

Robert Parker - Article

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A much-needed bounce back from the 2020 vintage, the 2021 vintage starts off with a bang and promises to be superior in quality but is on par in quantity. With some of the 2022s rolling out soon, the overall production was up with a lot of vigor on the vine; however, I'll reserve my thoughts on the 2022s for later.

The 2021 Vintage

The 2021 vintage started with a bang, kicking off with slightly warmer-than-average temperatures around budbreak. Through the growing season, there was half a week of constant blistering temperatures of 118 degrees Fahrenheit (47.8 degrees Celsius) at the end of June. After the heat spike in late June, veraison began in the middle of July. As the seasons changed in the Columbia Valley, the average temperatures began to settle and cool down, allowing for a longer hang time, which made for unrushed harvesting. Overall, the consistent warmth during the growing season and well-timed rainfall provided optimal conditions for grape ripening and flavor development, resulting in wines characterized by their vibrant fruit expression, balanced acidity and structured tannins. The state's yields were approximately the same as in 2020, and both vintages were below the 200,000-ton mark, which hasn't happened since 2012.

While the overall quality remained high in 2021, there were a few standouts for me in this report. Quilceda Creek's 2021 offering is spectacular and gets top honors, with Quilceda Creek's President and director of winemaking, Paul Golitzin, saying that "all of the grape material was very strong this year and were of very high quality. The only challenge we had, if any, was choosing what to declassify into the CVR blend because the quality was so high." I couldn't agree more; the CVR blend was the best it has ever been and should be closer to twice the price.

Passing Time's 2021 Merlot from Champoux vineyard is currently the best Merlot in the state, and their Horse Heaven Hills Cabernet is even more stunning. The Bionic Wines from Christophe Baron and his vigneron team are as great as ever. Matthews Winery has made leaps and bounds, increasing wine quality exponentially in a very short period of time, ensuring the Matthews brand will evolve and reposition under the Otis family and their newer winemaking team. The Matthews 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve and 2021 Claret Reserve bottlings captured my heart. Kitzke & The Devil Is A Liar have shown considerable improvement and are my top bid for rising stars in Washington to keep an eye on, along with the profoundly impressive wines from Trothe that continue to take my breath away.

However, it has not gone unnoticed that wine bottle prices in Washington continue to increase and are getting closer to California wine prices.

The Evergreen State's Successes and Challenges Ahead

Even though American wine sales are down, Washington shines brightly as a leader in DTC sales. While Washington producers sell roughly half of the production inside the state, the vast majority of Washington wine consumers are located in North America. This leaves many opportunities to gain traction abroad, increasing visibility and wine sales.

Chateau Ste. Michelle canceling 40% of their vineyard and grape contracts over the next few years has sent shock waves across the state. Only about 10% of Washington's wineries produce more than 5,000 cases per year, meaning the vast majority of the state's producers, approximately 90%, are considered small-sized wineries. To make matters worse, Washington now has a surplus of wine amounting to 20 million gallons. This could pose an opportunity for many of the 900+ producers looking to grow in scale, but the real solution to the surplus won't come overnight.

Climate change and extreme climate events are an ongoing challenge. We will continue to see extreme heat spikes, heightened threats from wildfires and potential smoke damage in the summer as well as intense cold snaps in the wintertime—as in the case of this year's winter that has almost completely devastated the 2024 wine crop in British Columbia, just over 100 miles to the north of Washington's Columbia Valley.

The Artistry of Washington Wine

There are plenty of passionate people making fine-quality wine in Washington. And Washington is America's second-highest wine-producing state, just behind California. Anyone who knows Washington wine well enough knows that the state has some wine bottles with fun, interest-sparking labels, such as Viking references from Longship Cellars, funky labels with vinyl records and magic-related themes from Sleight of Hand Cellars and, of course, who could forget that fun label from Cayuse with a cartoon bionic frog stomping wine grapes.

This supports the theory that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover or wine quality by its label. It has always been what's on the inside that counts the most, a sentiment that I know all too well as a six-foot-one, big, brown man who might have otherwise become a bouncer but instead became a sommelier and oenophile. Beyond the fun and sometimes silly labels, you get serious works of art inside and outside the bottle. Such is the case of Upchurch Vineyard's labels featuring the art of Bill Cummings, Salustiano and Plume 21.

Nevertheless, there is no shortage of beautiful wine from Washington, and I, for one, won't stop drinking and collecting these treasures.

Signing Off

This will be my last Washington report for *The Wine Advocate*. I joined the Robert Parker Wine Advocate team in late 2018 and was appointed reviewer for Washington and South Africa in February 2019. Working alongside the talented team of reviewers during my time has been an honor, and my journey as a wine reviewer has been a personally rewarding experience. I want to extend a sincere thank you to the Robert Parker Wine Advocate teams and, most importantly and above all, our loyal subscribers. Thank you. It has been an honor and a pleasure. I leave Washington wine reviewing in the immensely capable hands of my friend and fellow wine reviewer, Erin Brooks. In a field dominated by men—now, more than ever—we need more talented women like Erin in the world of wine. Please join me in welcoming her as I hand the baton of reviewer duties for Washington over to Erin. Go get ‘em, chef!

Thanks for reading,
Anthony Mueller, Advanced Sommelier

Rating:97

Release Price:N/A Drink Date:2024 - 2040

The 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon Longwinds Vineyard displays a deep magenta hue and an open, expressive nose, offering succulent black raspberry and dark cherry notes accented by oak essence, brown baking spices and resinous purple flowers. On the palate, this full-bodied wine is lush, round and layered with complexity, showcasing ripe flavors of fresh plums alongside nuances of turned earth, graphite and bitter dark chocolate. It concludes with a long, lingering and food-friendly finish that pairs beautifully with ribeyes and New York strips. Enjoy with food, and consider decanting for an hour. Bravo!

Reviewed by:[Anthony Mueller](#)

Source:[Issue 263 End of October 2022](#)

Published date:Mar 21, 2024

Producer:Cabernet Sauvignon Longwinds Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain



Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry

Rating:(95-97)

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:N/A

The 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Klipsun Vineyard is an exceptional wine that dazzles the senses with spiced blueberry and bursting plum compote. It has a certain gravitas, with a healthy, ripe, hedonistic fruit character that captivates the palate and holds it hostage. It's a generous Cabernet that doesn't stop, displaying gobs of inky and juicy fruit with succulent oak spice and resinous purple flowers. I'm already thinking of grilled tomahawk chops with this big-boy wine. Wow, you will want to mark your calendar for its release.

Reviewed by:[Anthony Mueller](#)

Source:[March 2024 Week 3](#)

Published date:Mar 21, 2024

Producer:Cabernet Sauvignon Klipsun Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain



Color/Type/Sweetness:Red/Table/Dry

Rating:(94-96)

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:N/A

Tasted as a barrel sample, Canvasback's 2021 Grand Passage is firm, juicy and bold. Seductive layers of black raspberry and spiced plum compote sway with dark cherries with oaky essences and resinous purple flowers. The wine reveals a myriad of juicy dark red and black fruit tones that dance across the mid-palate with elegance, power and finesse. Even at this stage, the wine is seductive and juicy, showcasing a ripe and ready essence that promises to be a blockbuster upon release. Mark your calendars for this highly anticipated release; it will undoubtedly be worth the wait.

Reviewed by:[Anthony Mueller](#)

Source:[March 2024 Week 3](#)

Published date:Mar 21, 2024

Producer:Grand Passage

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Type/Sweetness:Red/Table/Dry



Rating:(94-96)

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:N/A

Tasted as a barrel sample, Canvasback's 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Longwinds Vineyard presents a dark and generous nose, rich with juicy black fruit, dusty dark cherries and spiced plum compote accompanied by elegant, round baking spices. The palate follows suit, with ripe fruit flavors held together by firm gripping tannins that dominate the mid-palate and lead into a long, lingering and evolving finish. Although tight now, it is expected to find its cadence in about three to four years. The longer it sits on the palate, the more impressive it becomes.

Reviewed by:[Anthony Mueller](#)

Source:[March 2024 Week 3](#)

Published date:Mar 21, 2024

Producer:Cabernet Sauvignon Longwinds Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Type/Sweetness:Red/Table/Dry



Rating:(93-95)

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:N/A

Tasted as a barrel sample, the 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Ciel du Cheval Vineyard, winemaker Brian Rudin's farewell creation for Canvasback, presents a slightly smaller frame than its larger counterpart, Klipsun Cabernet. While it may not boast the same magnitude, its power emanates from finesse and precision. The palate reveals a lifted floral expression featuring cherry blossoms, juicy plums and spiced raspberries, while a subtle mineral tension is complemented by succulent acidity and fine-grained tannins. It's a bit shy now, but I have no doubt it will find its stride by the time it's released.

Reviewed by:[Anthony Mueller](#)

Source:[March 2024 Week 3](#)

Published date:Mar 21, 2024

Producer:Cabernet Sauvignon Ciel du Cheval Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Type/Sweetness:Red/Table/Dry



Rating:94

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:2025 - 2042

The 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon Ciel du Cheval Vineyard presents a dark, reserved nose and a mineral-driven essence at its core. Initially shy, it gradually opens up after some time in the glass, revealing aromas of black cherry and spiced plum reduction. With layers of complexity, power and grace, this full-bodied wine is still tight on the palate, with a firm tannic grip that persists through the long, complex finish. It will require more time to fully unravel and reveal its depth and complexity, so your patience will be rewarded. Give it the time it deserves.

Producer:Cabernet Sauvignon Ciel du Cheval Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Young/Table/Dry



Rating:94

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:2024 - 2035

Displaying an opaque core, the 2020 Malbec Red Mountain erupts from the glass with intensity and power, showcasing generous aromas of black raspberry skin, boysenberry and spiced plums with a lifting and supporting structure of brown baking spices. Full-bodied, this Malbec is no-holds-barred, offering firm gripping tannins that will remain food-friendly for more than a decade and effortlessly pair with a wide variety of wild game and roasted meats. The mid-palate shows considerable weight with a succulent mouthfeel before ending with a long, lingering, spicy finish. This bottle is a perfect companion for Brazilian steakhouses.

Producer:Malbec Red Mountain

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry



Rating:93+

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:2024 - 2035

The 2020 Merlot Ciel du Cheval Vineyard begins with enticing notes of dusty plum and wilted flowers, leading into a fresh, complex palate with a mineral-driven character. Showing flavors of black raspberry and turned earth, this medium to full-bodied wine is balanced with succulent acidity and fine-grained tannins. It culminates in a long, spicy finish that delights the palate. Expect this delightful Merlot to age gracefully for more than a decade, with decanting recommended to fully appreciate its nuances.

Producer:Merlot Ciel du Cheval Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry



Rating:93+

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:2024 - 2035

Boldly expressive and round in the glass, the 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley has a generous Cabernet profile with notions of volatility with undulations of baked blueberries, boysenberry and cherry pie essence with delightful baking spices. Full-bodied, the mouthfeel offers gobs of complexity with a sappy fruit character before ending with a generous and boozy finish. I recommend an additional chill to this bottle with an hour of decanting before consuming. Enjoy with food.

Producer:Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Walla Walla Valley

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry



Rating:(92-94)

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:N/A

Tasted as a barrel sample, Canvasback's 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Les Collines Vineyard exhibits a firm and juicy character with structured tannins. It offers up flavors of blackberry, dark plum and dusty cassis accompanied by notes of espresso bean and bitter dark chocolate. Anticipated to reach its prime around 2026/2027, this Les Collines Cabernet will remain an elegant powerhouse for more than a decade.

Producer:Cabernet Sauvignon Les Collines Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Walla Walla Valley

Color/Type/Sweetness:Red/Table/Dry



Rating:92

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:2023 - 2033

Open-knit and slightly shy on the nose, the 2020 Syrah Funk Vineyard takes its time to slowly unwind and uncoil in the glass, offering notes of savory red fruit essence with hints of herbs and turned earth. Medium to full-bodied, the palate shows plenty of dusty red fruit flavors with notions of graphite and bitter dark chocolate before concluding with a mineral-laced finish.

Producer:Syrah Funk Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Walla Walla Valley

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry



Rating:91

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:2024 - 2034

Opening to a spicy and mineral-driven nose, the 2020 Syrah Red Mountain is ripe and complex with notes of spiced plum, turned earth and brown baking spices. Medium to full-bodied, the mouthfeel shows surprising mineral tension with a firm mineral grip and bitter dark chocolate flavors that melt into a firm tannic expression. Ending with a long and spicy finish, this will likely be better with both time and food.

Producer:Syrah Red Mountain

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry



Rating:90?

Release Price:N/A

Drink Date:2024 - 2030

Dense and inky in the glass, the 2020 Syrah Red Heaven Vineyard displays dusty and rocky expressions of scorched earth, dried tobacco, hot rocks and graphite. Full-bodied, the palate reveals bitter, gripping tannins with a soft ashiness that drives through the mid-palate and onto the quick finish, leaving me wanting more freshness and purity.

Producer:Syrah Red Heaven Vineyard

Wine regions:Washington, Columbia Valley, Yakima Valley, Red Mountain

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry

Sustainability

Robert Parker Wine Advocate has recently included sustainability markers to indicate wines that have been produced with sustainable methods.[Learn more about sustainability](#)