



WINEENTHUSIAST
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Buying Guide



Canopy management—desuckering and shoot positioning—is an important facet underlying Sicily's greatly improved wines.

Special Advance Release

**Reviews appearing in the
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FOR ADDITIONAL RATINGS AND REVIEWS



wine is going to win a lot of friends. The pretty strawberry and cherry fruit is generously endowed with mocha and chocolate, but the barrel flavors are not overbearing. Not one for the cellar; enjoy this wine in the fullness of its youth. —P.G.

88 Mark Ryan 2006 The Dissident (Columbia Valley); \$28. This monogrel is 50% Red Mountain Syrah, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon and 25% Merlot. Tight and tart, it has a slightly reduced, rubber ball character, and needs plenty of breathing time. Fruit flavors are raspberry and cassis, accented with sharp acids and stiff tannins. —P.G.

88 Tsillan Cellars 2005 Bellissima Rossa (Columbia Valley); \$28. Bellissima Rossa is 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc and 3% Malbec. The Cabernet Sauvignon is muscular and taut; blackberry and cassis, mineral and smoke come up as aromas, then follow as flavors. Good legs show the weight of the wine, which hits the palate tight and shows a bit of chalky acid, then opens into more lush milk chocolate barrel flavors. —P.G.

88 Woodinville Wine Cellars 2006 Little Bear Creek Red Wine (Columbia Valley); \$20. This affordable blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cab Franc, Merlot and Syrah shows plenty of color, fragrant scents of very ripe red berries and plums, and a silky layer of chocolate smoothing over the tannins. Yet it retains some lift from the acids and a hint of the tea leaf/herbal character that defines some Washington vineyards. Nicely balanced, it delivers a lot of complexity and flavor at this price. —P.G.

88 Woodinville Wine Cellars 2005 Ausonius (Columbia Valley); \$35. This new Ausonius features a blend of 47% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Cabernet Franc and 8% Malbec. At first it's rich, smoky, chocolaty and supple; moving toward a Napa style in its breadth and ripeness, but leavening that with Washington's bright acids. Pleasing hints of spice and herb are dappled in, and the wine is almost peppery as it weaves across the palate. The finish is clean and simple, leaving you wishing for just a bit more complexity. —P.G.

87 Tsillan Cellars 2006 Sinistra Red (Columbia Valley); \$23. A Tuscan-inspired blend, the Sinistra is 70% Sangiovese, 15% Nebbiolo and 15% Barbera. It's a smoothly aromatic red, showing good ruby color, scents rich with milk chocolate, red fruits, hints of black

pepper and black tea. Smoothly blended wine, it's showing its young fruit off to best advantage, so drink up. —P.G.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

94 Sheridan Vineyard 2005 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (Yakima Valley); \$75. More powerful and potent than the '04, this simply has more juice, more depth, more power and more detail than any previous Sheridan wine. The fruit is exceptional—dense black cherry and cassis, with a sense of compact layering that promises great aging potential. This was 30 months in oak but does not seem oaky in any way. It already has the balance, the polish and the length to justify long-term cellaring. Tannins are ripe and supple, bringing in hints of dried herb and black olive. —P.G.

94 Woodward Canyon 2006 Old Vines Dedication Series #26 Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$84. This is a mix of 56% Sagemoor and 41% Champoux Cabernet, with a 3% splash of estate Petit Verdot. It's detailed in the manner of a Pauillac, thick cassis fruit with deep veins of iron, cedar, licorice and a just a hint of silage. The fruit is dark and dense, but with breathing you'll find it begins to open into a splendid blend of black cherry, cassis and mountain berry flavor. Woodward Canyon's red wines age beautifully, but if drunk young give them a lot of breathing time. **Editors' Choice.** —P.G.

92 Sheridan Vineyard 2004 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (Yakima Valley); \$60. This is 100% new oak (primarily Taransaud, 32 months), and it's a marvelous example of the grape, the vineyard and the strengths of Washington fruit. The Shafer Hillside Select is the inspiration for the extended barrel aging and the focus on round, sweet tannins. This is a tight wine, with a lovely purity of fruit that captures the cassis, the black cherry, the subtle herbal character of the Cabernet grape. This is from the oldest block in the vineyard—now eight-year-old vines. —P.G.

91 Columbia 2003 Otis Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (Yakima Valley); \$28. A fine Otis Cab, from Columbia's now departed winemaking team of David Lake and Robert Takahashi. It's rich and deep, scented with a luscious mix of fresh herbs. The fruit has a pleasing spiciness, sweet plum and cassis

threaded with anise and sage. There seems to be more fruit concentration and less of the green, peppery character that Otis can bring in some vintages, but even now this is a very young wine (it was released in June of 2008) that should reward another few years of cellaring. —P.G.

91 Fielding Hills 2006 RiverBend Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (Wahluke Slope); \$38. In the blend are small portions of 6% Syrah, 3% Merlot and 1% Cabernet Franc—winemaker Mike Wade is a meticulous blender—and the nuanced character is immediately apparent. Seductive scents mix black cherry, nutmeg and toffee, leading into rich red and black fruits, licorice and smoke. Just a hint of earth and herb highlight the lightly tannic finish. —P.G.

91 Woodward Canyon 2006 Artist Series #15 Cabernet Sauvignon (Washington); \$49. Predominantly Sagemoor vineyard, along with some Champoux and estate grapes, including some old vine fruit and 13% Syrah. Somehow, the Artist Series Cabernet has an open softness that seems more like Merlot; it's lush and approachable, sleek and liquorous, dotted with malted milk/chocolate highlights around deep black cherry fruit. The aromas are lovely, though at first taste it sags a bit in the late going; the fruit falls off and the chocolaty notes take over. The tannins have a little green tea flavor. —P.G.

90 Milbrandt Vineyards 2006 Traditions Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$15. Here is another great value from the Milbrandt brothers, based upon their impeccable vineyard sources (they own 1600 acres, mostly in the Wahluke Slope AVA). Dense and dark, ripe and compact, this Cab/Merlot/Petit Verdot blend brings plenty of macho and muscle, layers of black fruits, black smoke, black tea and black olives. Get the idea? It's a beautiful effort, and really shines at this price point. **Best Buy.** —P.G.

89 Columbia 2005 Red Willow Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (Yakima Valley); \$30. Red Willow was the launch pad for many viticultural experiments. The wines are usually released a little later than most, and reward breathing and cellaring. The relative lightness of the fruit is compensated for by the textural layering of leaf, berry, barrel and tannin. This new vintage feels a bit softer than most, but the mix of berries, pomegranate and citrus remains, with the new oak lightly applied.



The addition of 10% Malbec deepens the color and adds some peppery spice. —P.G.

89 Columbia Crest 2005 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$27. Scents of tobacco enhance the ripe, lush black fruits, which amply demonstrate the power of Washington grapes. The winemaking is polished, the barrel aging adds vanilla and smoke, and at this new, lower price, it's a good value as well. —P.G.

89 Nelms Road 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon (Washington); \$24. The blend includes presswine from the estate and other top vineyards; and the Cabernet, though dominant, is padded with an interesting mix of grapes, including some Italian varieties. It's deep, plummy, laced with complex flavors that begin with ripe and tangy red berries and black cherries, and lead into accents of coffee, earth and baking chocolate. The tangy natural acids keep this wine sharp and focused, and the Italian varieties seem to bump up the sweetness in the finish. —P.G.

89 Reininger 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon (Walla Walla); \$38. As before, this is Pepper Bridge and Seven Hills Cabernet Sauvignon, with just a splash of Petit Verdot. For a Cab it's open and forward, showing juicy cherry and strawberry flavors, dotted with herb and spice, finished with luscious milk chocolate. The sharp tannins seem to tighten it up, suggesting further improvement with age. This is a classy effort, as always, but seems to want further bottle time to show its best. —P.G.

89 Saviah Cellars 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon (Walla Walla); \$28. Included is a portion (10%) of Seven Hills Merlot; it's a wine that opens up immediately with pretty fruit and floral scents, some spicy highlights, and an intriguing darker streak. There's toasted grain character that comes from the vines, not the barrels, explains winemaker Rich Funk. The wine is supple and balanced, and the bright berry and cassis flavors are nicely counterpointed with streaks of toast, caramel and chocolate. —P.G.

88 '37 Cellars 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$NA. The name refers to the year 1937, a classic year for Martin guitars. This debut release will remind many tasters of the Cabernets of Boudreaux Cellars—thick, toasty, gritty and tannic, but delicious in a bodaciously aggressive style. The liquorous

finish coats the mouth like a smooth shot of Bourbon. —P.G.

88 Hightower Cellars 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$NA. Mostly Red Mountain fruit, this Bordeaux blend also includes about a third of the grapes from Alder Ridge in the Horse Heaven Hills, and a splash of Merlot from Pepper Bridge in Walla Walla. It follows the Hightower style of pretty fruit, ripe tannins and lots of chocolaty notes. In this excellent vintage it retains just a hint of fresh rosemary and black pepper, which contributes some snap to the finish. —P.G.

87 Balboa 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$19. A fine complement to Balboa's Merlot, the Cabernet shows a bit more muscle and concentration. Your enjoyment of the wine will depend upon your tolerance for flavors of stem and leaf, which run through the steely fruit and give it a Bordeaux-like sensibility. A fine steak wine, it finishes up with black olive and bitter chocolate. —P.G.

87 Columbia Crest 2006 H3 Cabernet Sauvignon (Horse Heaven Hills); \$15. The H3 Cab comes across as a more tightly defined, sharp-edged version of the Merlot. Same berry flavors, a bit more acid, and a sense that the wine goes deeper into the palate, though with less breadth. It feels taut in the middle, as if needing more bottle age and/or breathing time to flesh out, but the structure is sound and the flavors clean and varietal. —P.G.

87 Dusted Valley 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$24. This is a Bordeaux blend; the winery's entry-level Cabernet. What that means, say the winemakers, is that it's made to be a little softer, more fruit forward—a wine for immediate pleasure. Most is estate (Walla Walla) fruit, despite the Columbia Valley designation. It's soft and fruity, with strawberry and juicy fruit/tropical flavors. Not exactly plump, but broad and generous, with a little spicy kick to the finish. —P.G.

87 Substance 2007 Cs Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$18. This Cabernet opens with lush mocha and coffee scents, and is a soft, well-rounded wine with well-rounded fruit flavors. Small amounts of Malbec and Petit Verdot are included in the blend. —P.G.

MERLOT

94 Woodward Canyon 2006 Merlot (Columbia Valley); \$39. There is a little Cabernet Sauvignon (15%) and Syrah (4%) in the blend also. This is a silky, yet muscular—let's say it, masculine—style of Merlot. Meaning that the fruit is concentrated with deep blue and black berry and cassis flavors, augmented with lead pencil. Beautiful polish and concentration characterize this wine, yet it's quite approachable. —P.G.

91 Reininger 2005 Merlot (Walla Walla); \$36. Chuck Reininger has fashioned a Merlot that captures his personal style as well as the signature of the vineyards. Smooth and seamless, juiced up with spicy berry and plum, then softened with barrel flavors of butterscotch, milk chocolate and coffee, this wine just glides along on a carpet of silk, tossing out bursts of spice and herb along the way. —P.G.

90 Beresan 2006 Merlot (Columbia Valley); \$29. This pure varietal blend of Merlot opens fragrantly with scents of black raspberry, black cherry, plum and smoke. Very young, tight and firmly packed, it's a wine that is already showing finesse and a pleasing tension between the tart fruit and the toasty, mocha-flavored oak. Given time in the bottle, it may well prove to be one of the best-aging Beresan Merlots ever made. —P.G.

90 Fielding Hills 2006 RiverBend Vineyard Merlot (Wahluke Slope); \$36. Included in the blend is 11% Cabernet Sauvignon and 9% Syrah, all estate-grown. It shows both the broadness and the depth of Washington Merlot, mixing plummy fruit with streaks of tobacco and licorice. There's a suggestion of earth and a savory aspect to the finish, which exits smoothly and softly, with a last kick of cinnamon. —P.G.

90 Milbrandt Vineyards 2006 Traditions Merlot (Columbia Valley); \$15. From a mix of Milbrandt vineyard sites, this outstanding blend includes small amounts of Cabernet, Syrah, Malbec and Barbera. The blend was so well done that each component adds a vital piece to the whole—smooth berry and cherry fruits, spice, tobacco, licorice and smoke, folding into a lush and chocolaty finish. **Best Buy.** —P.G.