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/ Randy Buckner

March 2008

Late Winter 2008 Releases

Thanks to all of you who sent emails wondering if I had health issues or if I fell off of the face of the earth. Due to family health issues, I have been on a hiatus for a couple of months. I'm back and I have a lot of tasting to do!

More than one-half of the wines this month are from Washington. The overall quality is just outstanding. Washington had its 700th winery open recently, with no slowdown in sight.

As usual, we have wines from around the world, ranging in price from \$10 to \$80. There's something here to fit your pocketbook.

Another 100 new and current releases are presented for your inspection. The dual rating system evaluates quality (the first number) and value (the second) on a 100-point scale. All wines are tasted from Riedel Vinum glasses after breathing for one hour. No wines scoring below 80 points are listed. All prices are the manufacturer's suggested retail price. Vendor prices are often less expensive. As always, enjoy a bottle with dinner tonight.

Cabernet Franc

2005 Eaton Hill, Cabernet Franc, Yakima Valley, Washington, \$14. This light ruby red wine gives off aromas of red cherries, new leather and mixed spices. Light to medium bodied, crisp, with easy-going tannins, the wine will pair with a host of food dishes; 87/89.

2004 Cinnabar, Cabernet Franc, Lodi, California, \$35, 250 cases. Black cherries, leather and American oak are evident here. Well balanced and fruity, the wine displays earthy nuances and moderate rounded tannins; 87/87.

Cabernet Sauvignon

2005 Claar Cellars, Cabernet Sauvignon, White Bluffs Vineyard, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$18.50, 221 cases. The nose is underscored by black cherries, cigar leaf and French oak nuances. Very fruity in the mouth, with crushed cherries predominating. You can enjoy this one now with red meat; 85/87.

2005 Clos Du Val, Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California, \$32, 40,000 cases. Cassis, spice and leather grace the nose. Medium bodied, lush and fruity, the silky tannins allow for early consumption; 88/88.

2003 Dry Creek Vineyard, Cabernet Sauvignon, Endeavour, Dry Creek Valley, California, \$55, 799 cases. Black fruit, chocolate and barrel notes expand on the nose and palate. Tannins are well managed. A good effort given the vintage year; 88/88.

2005 Dusted Valley Vintners, Cabernet Sauvignon, Walla Walla Valley, Washington, \$26. Aromas of black cherries, cassis, plums and oak dance from the glass. Lush and fruity on the entry, the juicy black fruits linger endlessly on the finish; 91/92.

2004 Eaton Hill, Cabernet Sauvignon, Konnowac Vineyards, Yakima Valley, Washington, \$32. Deeply hued, with aromas of cassis, black cherries, olives and oak spice, the wine is nicely balanced, with silky tannins. You'll find generous fruit flavors and generous oak influence; 87/87.

2005 E.B. Foote Winery, Perfect à Trois, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$25, 243 cases. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc, the wine is well structured and fruity, with rounded tannins. Enjoy over the next few years for the black cherry, cassis and cedar highlights; 87/87.

2003 Gallo Family, Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Northern Sonoma, California, \$80, 485 cases. Aromas of cassis and berries abound, augmented by cedar and cigar leaf. Elegant and complex in the mouth, with firm tannins becoming evident on the finish. A top wine from a difficult vintage; 88/86.

2005 Gnarly Head, Cabernet Sauvignon, California, \$12, 38,000 cases. Berries, violets and oak notes define the nose. The wine is simple and fruity, with generous wood; 80/80.

2005 Hoodspout, Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$17. Blackberries, herbs and toasty oak unfold on the nose and repeat on the palate. Medium bodied, straightforward and tannic; 83/83.

2005 Hoodspout, Cabernet-Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$17. Black fruits, dark chocolate and toasty oak present on the nose and palate, backed by good structure; 84/84.

2002 McWilliams, Cabernet Sauvignon, Coonawarra, Australia, \$28, 2,352 cases. This deep-ruby wine has complex aromas and flavors of red and black fruits, coffee, black olives, mint and cedar. While nicely balanced, the wine becomes dominated by the coffee/black olive characteristics; 84/84.

2006 McWilliam's Hanwood Estate, Cabernet Sauvignon, South Eastern Australia, \$12, 90,000 cases. Underscored by plums, chocolate, dill spice and oak, this wine is very approachable right now for the currant and berry fruit. This is a nice, inexpensive BBQ wine; 85/90.

2005 Saint Laurent, Cabernet Sauvignon, Mrachek Estate Vineyards, Wahluke Slope, Washington, \$28, 508 cases. The nose displays an interesting mix of cherries, berries, Baker's chocolate and smoke. In the mouth the wine reveals excellent harmony of fruit, oak, tannins and acids. It's easy to drink right now with a grilled Porterhouse steak; 88/89.

2004 Simi, Cabernet Sauvignon, Landslide Vineyard, Alexander Valley, California, \$34, 11,890 cases. Blackberries, cocoa, spice and French oak nuances carry across the spectrum. Firm tannins will benefit from a couple of years in the bottle; 84/84.

2004 Souverain, Cabernet Sauvignon, Winemaker's Reserve, Alexander Valley, California, \$40, 2,950 cases. Generous oak and black fruit aromas repeat on the palate. Tannins are firm but ripe, with nice acid structure; 86/86.

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2004 Stonecap, Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$12, 3,500. This is a second-label wine from Goose Ridge Vineyards and is your basic entry-level red wine. Straightforward, fruity and easy to quaff; 81/81.

2005 Three Rivers, Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$21, 1,900 cases. Defined by black cherries, cedar and coffee beans, the wine is well balanced, fruity and tannic. Put it in the cellar and forget about it for five years; 88+/88+.

2004 Wolf Blass, Grey Label Cabernet Sauvignon, Langhorne Creek, Australia, \$32. This purple/red wine radiates blackberry, eucalyptus and barrel notes. Well balanced, crisp, and tannic, with flavors mirroring the nose; 87/87.

Chardonnay

2006 Boom Town, Unoaked Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$12.50. Loads of apple and white peach scents highlight the nose and follow through on the palate. This value wine has excellent balance and will pair well with lemon chicken. This is a second label of Dusted Valley Vintners; 86/88.

2006 Cinnabar, Chardonnay, Late Harvest, Santa Cruz Mountains, California, \$32 (375 ml), 250 cases. This brass-colored wine radiates aromas of peaches and honey. Lusciously sweet at 17 percent residual sugar, with ample acidity to balance it out, this is a dessert unto itself; 90/90.

2006 Claar Cellars, Chardonnay, White Bluffs Vineyard, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$13, 224 cases. Aromas and flavors speak of citrus, pears and toast. Food-friendly acidity underpins the wine. Pair with pasta and cream sauce; 85/88.

2006 Clos Du Val, Chardonnay, Napa Valley Carneros, California, \$24, 13,000 cases. Aromas of pears, butter and toasty oak emanate from this brass-gold Chardonnay. It is elegant on the entry, well balanced and displays generous fruit and French oak flavors; 87/87.

2006 DeLoach, Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, California, \$16, 30,000 cases. Well balanced, with complex flavors for the price class. Enjoy early on for the pear, vanilla and spice nuances; 85/88.

2006 Dusted Valley Vintners, Reserve Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$28. Full and lush in the mouth, the aromas and flavors reveal apple, lemon curd, toast and leesy nuances. Deft use of oak allows for a very fruity finish; 90/90.

2006 Fish House (Magnificent Wine Company), Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$10. Enjoy this soft, simple quaffer early on for the pear and orange zest nuances; 81/81.

2003 Gallo Family, Estate Chardonnay, Northern Sonoma, California, \$50, 550 cases. A complex nose of stone fruit, apples, lees and French oak evolves into fig, caramel, peach and vanilla flavors. Oak is not overbearing here - bravo! 91/91.

2006 Hoodspout, Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$13. Lemons, pears and toasty notes highlight the aromas and flavors. Soft, straightforward and easy to drink; 83/83.

2006 Sebastiani, Chardonnay, Sonoma County, California, \$15. This light-gold Chardonnay is defined by apples, pears, butter and toast. It is straightforward, soft and fruity; 82/82.

2005 Simi, Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, California, \$25, 19,260 cases. The nose is a mélange of scents - baked apple, sandalwood, vanilla and toast. Oak and vanilla dominates the palate, with lemon custard underlying. Bright acidity adds zest; 84/84.

2006 Souverain, Chardonnay, Alexander Valley, California, \$17, 27,000 cases. Light gold, with peach, pear and toasty oak aromas. The aromas do an encore in the mouth, with a crisp bite. Nice for the style; 86/89.

2005 Stonecap, Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$12, 4,680 cases. Here's a crisp, clean straightforward quaffer that was fermented in stainless steel. It will pair well with shellfish; 82/82.

2006 Three Rivers, Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$19, 1,071 cases. Light gold, with tropical fruit and lees unfolding across the spectrum, wrapped up in a balanced, creamy, flavorful package; 86/87.

2006 Waterbrook, Chardonnay, Reserve, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$22, 1,955 cases. Aromas of pineapples, butter and toast lead to flavors of same. In the mouth the wine is creamy and balanced; 85/85.

Fruit Wine

NV Hoodspout, Apple Wine, Washington State, \$13. Well balanced, with delicate sweetness, the apple aromas and flavors should pair well with a cheese plate; 85/85.

NV Hoodspout, Blackberry Wine, Washington State, \$13. Brick colored. Blackberries and spicy accents carry from the nose to the mouth. Crisp, with threshold sweetness; 84/84.

NV Hoodspout, Pear Wine, Washington State, \$13. The aromas speak of pears and citrus fruit. Off-dry at two percent residual sugar, the wine is nicely balanced, with flavors echoing the nose. This should make a nice accompaniment for Asian food; 85/85.

NV Hoodspout, Raspberry Wine, Washington State, \$13. You'll find pure essence of crushed raspberries on the nose and palate, with very delicate sweetness. A natural for chocolate. Always one of Hoodspout's best wines; 90/91.

NV Hoodspout, Rhubarb Wine, Washington State, \$13. Sporting a delicate pink coloration, the wine displays strawberry and rhubarb aromas and flavors. Elegantly balanced and off-dry, believe it or not, this is a great oyster wine, 86/87

Merlot

2005 Claar Cellars, Merlot, White Bluffs Vineyard, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$18.50, 240 cases. The nose is underscored by black cherry, cigar box, cedar and olive nuances. The wine is well structured and fruity, with firm but ripe tannins that can stand a year or two in bottle; 85/86.

2005 Hogue, Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$10. Crisp, with modest tannins, this value wine is easy to drink right now for the plum, black cherry and floral nuances; 86/88.

2005 Hoodspout, Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$21, 2,000 cases. Black cherries, plums and toasty oak unfold on the nose. While crisp, with firm tannins, the oak tends to dominate the palate, with nice underlying black fruit; 82/82.

2005 Saint Laurent, Merlot, Wahluke Slope, Washington, \$19, 990 cases. Fruit forward, with lively acidity, this fun wine is structured for food. Black cherries, cigar leaf and oak nuances give the wine character; 86/88.

2005 Sebastiani, Merlot, Alexander Valley, California, \$24. Sebastiani reigned in the oak on this Merlot, producing a medium-bodied wine that is chock full of juicy black fruit flavors that invite sip after sip; 88/89.

2005 Three Rivers, Merlot, Champoux Vineyard, Horse Heaven Hills, Washington, \$39, 174 cases. Still sporting a youthful

purple color, the wine reveals black cherry, cigar leaf and earthy aromas and flavors. Built for aging, the wine needs several years for the tannins to tame down and the fruit to fully integrate; 88+/88+.

2005 Three Rivers, Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$19, 961 cases. Medium bodied, well structured and approachable now, enjoy this one for the black cherry and light cedar nuances; 86/86.

2005 Tsilian Cellars, Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$28, 1,283 cases. Aromas of black cherries, cedar and coffee repeat on the palate, augmented by oak spice and bright acidity. Firm tannins will benefit from bottle aging; 85/85.

2005 Waterbrook, Merlot-Cabernet, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$12, 2,986 cases. A mélange of aromas and flavors unfold - plums, currants, tobacco, cedar and new leather. Fruity in the mouth, the wine has friendly tannins that allow for early consumption. Good value; 84/87.

Miscellaneous

2004 Bogle, Phantom, California, \$17. Phantom is a blend of Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and Mourvèdre. Blueberries, chocolate, floral notes and American oak presents on the nose, while brambly fruit dominates the palate. Firm tannins demand bottle time; 86/88.

2005 Bogle, Petite Sirah Port, Clarksburg, California, \$18, 2,400 cases. Plums, berries, brown sugar, and floral notes abound. The flavors are reminiscent of grandma's berry cobbler. Residual sugar is nine percent; 87/88.

2004 Cinnabar, Petit Verdot, Lodi, California, \$35, 250 cases. Black cherries, violets and sweet oak on the nose and evolve on the palate. Soft and very fruit forward, this wine can be enjoyed now with grilled meats; 89/89.

2006 Claar Cellars, Sangiovese, White Bluffs Vineyard, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$18.50, 240 cases. This garnet-colored wine is crisp, with easy-going tannins, but is generic in nature; 82/82.

2006 Dusted Valley Vintners, Viognier, Yakima Valley, Washington, \$24. Honeysuckle aromas leap from the glass, with hints of citrus zest. The wine is very elegant, with peach and honeysuckle flavors backed by zesty acidity; 89/90.

2007 George Duboeuf, Beaujolais Nouveau, France, \$11. This light, simple quaff is very grapey on the nose and palate, with strawberry and raspberry nuances; 82/83.

2004 Hoodsport, Island Belle, Puget Sound, Washington, \$17. This has a unique foxy, grapey, red cherry nose. The wine is crisp and dry, with flavors mirroring the aromas. Very stylistic and not for everyone; 85/85.

2005 Hoodsport, Madeleine Angevine, Puget Sound, Washington, \$13. Madeleine Angevine is a white wine grape that is grown primarily in England. Melon, citrus and herbal notes carry from nose to palate. Crisp, straightforward and refreshing; 84/84.

2006 House Wine (Magnificent Wine Company), White Wine, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$10. This blend of five white grape varieties provides a simple, fruity quaff with apple, citrus and floral notes; 81/81.

2004 Langtry, Petite Sirah, Serpentine Meadow, Guenoc Valley, California, \$40. Sporting a youthful purple color, the wine displays black fruit, spice and barrel notes across the board. It needs bottle time to soften the tannins; 85/84.

2006 Luna Vineyards, Freakout White Wine, Napa Valley, California, \$16, 4,000 cases. Here's a simple, balanced blend of four white wine grape varieties that provides citrus, tropical fruit and spicy nuances; 83/83.

2001 McWilliam's, 1877 Cabernet Sauvignon/Shiraz, South Eastern Australia, \$70. Black fruit, mint and barrel notes radiate from this deeply-hued blend. Nicely balanced, crisp and very approachable, the wine is packed with juicy black fruit flavors; 88/87.

2006 Three Rivers, Late Harvest Gewurztraminer, Biscuit Ridge Vineyard, Walla Walla Valley, Washington, \$15 (375 ml), 862 cases. Lychee fruit and honey scents abound on the nose and palate. The wine is sweet at 10.8 percent residual sugar. Acidity is adequate, but I'd like to see more; 86/87.

2005 Three Rivers, Malbec-Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$25, 834 cases. Highlighted by cherry and crushed berry fragrances, the wine is quite smooth on the entry. Acidity breathes life into the generous fruit. Pair with grilled meats; 88/88.

2006 Three Rivers, River's Red, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$13, 2,892 cases. This is one of the best value wines coming out of Washington. Plums, cherries and cola accents abound. Purchase by the case for those summer BBQs; 85/90.

2006 Waterbrook, Mélange Blanc, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$15, 2,988 cases. As the name suggests, this is a blend of six grape varieties. Straightforward, balanced and fruity, the wine is underscored by peach, honeysuckle and lychee nuances; 84/86.

Pinot Gris

2006 Boom Town, Pinot Gris, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$12.50. Clean, fresh, straightforward. Citrus, pear and floral aromas give way to melon fruit flavors; 83/83.

2007 Hogue, Pinot Grigio, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$10. Aromas of apricots, citrus zest and pears radiate from this straw-gold wine. Crisp, balanced and food friendly, the aromas echo on the palate. Good value; 86/88.

2006 King Estate, Pinot Gris, Oregon, \$25, 5,144 cases. Melons, pears and orange blossoms grace the nose. Brilliant acidity gives zest to this fruity wine. This is a perfect match for shellfish; 90/90.

2006 King Estate, Pinot Gris, Vin Glacé, Oregon, \$18, 2,693 cases. Intense aromas and flavors of honey, peaches and tangerines cascade over the senses. A dessert wine unto itself, the wine has 18.6 percent residual sugar with acidity adequate to the task; 91/92.

2006 Luna, Pinot Grigio, Napa County, California, \$19, 40,000 cases. Straw colored, light, and straightforward, drink this one now before the pear and citrus fruit fades; 85/85.

2007 Tsilian Cellars, Pinot Grigio, Estate, Columbia Valley, Washington, \$23, 394 cases. This straw-gold wine is highlighted by aromas and flavors of pears, citrus and lemongrass. Crisp, clean and refreshing, this one will really sing with fresh shellfish; 90/90.

Pinot Noir

2005 Bogle, Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, California, \$13. Roses, cherries and dark tea define this garnet-colored wine. Light to medium bodied, this is a fruity wine with nice structure at a killer price; 85/90.

2005 Buena Vista, Pinot Noir, Carneros, California, \$25, 25,295 cases. Light to medium bodied, balanced and approachable now, you'll find lovely cherry, mushroom and warm spice aromas and flavors; 86/86.