



## OPEN HOUSE AT HORTON

This Friday and Saturday, Horton Vineyards in Gordonsville, Va., hosts a Thanksgiving open house. The \$5 admission gets you a glass, barrel tastings, cellar tours and tastings. Special discounts on wines are available. Cal (540) 832-7440 for info.

## SCOTT GREENBERG *Vine Guy*

# Washington makes its mark



A sunset overlooks vineyards in the central Washington region, which is beginning to draw more attention from wine experts. - AP



By now, you're probably getting a little tired of me writing about the wine class that I recently taught for the Smithsonian Associates program. But fear not, for this is not only the last in the series of three articles on this top-

ic, it also is the most surprising.

The class was part of a six-week long series that concentrated on Exploring Lesser-Known American Wineries: North American Style. In the first class, we covered wines from various growing regions throughout California. In the second class, Oregon and Washington were the topic du jour.

The surprise came when it was time to sample the wines. The class agreed that we were truly fortunate to taste what could be some of the best

wines in the country. How did this revolution of quality wines occur so suddenly? Well, it's been a work in progress for a very long time.

According to the Washington Wine Center's Web site, Washington's wine industry has been around in various incarnations since the first vine grapes were planted at Fort Vancouver by the Hudson's Bay Co. in 1825. By 1903, Italian and German immigrants had learned how to tap into the plentiful snow runoff of the Cascade Mountains and utilized irrigation to take advantage of the rich volcanic soils. But it wasn't until the 1960s that the number of acres devoted to vineyards began to increase swiftly in both the Columbia and Yakima valleys, which lie to the east of the Cascade Mountain range. Today, there are more than 460 wineries in the state.



Location is also a big part of the equation. Many vineyards lie on approximately the same latitude as some of the noted wine regions in Bordeaux and Burgundy. Combined with a variety of climates, soils, long sunlight summer hours and cool fall temperatures, the grapes can develop wonderful fruit ripeness while preserving acidity. It is important to note that of the nine American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) in Washington, eight of the appellations — and 99 percent of the wine grapes grown — lay to east of the Cascade mountain range.

Personally, I enjoyed 100 percent of the wines we tried. Retail prices are approximate. And a little warning: Several of the wines might be a little hard to find, but all are worth the hunt.

**2005 Covey Run Late Harvest Riesling, Columbia Valley (58 percent) and Yakima Valley (42 percent), Washington (\$12 - available at Total Wine and More in McLean)**

Made from riesling grapes that are shrunk and dehydrated, thanks to Botrytis mold (it sounds worse than it is), the sugars and flavors are concentrated into a sweet juice. The Botrytised grapes are crushed and blended with non-Bortytised riesling and allowed to mingle for several hours before fermentation begins. The result is a wine that has won-

derful nutty aromas of apricot and orange blossoms. The rich mouthfeel delivers apricots, apples, peaches and hints of citrus on a sweet-but-not-cloying frame thanks to the abundant acidity.

**2001 Columbia Winery Syrah, Red Willow Vineyard, Yakima Valley, Wash. (\$28 - available at Finewine.com in McLean)**

Made by legendary winemaker David Lake, one of only two Master of Wine winemakers in the U.S., this wine offers plenty red raspberry, pepper and tobacco scents in the bouquet and easy-to-please flavors of lush berry fruit on the tongue. Notes of cinnamon, pepper and smoke round out the elegant, smooth finish.

**2000 Andrew Will Winery Cabernet Sauvignon Sheridan Vineyard, Yakima, Wash. (\$45 - available at MacArthur Beverages in D.C.)**

The Sheridan vineyard, planted in 1997, is about 20 miles east of Yakima and sits at an elevation of 1,200 feet. The hardpan soil grows grapes that produce soft satin textures with a plush middle featuring flavors of black cherry, red plum and sage with hints of violets and licorice on the commanding finish.

**2004 Leonetti Cellars Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$80 - available at the Wine Specialist in D.C.)**

The grapes for this stunning merlot are sourced from three different vineyards and then carefully blended to near perfection. Engaging aromas of crème de cassis, black plums, violets and hints of pencil shavings

seduce the nose while gorgeous flavors of black fruit, dark strawberries and hints of cocoa tantalize the tongue on a rich, yet silky, body. If Miles had tried this merlot in "Sideways," he never would have consumed anything else. This wine could benefit from a few more years in the cellar, but I don't think I have the patience to wait.

**2003 Quilceda Creek Cabernet Sauvignon, Washington State (\$235 - available at MacArthur Beverages in D.C.)**

Yes, that is pricey but Va-va-va-voom — What a wine! A blend of 97 percent cabernet and 3 percent merlot, this wine simply is stunning. Brilliant aromas of blackberry jam, cassis liqueur and dark choc-

olate. But it is the layer after layer of flavors that captivate the tongue, first with rich jammy black fruit, followed by earthy spices and finally notes of ultra-rich chocolate that glides in on a silky finish that doesn't end. The balance and structure are as close to perfection as a cabernet can get — and will hold up to cellaring for another decade or so.

Washington is definitely not just for apples any more.



Do you have a favorite royalty of wine? E-mail me at [scott@vineguy.com](mailto:scott@vineguy.com).

