabo is where botanist and organic farmer Robin Phillips lives and his guided hiking tours begin.

Phillips, who charges \$75 total for each group of five

hikers, greets us with an orange fruit called a canistel. He grows them on his 12 acres of land, which include a cabin and campsite.

"Very few people come to this side of the rain forest," Phillips said. "And the ones that do make it alone, most are deterred by these signs." We walk on the road for a while before veering onto a path where the forest's lush canopy allows rays of light to stream through.

The forest suddenly becomes hushed except for the two-tone chirp of tiny tree frogs called coqui and the twitter of birdsong.

We eventually reach a 90-foot ladder with metal rungs and climb slowly. We scale a

maze of rocks until we reach a 110-foot waterfall with several levels.

At the base of one is a large pool. We strip out of our sweat-soaked clothing and into bathing suits to step into the pristine water.

"Sometimes honeymooners come up here with me," Phillips said with a chuckle. "They ask for some privacy. I go wait down below the rocks until they're done."

The cooling effects of the water quickly wear off as we lumber down the face of the mountain under a baking sun. By the time we stagger back, fresh muscle aches and a raw sunburn appear — a small price to pay for a day on the lost side of the rain forest.

### IF YOU GO

El Yunque, also known as the Caribbean National Forest, is easily accessible from San Juan; many hotels can arrange taxis or tour buses. Robin Phillips leads

12-mile hikes; details at [www.rainforestsafari.com/Phillips.htm](http://www.rainforestsafari.com/Phillips.htm). The Casa Cubuy inn in Naguabo, [www.casacubuy.com](http://www.casacubuy.com), has rooms starting at \$90. The inn offers breakfast and dinner and can pack you a lunch.



Hermínio Rodríguez/AP

Jonathan Mitchell of Boston climbs to a 40-foot waterfall at the south side of the Caribbean National Rain Forest, commonly called El Yunque, on April 3 near Naguabo, Puerto Rico. It's the only tropical forest in the U.S. national forest system.



Bebeto Matthews/AP

A mural tribute by artist Chico to memorialize poet Pedro Pietri covers the facade of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in New York. Pietri was a founding poet of the cafe.

# The poets' place

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Puerto Rican neighbors "a space to speak out from," he said.

But it got too crowded, and the retired Rutgers University literature professor moved the gathering to a local bar. In 1980, he and other founders formed a nonprofit organization and expanded the offerings. Now, every night except Mondays, there are artistic events, including live music and theater at the gritty, sparsely decorated spot in a neighborhood that is steadily gentrifying and bringing itself back from decay.

"There's always poetry, no matter what," says Julio Dalmau, the cafe's manager.

### Hip without trying

Regulars love the cafe because it manages to be hip without trying to be. The cover charges are \$7 to \$15 — compared to \$25 in other night spots — and an evening there never fails to include topics racial, emotional and political.

For young black and Latino artists, it is one of only a handful of places where their work is highlighted. Here, unfettered, they rhyme about living young and brown in the city.

"I've never experienced anything like the first time I performed at the Nuyorican. It's a poet's dressing room. It's embracing," says Narubi Selah, a playwright, poet and actor who per-

formed her 90-minute play, "The Classifieds," in early April.

### Poetry slams

The most popular events are the poetry slams. Winners compete until the cafe has anointed its five best poets. The team is then sent, all expenses paid, to compete in an annual, national competition organized by Poetry Slam Inc. This year's event is in Albuquerque.

"It's a sport," says Lois Elaine Griffith, the cafe's treasurer and a professor of English at Manhattan Community College. "It's combat: 'Can I tell more truth than you?'"

The profile of the Nuyorican and cafes like it has been aided by a cross-pollination with hip-hop, making poets more performance-conscious and rappers more lyrical. "Hip-hop, its contents — they sizzle," Algarin said. "It's made rhymes and couplets useful again."

Now and then, star pupils return to the cafe, manager Dalmau said with pride. But more important than that, he said, is the open arms the offers young poets who keep clamoring to get onstage.

"There's a reason the cafe is still existing in 2005," says the poet Jaime, a doctoral candidate at New York University writing her dissertation about the cafe. "The essence of life and death is expressed there. When you walk into that space, there's a very different feeling. There's nothing like it."

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