

Perfect Score

ON THE HEELS OF WASHINGTON'S FIRST 100-POINT RATING, MASTER SOMMELIER SHAYN BJORNHOLM SAMPLES OUR STATE'S HIGHLY RATED WINES

FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS PAST APRIL, two wines produced at a Washington state winery from grapes grown in the Columbia Valley earned the highest score possible in the wine world. The 2002 and 2003 Quilceda Creek Cabernet Sauvignon garnered an impossibly rare 100 points from the much discussed and mostly revered *Wine Advocate*, published by the world's most powerful

wine critic, Robert Parker Jr. After years of scrubbing the floors of big sisters Napa Valley, Bordeaux and Barossa Valley, Washington tried on the glass slipper—and it was a perfect fit.

Quilceda Creek has been a beacon among world-class Cabernet Sauvignon producers since 1979. For many years, owners and winemakers Alex and Paul Golitzin have trumpeted their goal of

SHAYN'S WINE PICKS



1 2001 DiStefano Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley \$28; 89 points from *Wine Spectator* in October 2005

The little engine that could, this tucked-away Woodinville gem has been quietly matching the big players with approachable and affordable wines for at least the last 10 years, always at a fraction of the cost of most of its high-scoring brethren. This rich and astringent Cabernet Sauvignon is spiced with a touch of Merlot to soften and round out the finish. **Pairs with:** Warm pheasant and black currant bread salad.

2 2002 Quilceda Creek Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley \$76; 100 points from *Wine Advocate* in April 2006

By now, none of us will be able to get any of this, but we must pay homage to the breakthrough effort of winemakers Alex and Paul Golitzin, who toiled for decades with the 100-point peak in mind. If you have a bottle or are lucky enough to get one, don't be tempted to open it now: This high-octane, massively extracted, heavily oaked and high-alcohol beast needs time to integrate. **Pairs with:** The most marbled New York steak you can find, grilled.

3 2004 Januik Cold Creek Vineyard Chardonnay, Columbia Valley \$30; 92 points from *Wine Advocate* in April 2006

Longtime Chateau Ste. Michelle white-wine guru Mike Januik "grew up" as a winemaker around Cold Creek, Washington's best Chardonnay vineyard, and it shows. Plush fruit, crisp acid and integrated French oak with a long finish. **Pairs with:** Grilled peach and mâche salad with pear cider vinaigrette.

4 2004 Leonetti Cellar Merlot, Columbia Valley \$60; 94 points from *Wine Advocate* in May 2006

While this icon is always tough to find, it was one of the original point-scoring behemoths that put Washington on the map—our state's first superstar winery and grape in one bottle. Note the exotic flavors—a veritable spice-rack-full—sifted throughout the soft, plummy Merlot fruit and tannins. **Pairs with:** Seared chicken breast paillard with allspice and early Bing cherry compote.

5 2003 McCrea Cellars Cuvée Orleans Syrah, Yakima Valley \$50; This new release not yet rated.

The original Rhône Ranger in our state still makes some of the best. From an exceptionally hot year, this dip-your-quill-and-write-a-letter black/purple Syrah has typical white pepper, smoked meat and ripe blackberry notes, made elegant by the lift of white flowers from the added touch of Viognier. **Pairs with:** Pan-roasted lamb saddle au jus with fresh blackberries.