

HOT SMALL BRANDS

Hot Small Brands of 2011

Patricia M. Roth



Hot Small Brands: 2003-2010

Hot Small Brands of 2010

1. **Cameron Hughes** (Napa Valley, California)
2. **Crew Wine Company** (Dunnigan Hills, California)
3. **Dusted Valley** (Walla Walla, Washington)
4. **Twisted Oak** (Calaveras County, California)
5. **Black Ankle Vineyards** (Maryland)
6. **Salinia Wine Company** (Sonoma Coast, California)
7. **Bella Vineyards and Wine Caves** (Dry Creek Valley, California)
8. **Persimmon Creek Vineyards** (Georgia)
9. **Willakenzie Estate** (Willamette Valley, Washington)
10. **Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards** (Sonoma, California)

Hot Small Brands of 2009


1. **Pacific Rim** (Washington)
2. **Wines Of Substance** (Washington)
3. **Cambiata** (Monterey County, California)
4. **Abacela** (Southern Oregon)
5. **Cinder** (Idaho)
6. **Swanson Vineyards** (Oakville, California)
7. **L'aventure** (Paso Robles, California)
8. **Marynissen Estates** (Ontario, Canada)
9. **Bartholomew Park Winery** (Sonoma Valley, California)
10. **Raffaldini Vineyards And Winery** (North Carolina)

Hot Small Brands of 2008

1. **Graziano** (Mendocino, California)
2. **Four Vines Peasant** (Paso Robles, California)
3. **Becker Vineyards** (Texas Hill Country, Texas)
4. **Red Tail Ridge** (Seneca Lake, New York)
5. **Sojourn Cellars** (Sonoma, California)
6. **Domaine Drouhin** (Dundee Hills, Oregon)
7. **Jeff Runquist Wines** (Clarksburg, California)
8. **Marilyn Remark Winery** (Arroyo Seco, California)
9. **Trio Vintners** (Columbia Valley, Washington)
10. **Purple Wine Company** (Napa Valley, California)

Hot Small Brands of 2007

1. **Willamette Valley Vineyards** (Turner, Oregon)
2. **Ceja Vineyards** (Carneros, California)
3. **Tangent** (San Luis Obispo, California)
4. **Clos Du Val** (Napa, California)
5. **Kutch Wines** (Russian River, California)
6. **Coro Mendocino** (Mendocino County, California)
7. **J.R. Storey** (Sausalito, California)
8. **L'ecole N° 41** (Lowden, Washington)
9. **King Family Vineyards** (Crozet, Virginia)
10. **Gruet Winery** (Albuquerque, New Mexico)



IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, we highlight our ninth annual Hot Small Brands list, which includes some of today's most exciting brands from small- and medium-sized producers—as well as a couple of larger ones that merit recognition.

When WBM published the first annual list of Hot Small Brands in 2003, we sought to identify and recognize small- or medium-sized wineries—the up-and-comers that had experienced the most growth in a short period of time. We measured growth in case sales, which was typically the result of smart marketing. Many of our early picks went on to new heights. Some were acquired by larger wine companies while nearly all continued to grow.

The list and the way we select these wines have evolved as well.

We gravitate toward wineries and brands that represent market trends or innovation, that take a leadership position in their regions, or that make unusual varietals or unexpected wines. There are some larger wineries on the list now as well.

These are wines that winemakers will want to check out. This list also represents a collection of wines *Wine Business Monthly* editors would serve at a party. We do, in fact, serve them during a gathering we host during the annual Unified Wine & Grape Symposium.

1. **Wine by Joe**
(Dundee, Oregon)
2. **Cecchetti Wine Company**
(Sonoma, California)
3. **JC Cellars**
(Oakland, California)
4. **Truett Hurst**
(Dry Creek Valley, California)
5. **Barnard Griffin**
(Richland, Washington)
6. **Bennett Valley Cellars**
(Sonoma County, California)
7. **Talbott Vineyards**
(Monterey County, California)
8. **Veritas Vineyard & Winery**
(Afton, Virginia)
9. **Barrister Winery**
(Spokane, Washington)
10. **Lone Madrone**
(Paso Robles, California)

Hot Small Brands of 2006

1. **A to Z Wineworks** (Dundee, Oregon)
2. **House Wine** (Walla Walla, Washington)
3. **Liberty School** (Paso Robles, California)
4. **Shannon Ridge** (Lake County, California)
5. **Twenty Bench** (Napa, California)
6. **Cycles Gladiator** (Napa, California)
7. **Bedell Cellars** (Cutchogue, New York–Long Island)
8. **Artesa Vineyards & Winery** (Napa, California)
9. **Black Star Farms** (Suttons Bay, Michigan)
10. **Buena Vista Carneros** (Sonoma, California)

Hot Small Brands of 2005

1. **Parducci Wine Cellars** (Ukiah, California)
2. **Solorosa** (St. Helena, California)
3. **Cheapskate** (Napa, California)
4. **Velvet Red** (St. James, Missouri)
5. **Incredible Red** (Paso Robles, California)
6. **Hard Core** (Santa Maria, California)
7. **Kunde Estate** (Kenwood, California)
8. **Hitching Post** (Buellton, California)
9. **Andretti Winery** (Napa, California)
10. **Esser Vineyards** (Napa Valley, California)

Hot Small Brands of 2004

1. **Red Truck** (Sonoma, California)
2. **Cartledge & Browne** (American Canyon, California)
3. **Seven Deadly Zins** (Lodi, California)
4. **Oliver Winery** (Bloomington, Indiana)
5. **Angeline Wines** (Santa Rosa, California)
6. **Rock Rabbit** (Graton, California)
7. **Three Thieves Bandit** (Lodi, California)
8. **Sofia Mini** (Rutherford, California)
9. **Screw Kappa Napa** (Sonoma, California)
10. **Graceland Cellars** (Oakland, California)

Hot Small Brands of 2003

1. **Hrm Rex-Goliath** (Soledad, California)
2. **McManis Family Vineyards** (Ripon, California)
3. **Sebastiani Vineyards & Winery** (Sonoma, California)
4. **Castle Rock Winery** (Palos Verdes Estates, California)
5. **Black Oak** (Healdsburg, California)
6. **Jewel Collection** (Lodi, California)
7. **Tin Roof** (Geyserville, California)
8. **Three Thieves** (Lodi, California)
9. **Jest Red** (Healdsburg, California)
10. **J Garcia Wines** (Geyserville, California)



1. Wine by Joe

A Value-priced, Italian-style Sparkler from Oregon

2010 JOE'S SECCO, OREGON

As a kid, Joe Dobbles used to hang out in the kitchen while his mother and grandmother cooked. "I was always into analyzing flavors and aromas. The family joke was that some day I was going to get my nose cut off from putting it in so many things," he recalled. "Winemaking is kind of a sixth sense for me. I felt I innately understood a lot of things that were not taught to me."



Along that line, Dobbles said he has always followed his instincts. "I don't over-think things. If my gut says it's correct, it's correct," he said. When he left his job as head winemaker for Willamette Valley Vineyards in 2002, he used \$50,000 of his own money and focused on what he knew best—production. The company launched in 2003 with Wine by Joe and 20 custom winemaking clients.

Dobbles reports that today his company is the third largest wine producer in Oregon. He owns a 214-acre vineyard and buys grapes from approximately 30 other vineyards, and 24 employees make it all happen in a 52,000-square-foot winery in Dundee, Oregon. "The business is basically a four-legged stool: our own business, retail, vineyard and bulk custom winemaking and proprietary labels," Dobbles explained.

Wine by Joe is one of three brands in the Joe Dobbles' portfolio and one of the first high-quality screw top ventures in Oregon. Marketed as "Serious Wines without Attitude," the lineup includes Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Rosé and Joe's Secco—all priced for under \$20. The winery will bottle approximately 32,000 cases from the 2011 vintage under Wine by Joe.

The WBM team went for Joe's Secco with its Prosecco-style bubbles. We liked the play on words in the name and the fun packaging; the color of the wine, seen easily through a clear bottle, and the crown cap caught our eye. The flavor was fresh and vibrant, and there was lots of fizz in this Italian-style sparkler. It's enjoyable, original and it retails for \$16.

Dobbles said the economy has actually contributed to Wine by Joe's success in that his company was among the first to offer value-priced Oregon wines. "People love the quality and the value. We launched Wine by Joe in 2004 primarily in Oregon. The Joe's Secco was offered exclusively in 2011 to Whole Foods in Oregon and Washington and to limited on-premise accounts in Oregon and Washington; and in 2012, we are going to offer it nationally. It's been a good success.

"I've knocked down barriers in price, quality, image and packaging. Wine by Joe is fun—and believe me, it over-delivers on value. I think that's part of the reason for its success," Dobbles said.

Dobbles mentioned that ever since he traveled to Germany after college and apprenticed at Wiengut Erbhof Tesch, where they made Gewürztraminer ice wines, he's had "kind of a sweet tooth." As winemaker for Silvan Ridge, he developed a semi-sparkling Muscat under the winery's Hinman label. Joe's Secco is a blend of Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir Blanc and Muscat and is less than 0.30 percent residual sugar—essentially dry to the taste.

In addition to Wine by Joe, the Joe Dobbles' portfolio includes: Dobbles Family Estate, a 6,000-case luxury high-end brand focused on single vineyard and stylistic blended Pinot Noirs, and Jovino Oregon Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, a restaurant-focused brand. In 2010, Dobbles produced Oregon's first commercial Grenache Blanc, which replaced the discontinued Pinot Gris under the Dobbles Family Estate label and will be the solely-focused white wine for national distribution.

In 2012, Dobbles said business plans include growing and marketing his own labels much more strongly by focusing on expanding national distribution in new markets and expansion to others outside the U.S., including Japan, Hong Kong, Sweden, U.K. and China, while continuing with custom and bulk wine sales.

Price: \$16

Case Production: 800 cases

Blend: Proprietary Blend

Brix at Harvest: 20.1

Residual Sugar: 0.35%

Alcohol: 13%



2. Cecchetti Wine Company

Fast Growth from an Industry Veteran

2009 LINE 39 SAUVIGNON BLANC, LAKE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Ask Roy Cecchetti how he has doubled his company's business every year since launching it in 2007, and he will tell you about his father's strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit, his education in finance and his wife, Rachael, who co-founded the company with him. He'll also talk about the business model he believes in and the opportunities of a winegrowing region his winemaker Bob Broman calls "The Last Frontier."

With the motto that "good wine does not always come with a hefty price tag," Sonoma, California-based Cecchetti Wine Company started shipping wine in 2007. The company sold more than 260,000 cases in 2011. As for 2012, "The sky's the limit. We're going to just keep growing," Cecchetti said.



Of the company's three affordably-priced brands—Line 39 (\$10 to \$12), Redtree (\$7 to \$9) and Backhouse (\$6 to \$8)—Line 39 is becoming one of the top brands in the company's portfolio. It sold 86,000 cases in 2011 and is projected to reach 120,000 cases in 2012.

Line 39 Sauvignon Blanc is a lemony, crisp, affordable wine that showcases the main white grape variety grown in Lake County, and it represents a marketing success story. Although it's not a "small brand," we break WBM rules when there's a good story behind it.

Roy Cecchetti was co-owner of one of the fastest growing California wineries, Cecchetti Sebastiani Cellar, due largely to the success of its flagship brand Pepperwood Grove, a 500,000-case brand when he sold his share of the company in 2003. After that, he took a break and later served as president of Guenoc Estate Vineyards & Winery, which turned him on to the beauty and quality of Lake County wines—in particular, Sauvignon Blanc.

Now he's doing it all over again and has brought veteran winemaker Bob Broman along for the ride. They've worked together since the mid-1990s at Cecchetti Sebastiani Cellar and at Guenoc. While they were there, Broman called Lake County the Last Frontier because "it's the last bastion of appellations in California that has not been established, the last one we knew of that was not out there in a big way," Cecchetti explained. So they went for the volume, using the "oceans" of Sauvignon Blanc grapes grown in Lake County.

Line 39 Sauvignon Blanc is made by Broman at The Ranch Winery in St. Helena. "Our wine-making style is totally stainless steel, and it's kind of a twist between New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and California/Lake County Sauvignon Blanc. Broman does the minimal oxidation process, which New Zealand winemakers do, and he also does it the traditional way, which gives it a twist," Cecchetti said.

"Every release, four vintages from 2007 on, has had Best Buy awards from *Wine Spectator* or *Wine Enthusiast*, so it's been very well received."

Cecchetti still handles the finances of the company and knows exactly where the business is positioned "every minute of every day." The business formula he has always believed in and learned the hard way is this: "You're not going to make any money in this business unless everybody else along the line makes money—so you have to price products accordingly, and that's why I'm in the volume and value game.

"I care about dollars, not percentages; and I want to make sure when you give a product to a wholesaler and retailer that it is value-priced and it sells. If wholesalers and retailers profit well from our brands and, at the same time, they sell in volume, game's over: you've won."

Price: \$10

Case Production: 20,000 cases

Blend: 100% Sauvignon Blanc

pH: 3.46

TA: 0.66

Brix: 23.1

Residual Sugar: 0.3

Alcohol: 13.5%



3. JC Cellars

Blending His Way to Greatness

2008 THE IMPOSTOR, CALIFORNIA

Our WBM team chose a blend from JC Cellars called The Impostor as one of the 2011 Hot Small Brands because, much like the attributes of the best chefs, we think blends exemplify a winemaker's creativity, choices and influences. So it's not surprising that winemaker **Jeff Cohn** studied the culinary arts before winemaking became his passion or that he counts French winemakers as being among his strongest influences.

Cohn got to play with a lot of different kinds of barrels and yeasts when he was the winemaker for **Rosenblum Cellars**, where he crafted more than 70 different wines annually. "We experimented. It was about flavors. My goal was to take wine to the next level, from great to truly amazing," Cohn said.

Cohn created his own label, JC Cellars, in 1996 while at Rosenblum. He left in 2006 to focus on his own winery in downtown Oakland, California, where he shares a cozy office with his wife **Alexandra**, the winery's accountant and CFO. The urban winery on 4th Street presents a welcoming vibe, indicative of Cohn's long-held friendships he has made throughout his career. No walls divide the tasting room and the winery, where French winemaking interns annually become part of the winemaking team and where visitors can experience a working winery.

"My wines are truly a vision of what I love to drink," Cohn said. "I have a lot of friends in France who have influenced me, and our wine has been described as being very French and very Californian at the same time."

"Jeff can taste a grape and have a vision for what he wants to do with it," Alexandra added.

With The Impostor, Cohn blended Zinfandel and Syrah with smaller amounts of Petite Sirah, Tempranillo, Carignan, Grenache and a last-minute dose of Viognier to create the "mysterious aromatics" noted in the wine's tasting notes. "The true story is that we had a lot of Zinfandel from one particular vineyard, and I picked out the best barrels for the vineyard-designate from that vineyard; the rest we kept separate, and I didn't know what to do with it. I decided to throw it in the tank, blend some of this and some of that," Cohn said. "I liked it but didn't initially love it. I thought it needed something to make it stand out. I went into the cold room. I found some Viognier we hadn't used, and that seemed to make everything pop. That's one of the components we continue to use in that blend, which makes it interesting."

Cohn described the wine as "a roller coaster ride of aromatics and flavor constantly going in different directions, and that is what you want in a wine...Whereas you think it's very fruit-driven, you get more mineral aspects and more gamey aspects going through."

At a tasting in Mississippi, Alexandra said someone described it as "a party in your mouth...So many people like this wine. It appeals to a broader palette. I go out with it to the marketplace, and people taste it and get a big smile on their faces. It's fun."

"I think when you taste wine, it shouldn't just be about tasting it. I like a wine that tells a story. When you taste a story, that's really interesting. I want to make a wine that makes you think when you drink," Cohn said.

Of his winemaking philosophy, Cohn noted: "I like to do cold soaks. Our fermentation styles are very interesting. We do punch downs five times a day during fermentation, and I think that is part of what the key to our wines is about. We give them a lot of oxygen early on with the punch downs. We get a lot of great extraction. All free run goes directly to barrel. We don't rack. I like to leave things on their gross lees; it adds richness to the wine. I use a variety of storage units—part is aged in Foudre, part in stainless steel and cement tanks, and the rest is in Burgundy-shaped barrels. I have a yeast program, and we use a lot of yeasts that I have picked to match up with the certain wines."

The barrels range in size from 60 to 600 gallons and come from more than 10 different cooperages. When wine from the individual barrels is blended together, additional layers of flavors and aromatics are achieved.

"Single varieties can make great wines. I've had 100 percent Grenaches that are mind-blowing, but I wanted this wine to be more about layers. The old Italian farmers all planted field blends. Why? Because they knew it added flavor. For me, that's what I like to do. We are constantly experimenting, constantly evolving, constantly trying new things out," Cohn said.

Price: \$35

Case Production: 1,171 cases

Blend: Zinfandel, Syrah, Petite Sirah, Tempranillo, Carignan, Grenache, Viognier

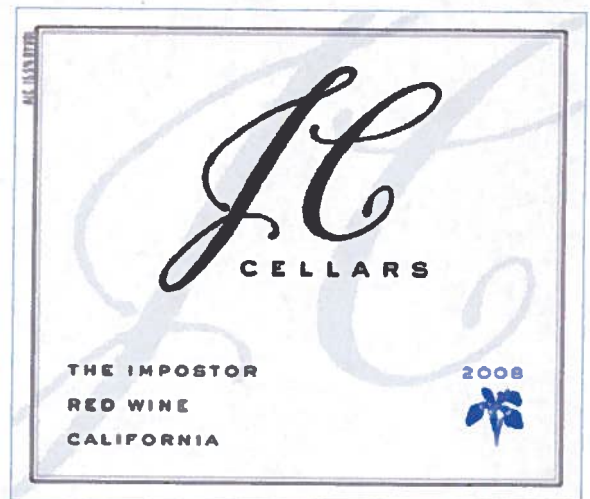
pH: 3.68

TA: 0.58

Brix: 26.3

Residual Sugar: Dry

Alcohol: 15.5%





4. Truett Hurst

Leaders in Sustainability

2009 RED ROOSTER ZINFANDEL, DRY CREEK VALLEY, SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

With the vision of creating world-class wines using biodynamic farming principles and varieties indigenous to Dry Creek Valley in Sonoma County, California, the owners of Truett Hurst planted 17.5 acres to Zinfandel and Petite Sirah in 2008. In 2012, the winery hopes to harvest its first biodynamic crop.

The 2009 Red Rooster Zinfandel is among the winery's first releases, of which 950 cases were produced. The grapes came from several different sources in Dry Creek Valley that were mostly hillside- and sustainably-farmed.

The wine is a blend based on a specific flavor profile sought by winemaker Virginia "Ginny" Lambrix: Big rich fruit, a little spice, a lot of texture.

Lambrix counts making the "best picking decision based on ripeness" as probably the single most important decision she makes as a winemaker. "It is the grape flavor precursors that the yeast transform. I want them to be pushed solidly into the spicy, fruit-forward realm and away from vegetal and green. My goal is to coax and direct the yeast to maximize interesting and fruit-forward elements," she explained.

Lambrix wants fruit flavors to explode in her mouth when she's making picking decisions, and that bold flavor comes through in this wine.

The history behind Truett Hurst tells the story of the owners' belief systems. They are committed to sustainability and, through organic and biodynamic farming practices, aim to foster the winery's natural eco-system and make it welcoming for that which spawns, grazes, roosts and grows there.

The story goes back more than 20 years. Fourth-generation winemaker and biodynamic winegrowing pioneer Paul Dolan and 26-year wine industry veteran Phil Hurst worked together when Dolan ran Fetzer Winery, years before they formed the Truett Hurst partnership. Dolan hired Hurst at Fetzer and became his mentor; Hurst, later in his career, co-founded Winery Exchange, one of the world's largest private label companies.

Their wine company, called HDD, LLC, has grown to include Ginny Lambrix and Heath Dolan (winemakers and viticulturists); Bill Hambrecht (Hambrecht & Quist investment banking firm co-founder); Woody Hambrecht (marketing specialist and vineyard manager); and Mark De Meulanaere (the company's CFO and Truett Hurst's GM). Because of their collective talent in winemaking, viticulture, marketing and business, members of this wine group have often been referred to as "the dream team."

The company's portfolio includes Truett Hurst, VML (Virginia Marie Lambrix) Winery, Bradford Mountain, Healdsburg Ranches, Stonegate, Simply Pure and Sauvignon Republic. In 2011, company sales exceeded 150,000 cases, up from 60,000 cases in 2010.

Lambrix makes all the wines for Truett Hurst, VML Winery and the company's nationally distributed wines. When making Red Rooster, Lambrix said the grapes were cold-soaked for almost a week and punched down daily. The fermentations occurred in jacketed open-top fermenters, ranging in size from 4 to 6 tons of capacity. The wines were pressed slightly sweet and sent to barrel to finish both primary and secondary fermentation.

On the business side, Hurst said, "We are looking at the industry differently and applying some modern business techniques. Because of our partnership with Bill Hambrecht, who has brought business strategies to us that we never would have dreamed of, we are being exposed to a whole new galaxy of business opportunities."

The wine company is in negotiations with an Internet retailer, as well as a high-end luxury brand, and it's eyeing new acquisitions. The owners are also considering taking the business public.

Looking back, Hurst said: "When I hooked up with Paul Dolan four years ago and we started HDD, LLC, we thought we would keep the company small and family-oriented." But keeping it small was not in the cards. "We are a dynamic enterprise—and we just could not stop the entrepreneurial spirit."

Price: \$29

Case Production: 950 cases

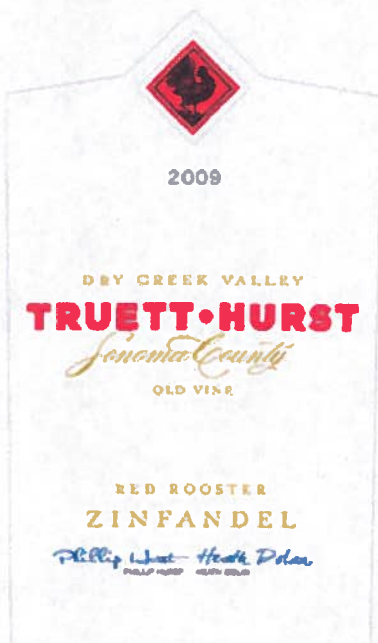
Blend: 100% Zinfandel

pH: 3.55

TA: 6.63

Residual Sugar: 0.07

Alcohol: 15.8%





5. Barnard Griffin

Marching to the Beat of His Own Drum

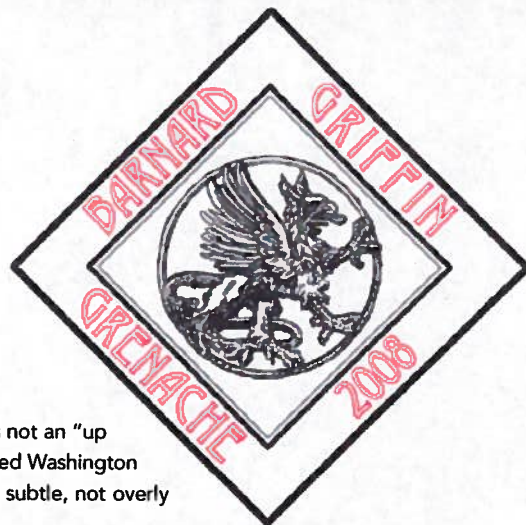
2008 GRENACHE, WASHINGTON

Rob Griffin makes elegant wines, and Barnard Griffin—well established in the state of Washington—is not an “up and coming” winery nor is it a “small brand.” Rather, we are honoring a pioneer who made and marketed Washington wine when there wasn’t a culture for doing so. He also helped to develop and is known for producing subtle, not overly extracted, wines in a solid style.

Though Griffin’s great grandfather laid down roots in the Alhambra Valley in the San Francisco Bay Area and his uncle farmed vineyards in Napa, Griffin set his compass further north. After graduating from UC Davis’ winemaking program and working at Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma in the early 1970s, he moved to the state of Washington, where Barnard Griffin has had its own label for 30 years.

Griffin was drawn to the state’s rough-cut character and cooler northern climate and inspired by the similarities in latitude between Washington and some of the great wine regions in France that he had read about on the back labels of wine bottles. When he arrived in what would become Washington Wine Country, covered with sagebrush and the occasional tumbleweed, there were 10 wineries; today, there are about 700 wineries and growers combined.

He and his wife, Deborah Barnard, own and operate Barnard Griffin in Richland, Washington. What started as a virtual winery, while Griffin was holding down a job as winemaker for Hogue Cellars, has grown to be one of the larger wineries in Washington. “We are one of probably two entirely family-owned wineries in the state. Otherwise, everyone



Price: \$25
Case Production: 128 cases
Blend: 100% Grenache
pH: 3.5
TA: 0.64
Residual Sugar: Dry
Alcohol: 14.4%

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in the similar size category is corporate. We are the second largest family-owned winery in the state, probably. In this business, you lie about how large you are and about how small you are," he quipped.

In going out on his own in 1983, Griffin said, "I was motivated to have complete and utter creative control. I always saw winemaking as a calling, not just a job, so having the ability to craft the wine the way I wanted to was important."

The couple's two daughters have joined the business—Megan in winemaking and Elise in marketing; and Deborah, a warm-glass artist, operates her studio at the facility. The winery sits at the confluence of the Yakima, Columbia and Snake rivers in the heart of wine country; a choice made early on—to be near the vineyards—turned out to be a decision in their favor.

The climate, most years, "does a great job of ripening grapes without over-ripening them," Griffin said. Yet, he added, "One of the things about Washington, it's a pretty tough climate. Every eight to 10 years, vineyards are pretty severely damaged by the winter. By working with growers in a wider geographic spread, we are guaranteed a better chance of continuity."

The winery produces "a dizzying array of wines," including five wines with reasonably broad distribution and more that are winery- or wine club-only. Griffin said they are probably best known for Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Fumé Blanc, as well as Merlot and dry Rosé.

The Grenache—with bright, fruit flavors—is done in small volume but has been successful. It exemplifies the kind of quality that can be accomplished in Washington and reflects the fruit quality of the grapes in an elegant way.

"We're in a more extreme climate, and a variety like Grenache tends to yield a lot of fruit. The critical ripening period here is cooler, and we get physiological flavor maturity for ripe and mature tannins without the crazy high alcohol. It's difficult to get a good degree of color, so that reflects proper viticulture, which we advise on. We work with the best growers.

"Grenache is kind of Washington's answer to Pinot Noir," Griffin added.

Making it was pretty straightforward, he explained. "We crush into a small fermenter, do several pump-overs per day, ferment to near dryness, press into a mixture of newer and older oak barrels and age it, but not to where the wood overwhelms the fruit. Oak can obliterate the delicate and variably interesting aromas."

After three decades, Griffin is still very fond of the winemaking process. "It's the excitement of seeing fruit ripen and getting the fruit picked and delivered and processed. I'm more of a back-of-the-house than a front-of-the-house individual. I like the creative part. I am not as keen on the promotional part, but we all have to do that. I didn't get into the wine business to create status—that was not my goal."

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6. Bennett Valley Cellars

Producing the Flavor of the Bennett Valley AVA

2009 PINOT NOIR, BENNETT VALLEY, SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Bennett Valley is a little known appellation in Sonoma County, California. **Bennett Valley Cellars** is hoping to change that.

"We're the new kids on the block in Bennett Valley. We have a strong, focused vision and unbelievable synergy, and we want to join with the existing vintners and growers in Bennett Valley to show that this is a world-class wine-growing region," general manager **Doug Nickle** said.

Being in the Bennett Valley AVA is a bit like going back in time when a region's winemaking families lived and worked on their properties and produced flavors specific to the immediate area. It's fitting, then, that **Emilio Zanin**, owner and founder of Bennett Valley Cellars, was attracted to the AVA's close-knit community of 36 growers.

Price: \$38

Case Production: 650 cases

Blend: 100% Bennett Valley Pinot Noir

pH: 3.48

TA: 5.95

Brix: 25.6

Residual Sugar: 0.01 gm/100 ml

Alcohol: 14.5%



"I grew up in Italy, and my grandfather had the vision to buy a vineyard in the Veneto winegrowing region, where they make a lot of Soave. We used to spend the crush season there with the people working the land, helping them to pick grapes," Zanin said. "When I was a teenager, my father would insist I taste a little vino—wine was considered part of our everyday meal."

Zanin immigrated to the U.S. in 1969 and later started **American Tartaric Products (ATP)**. ATP has been supplying ingredients and machinery to the wine industry for 20 years. In 2006, he bought 5 acres of vineyard land with a home in Bennett Valley—and it enabled him to return to his long-held dream of winegrowing. The vineyard is named after his wife, **Marina**. "You always have this dream of doing something yourself, and that is what we are trying to do now," he said.

Down the road, the Zanins' son and winery president, **Luca**, bought 40 acres of vineyard property and called it **Simpatico Ranch**. The Bennett Valley Cellars team crystallized when they brought on Australian native **Toni Stockhausen** as winemaker and Sonoma native and former professional baseball pitcher **Doug Nickle** as general manager and grower relations manager. Both also work for ATP.

Bennett Valley Cellars produces estate-grown Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The winery has two Pinot Noir labels: Bennett Valley Cellars and Bin 6410. The 2008 Pinot Noir won a gold medal at the **Sonoma County Harvest Fair**, and the 2009 release got a silver medal at the **2010 San Francisco Chronicle International Wine Competition**. Stockhausen has a track record of making award-winning wine, having worked for **Mildara Blass** in Australia, **Foster's Wine Group** at **Windsor Vineyard** and **Weibel Family Vineyards and Winery** in Mendocino. Her father, **Karl Stockhausen**, is known as a "living legend" in Australia.

The 2009 Bennett Valley Cellars Pinot Noir reflects the flavors of a vineyard in a relatively new (2003) and small AVA (650 acres). The grapes came from Marina's Vineyard; all 5 acres are planted to Pinot Noir (clones 115 and 2A). The vines are nine years old.

Of the AVA growing region, Stockhausen said: "Every area has its stars. Making large homogenous blends of wines definitely has its place—but when you are in a small appellation like we are, the beauty is that it is regional-specific and will vary from year to year. We are what we are given to work with in that year. I think that's a big thing."

For the 2010 vintage, the grapes were hand-picked and hand-sorted, placed in 4-ton open-top fermenters, and the caps were manually punched down. "From there, my philosophy is to impart as much as we can to the finished wine," Stockhausen said. "We use several different strains of yeast, some different tannins and new French oak barrels as well, mostly to achieve color stability so you maintain those rich berry tones," she said.

Following a cold soak and primary fermentation, the remaining grapes were pressed in a basket press. "Most importantly with Pinot Noir, you don't want something overly extracted. You can control that really well with a basket press. From there we keep the clones separate and put them through malolactic fermentation. We gave the 2009 nine months in barrel and brought it out and bottled it.

"At the end of the day the biggest challenge is to have wine that Emilio and Luca want to drink—they are Italian, and so it's wine with lunch and wine with dinner," she said.

Bennett Valley Cellars currently produces 1,800 cases of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay per year and plans to grow to 5,000 cases.



7. Talbott Vineyards

Homogeneity of Ripeness in the Santa Lucia Highlands

2009 LOGAN CHARDONNAY, SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS, MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

WBM published an in-depth Varietal Focus in last month's January issue about Chardonnay, which involved nine winemakers from three different regions tasting each other's wines. The Talbott Vineyards 2009 Logan Chardonnay from the Santa Lucia Highlands in Monterey County, California was among them. The winemakers agreed this is a knockout wine—very creamy and not too oaky—at a reasonable price (\$22).

The wine is made from 100 percent estate-grown Chardonnay—notable because winemaker Dan Karlsen believes Mother Nature leads the way when it comes to wine, with oak being the only flavor over which he has control. To that end, the wine was approximately 80 percent barrel-fermented in 100 percent French oak, with about 30 percent of that new oak.

Karlsen said the Logan wine represents balance and tension. "The Sleepy Hollow Vineyard achieves physiological ripeness while still retaining its naturally high acidity, resulting in grapes that have a lot of richness with high acidity. The Logan is easy to drink but has tension from the acid. I think the intellectual likes tension in the wine. We are trying to create impressions of sweetness and richness and just enough intellectualness to keep people drinking," he explained.

Karlsen has been making wine for Talbott Vineyards since 2008. The winery was established in 1982 and is owned by Robb Talbott. The winery produces 100,000 cases of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir annually. The estate program encompasses two winegrowing areas in Monterey County: the Santa Lucia

Price: \$22.50

Case Production: 15,800 cases

Blend: 100% Sleepy Hollow Vineyards, Santa Lucia Highlands, Chardonnay mixed clones

pH: 3.79

TA: 6.1 g/L

Brix: 24.1

Residual Sugar: 1.8 g/L

Alcohol: 14.9%

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TALBOTT
 LOGAN
 2009
 CHARDONNAY
 SLEEPY HOLLOW VINEYARD
 SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS
Estate Grown

Highlands, where the 565-acre Sleepy Hollow Vineyard is located, and the Carmel Valley, home to the Diamond T Vineyard.

Talbott produces four tiers of Chardonnay, and Logan is priced in the middle. Like all of its Chardonnays, it is 100 percent estate-grown. The fruit came from the Sleepy Hollow Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands, mostly from older vineyards. The fruit is hand-harvested and hand-sorted. The sandy soil allows for homogenous ripening.

"I've been doing this for 32 years throughout the state of California, and you have never seen an easier vineyard to work with. It's homogenous, meaning every vine has the same vigor level," Karlsen said. "For me, the most important thing in the vineyard is homogeneity of ripeness. It's so nice to have a vineyard that doesn't really need a winemaker. It's kind of refreshing, quite honestly.

"I believe that the vine is genetically hard-wired to be successful, and we spend too much time trying to manipulate a system that does not need manipulating," he said. "As I have gotten older, this vineyard taught me that a vineyard put in the right place for the right grape variety wants to perform, and at that point the winemaker needs to back up a little and let the vineyard perform and not interfere with it. That's because you're a winegrower, not a winemaker. You trust the flavor the vineyard makes is enough.

"This is a wine that is 100 percent whole cluster press, and no fining agents are used at all. Making wine is so much like nurturing children; if you start to push the kid around, you end up with a lesser person—like if you have a kid born to be an artist and force it to be a business major at Harvard."

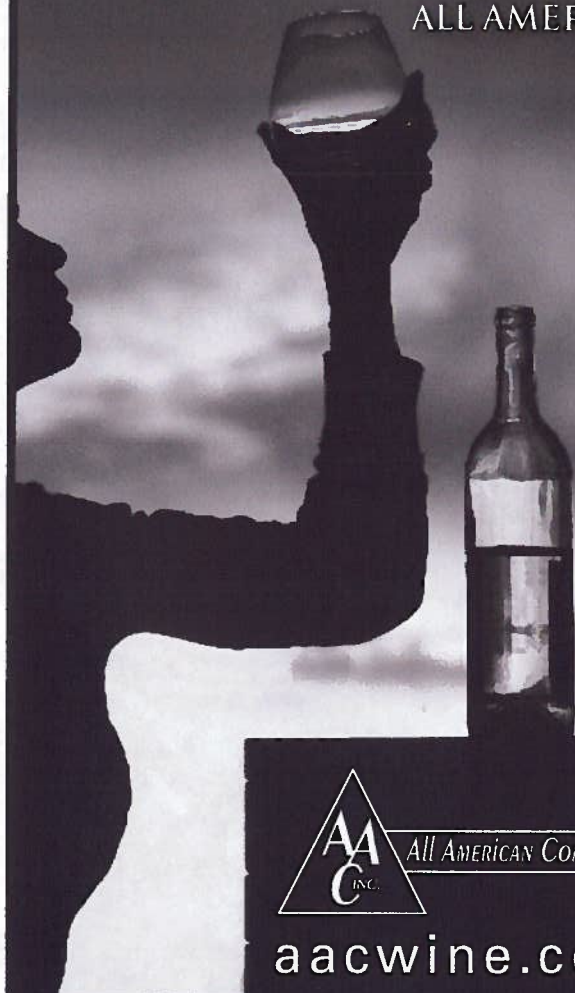
The winery is transitioning to screw cap. "Logan is currently under cork, but 60 percent of our production will be screw cap. I am hoping all of our high-end wines will be screw cap as well," Karlsen said.

Karlsen revealed he puts more heart into wine than intellect. "I have to admit, it took me 30 years to figure that out. You're trained to be a scientist and think about it intellectually. Isn't it supposed to just taste good? This is about accentuating a vineyard site, not about an ego trip.

"The Logan is my favorite wine in the winery," Karlsen added. "It has fresh fruit character, and it tastes like place. This tastes like Sleepy Hollow Vineyard."

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8. Veritas Vineyard & Winery

Virginia's Rising Red

2009 PETIT VERDOT, MONTICELLO, VIRGINIA

Petit Verdot has been gaining recognition as a top Virginia wine—and some say it should be the state's signature grape. That led us to check out a number of Petit Verdot wines.

We liked the 2009 Petit Verdot from Veritas Vineyard & Winery for its intensity of color and richness of flavor—and also because it's a rising star in a state that has long been known for Viognier and Cabernet Franc.

"Petit Verdot is the hope and the future of Virginia winegrowing," said Andrew Hodson, owner and winemaker emeritus of Veritas Vineyard & Winery. "I feel that way because Petit Verdot has the DNA, the sort of natural inborn ability, to be a noble grape here."

Veritas Vineyard & Winery is located on 25 acres at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Afton, Virginia. Hodson, a retired neurologist, and his wife, Patricia, who owned a medical billing business, opened their winery in 2002. He took responsibility for winemaking and she for the year-round cultivation of the vines. Their oldest daughter, Emily Pelton, recently took over as winemaker; though, as Hodson said, "It's my palate and her palate against the world, and we get on very well." Their youngest daughter, Chloe, manages weddings and special events and runs the tasting room. Last year, 70 weddings were held at the winery, which brought 400 new people to the winery on weekends for weddings alone. They produce 15,000 cases annually.

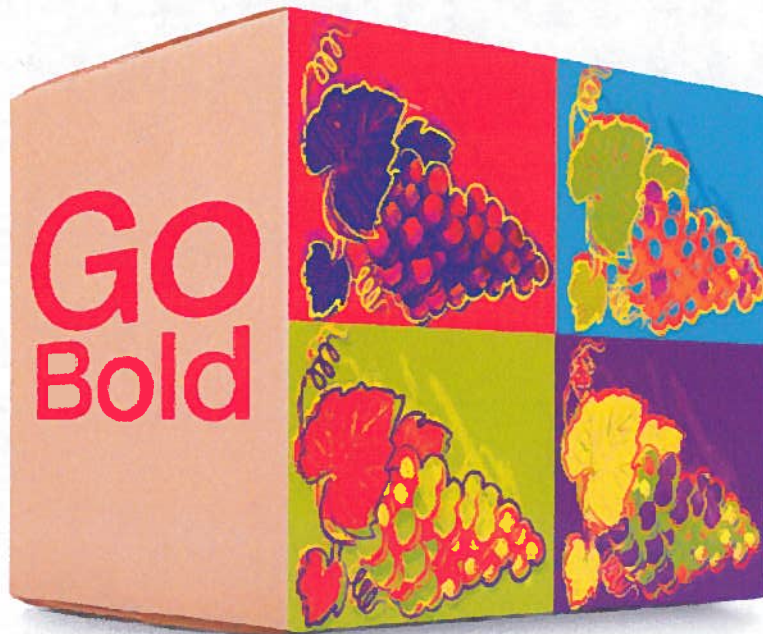
"We planted it, expecting to blend it," Hodson explained. They have since pulled out some Cabernet Franc and replanted with Petit Verdot.

Price: \$30
Case Production: 198 cases
Blend: 100% Petit Verdot
pH: 3.61
TA: 5.9
Brix: 0
RS: 0
Alcohol 13.7%

Beyond the Box.

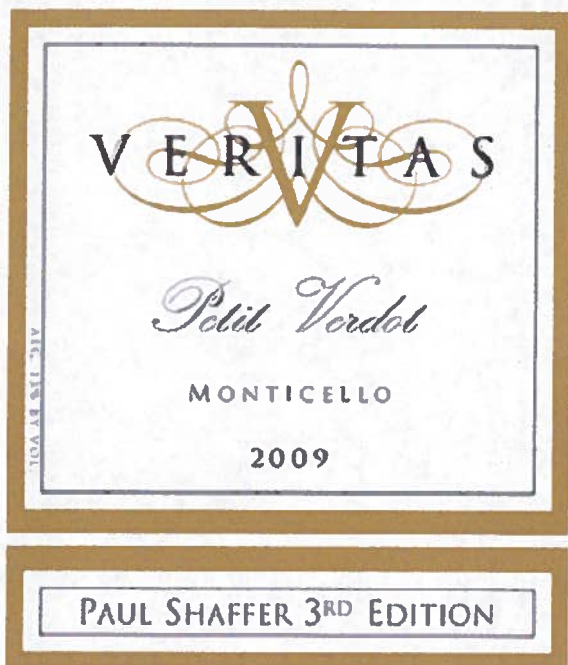
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"We have made a name for ourselves with Cabernet Franc, and now it is nice to have another competitive red that is not as mainstream as other varietals," Pelton said. "I feel like we have beauty and the beast, with the Cabernet Franc being elegant and Petit Verdot being our bigger, beefier red. With Petit Verdot, I can use a lot of aggressive winemaking techniques, which includes a pretty significant oak and aging regimen. It eats oak alive. Even aged in 100 percent new oak, the grape still comes through."

Pelton likes working with Petit Verdot because of its massive intensity of color and richness. "What I am looking for in reds to determine quality at harvest is the ripeness of the tannins. I am looking for intensity, so I like to have a good number of tannins, but I also want them to be supple and interesting, not green and aggressive. What I love about Petit Verdot is that these tannins are inherent to the grape; and unlike other varieties, Petit Verdot seems to have less 'green' qualities in these tannins."

Pelton has been making Petit Verdot from the same fields since she started her career. This enables her to hone her winemaking techniques "to allow the wine to speak for itself while at the same time taking it to the next level." The two fields on their property are harvested two weeks apart, with the field harvested first bringing a lot more fruit, fresh natural acid and vitality to the wine. "This has become a stylistic goal and a real part of my blend," Pelton said. "The field that is harvested later has a much higher level of tannin maturity but lacks the freshness and the brightness of its counterpart. Put together, these wines complement each other and bring a complexity to the wine that neither wine had alone."

Hodson so believes in Petit Verdot that he gave a lecture on it to the Virginia Viticultural Association a couple of years ago to encourage more wineries to plant it—and several have already done so. More wineries are also winning gold medals, Hodson said, including at the Governor's Cup in 2011, where Petit Verdot won more gold medals than another variety.

"This is no petite wine," Hodson emphasized. "The grape is actually masculine. The smallness is referring to the size of the berries. It has a lot of skin in relation to the pulp of the grape, so you get much more flavor and flavor intensity from grapes that have small berries."

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9. Barrister Winery

Emerging Washington Red Wine Variety

2009 CABERNET FRANC, COLUMBIA VALLEY, WASHINGTON

Producing premium wines from the highest quality grapes is the focus of **Barrister Winery**, founded in 2001. As its name implies, Barrister Winery is owned by two attorneys, **Greg Lipsker** and **Michael White**, who carried over their meticulous attention to detail required when practicing law to their wine business—from selecting grapes to choosing yeast and barrels.

Lipsker and White are also best friends, and together they make 4,000 cases of red and 300 cases of white wine annually in their downtown Spokane, Washington winery.

The winery is housed in a 100-year-old, three-story building on property purchased from the **Burlington Northern Railroad**. Trains chug over the barrel room, gently vibrating the barrels thousands of times annually, settling out sediment and serendipitously contributing to Barrister wines' signature softness. The historic facility, with its high, beamed ceilings, brick walls and original planked floors, is also rented out for weddings, dinners and cultural events.

Barrister Winery's flagship wine is Cabernet Franc. It is the fourth most widely planted grape in Washington, behind Cabernet Sauvignon, and is traditionally used for blending. However, Lipsker and White said the grape reaches optimum ripeness in their region, enabling it to stand on its own. "The vineyards we source our fruit from are adept at bringing this fruit to perfect ripeness, enhancing the berry-like components so that it can be used as a wine in its own right, rather than as a blender," Lipsker explained.

The two winemakers had early success with this wine. In 2002, 2003 and 2004, Barrister's Cabernet Franc won Best of Show awards in Los Angeles, Washington and Oregon. A judge who had tasted at all three shows said, during his third tasting, the wine was so consistent he could pick it out blind.

"The thing we found out fairly quickly is that Greg and I have similar, but complementary, palates. We found that we liked the same flavor profiles as we did the sampling, tasting and blending," White noted.

For the 2009 vintage, Lipsker and White blended 90 percent Cabernet Franc with 10 percent Cabernet Sauvignon. They achieved their goal: "to produce a bold, fruit-forward Cabernet Franc with a soft mouthfeel and a long, rich finish."

Price: \$28

Case Production: 937 cases

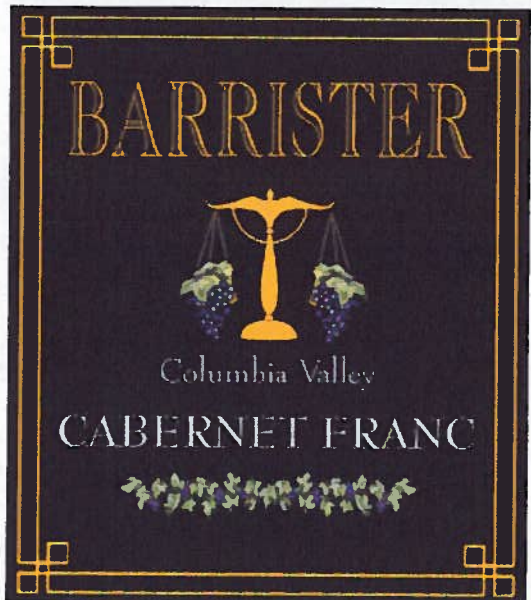
Blend: 90% Cabernet Franc,
10% Cabernet Sauvignon

pH: 3.79

TA: 5.8 g/L

Residual Sugar: 0.5 g/L

Alcohol: 14.9%



10. Lone Madrone

Championing Rhône Varietals on the Central Coast

2007 TANNAT, PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA

Neil Collins has been making wine in Paso Robles for more than 20 years. He has been with **Tablas Creek Vineyard** since 1998, where he currently serves as executive winemaker and vineyard manager. It's a job in which Collins may find himself driving a tractor to making great wine to serving it in fine restaurants, all within the same week.

Tablas Creek is a partnership between the Perrin family of **Château de Beaucastel** and importer **Robert Haas**, who purchased the 120-acre property in west Paso Robles for its similarities to **Châteauneuf du Pape**. It's one of California's best-known wineries—a name that's virtually synonymous with Rhône Varietals and with Paso Robles.

Lone Madrone is Collins' own label, a family affair, if you will: one he makes in relatively small amounts. Collins makes a number of Rhône blends, though the wine we were most intrigued by was the Tannat.

"I have a lot of experience with fruit from the west side of Paso Robles," said Collins, "I've been in the area a long time and have a passion for it."

Having lived and worked in the Paso Robles area for more than two decades, Collins has established relationships with long-time growers in the area, most of whose vineyards are head-trained and dry-farmed.

The grapes for the 2007 Lone Madrone Tannat are from the Glenrose Vineyard on Peachy Canyon Road, owned by **Don Rose**, while the clone came from the Tablas Creek nursery. The annual production was 168 cases.

Originally planted in the Basque region of northeast Spain and southwest France and made famous for the bold red wines of Madiran, Tannat is known as a really big tannic wine that is deep in color. The Spanish brought Tannat to Uruguay, where it thrives and became that country's signature grape. With just 200 acres of Tannat planted in California (mostly as a blender in California's Central Valley), Tannat is one of the rarest grape varieties harvested in North America, one that is poised to become more popular.

"Tannat is a great variety. There are definitely some Tannat fans out there now, and we're seeing other wineries and vineyards starting to plant little bits of it. It grows very well in Paso Robles. It can handle and enjoys the heat," Collins said.

"As with all of my wines, the Tannat is native-yeast fermented, and the malolactic fermentation is native. It rests on its lees a long time until right before bottling. It's such an intriguing grape. It's one I'm fond of. It's a very dark grape and has a reputation of being ferociously tannic. On this soil and in this climate, we can get it fully ripe so that those tannins become an asset rather than issue. For all of its darkness and structure, it has an incredibly juicy mid-palate," Collins said.

Collins' owners/partners in the winery include his wife, **Marci**, and sister **Jacki Meisinger**. **WBM**

Price: \$40
Case Production: 168 cases
Blend: 100% Tannat
pH: 3.5
TA: 0.69
Brix at harvest: 26.6
Residual Sugar: 0.16
Alcohol: 16.8%

