

SHELL-SHOCKED: LOCAL SOLDIERS FACE LIFE AFTER COMBAT

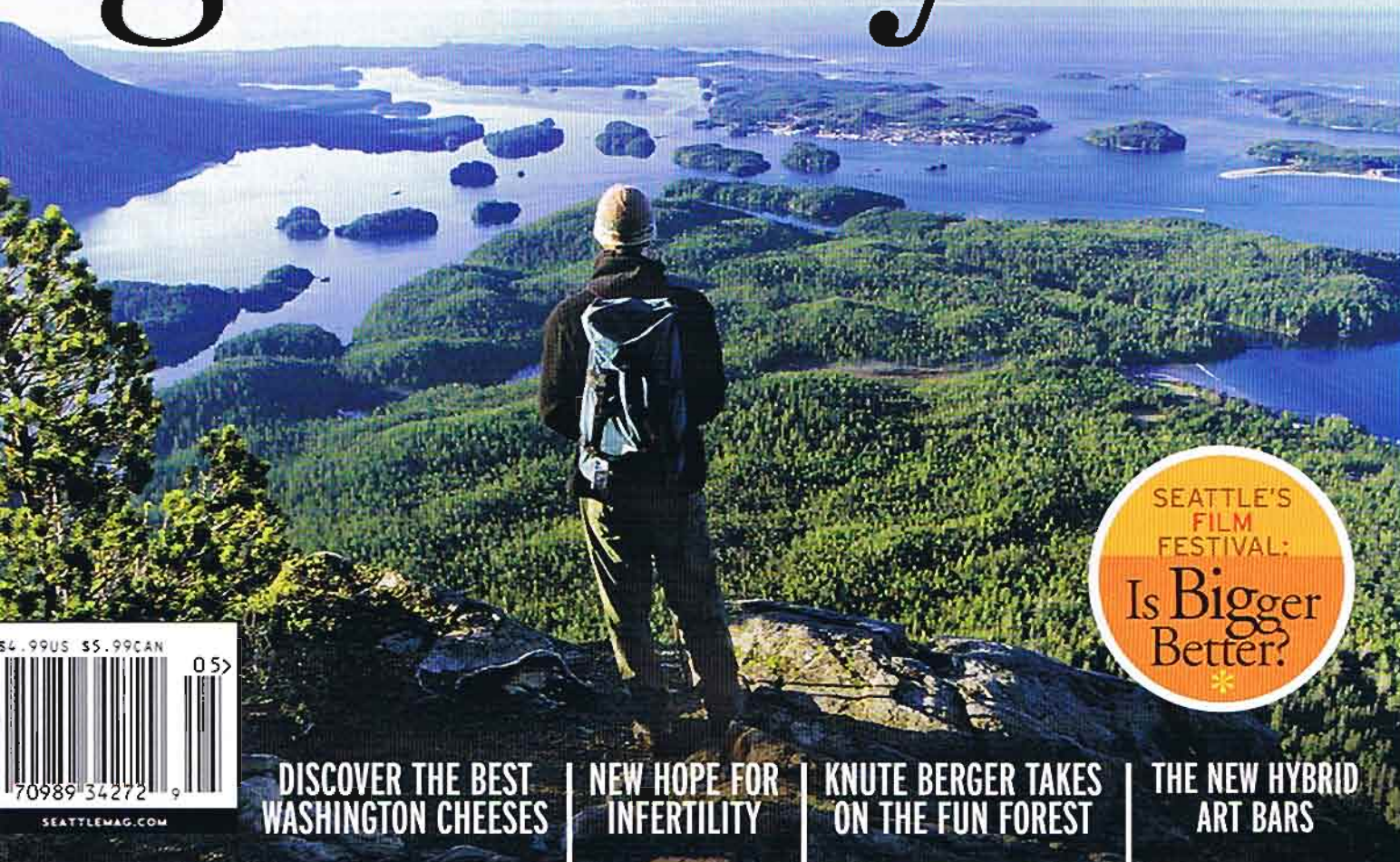
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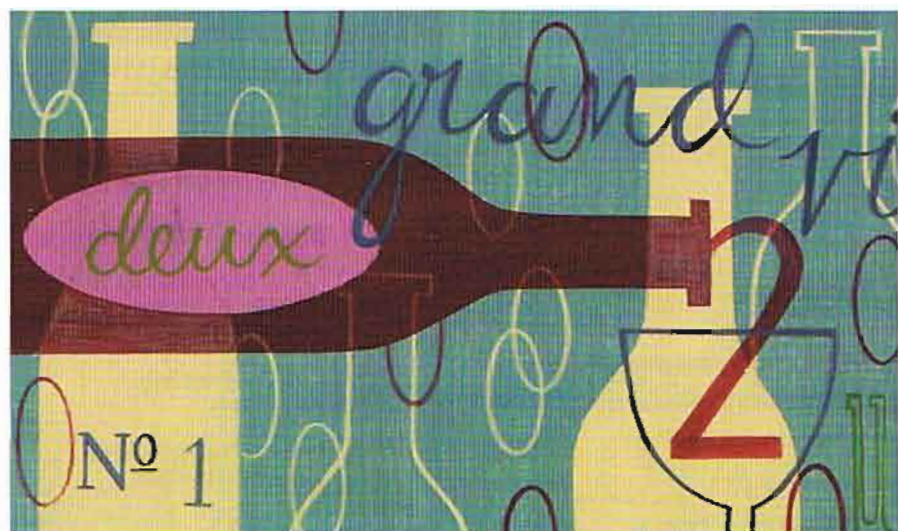
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SECOND TO NONE

Fine wineries around the Northwest boast treasures beyond their best labels, finds Master Sommelier [Shayn Bjornholm](#)

SECOND. IN A WORLD where success is valued above all and luxury is the everyday humdrum pursued by the masses, “second” has become a dirty word. Not *The Best!*? Then it must not be up to snuff. When it comes to wine, the Northwest is home to premium wineries that now go head to head with established estates in the Rolls-Royce regions of Napa Valley, Bordeaux and Burgundy. And often overlooked are the amazing bottles these superstars produce in the form of what we in the wine world call “second labels.”

Second labels are wines made by world-class wineries that, for a number of reasons, do not measure up to the quality, price or style standards of their premier wines and reputations. Often these wines will be sold under the premier winery’s name in hopes of inspiring trust and allegiance, as with the successful Quilceda Creek Red Wine. A newer trend is to create a totally separate winery, either for new premium-quality wine projects (as when Pepper Bridge created “sister” winery Amavi, in part, as a platform for winemaker Jean-François Pellet to craft premium-quality Syrah), or as a way to find a market for their own less expensive wines. The latter method was a learning experience for the Robert Mondavi brand when it briefly robbed its world-class Reserve line of its potency by putting the highly lauded Mondavi name on its lesser-quality Woodbridge line. Either way, these are wines made by the finest winemakers from quality fruit.

When it works, the second label is a win-win for winemakers and wine lovers. When a producer plants vineyards that need at least 10 harvests to develop super-premium-quality grapes, a second label serves as an outlet for that fruit before it reaches its peak. These wines also help groom new customers, bringing in “entry level” wine drinkers willing to pay the \$15–\$25 that these wines usually cost. And since second-label wines will be sold a year earlier than the reserve wines, which require additional cellar age for depth and balance, they provide a more immediate cash flow. Also, if they find an audience, second labels can serve as an introduction to the higher-end wines, creating brand loyalty for when that drinker can afford to step up to Big-Bottle Land.

The wine lover, on the other hand, is given good wine at a fantastic value. Since these winemakers can make world-class wines, they also know how to coax quality out of younger, lesser fruit. Premium reserve wines often require years of additional aging once purchased, but the second label is often structured to drink immediately. Also, the term “reserve” implies a greater use of oak as a sign of quality; for those who don’t like oaky flavors, second labels are more about the fresh tastes of the grape. Today, with so many choices in Northwest wines, the times of second labels as dumping grounds for plonk barrels are all but gone—nothing but the best for the money is put into the bottle.

As with all wine, there is a range of quality—from great producers to the not-so-great. And your own tastes should dictate what you drink. But if you try a bottle of one of my picks, I guarantee it will lead to, well, a second, second bottle. ☺

SHAYN'S WINE PICKS



2005 WINE BY JOE PINOT GRIS (DOBBES FAMILY ESTATE), OREGON, \$12

This is a porch pounder, people! Joe Dobbes makes this a clean, light and refreshing Pinot Gris. Lots of green melon, candied lime rind and honeysuckle flowers with a surprisingly long finish. **PAIRS WITH:** Salt-and-pepper watermelon salad.

2006 O'REILLY'S PINOT NOIR (OWEN ROE), WILLAMETTE VALLEY, OREGON, \$18

David O'Reilly scores with this fun label and delicious silk bomb. Served slightly chilled, this wine is full of ripe wild strawberries and green tea leaves. Richer than most for the price, it will reward those liking a fuller style of Pinot Noir. **PAIRS WITH:** Duck liver pâté with wild strawberry chutney.

2003 NELMS ROAD CABERNET SAUVIGNON (WOODWARD CANYON), COLUMBIA VALLEY, \$21

One of the great bargains in this grape category in the country. A slight hint of leafiness balances the ripe cassis and vanilla tones, producing soft tannins that still provide enough structure for Cab lovers. Bravo to winemaker Rick Small! **PAIRS WITH:** Dried Snake River beef tenderloin with gin-sautéed Walla Walla onions.

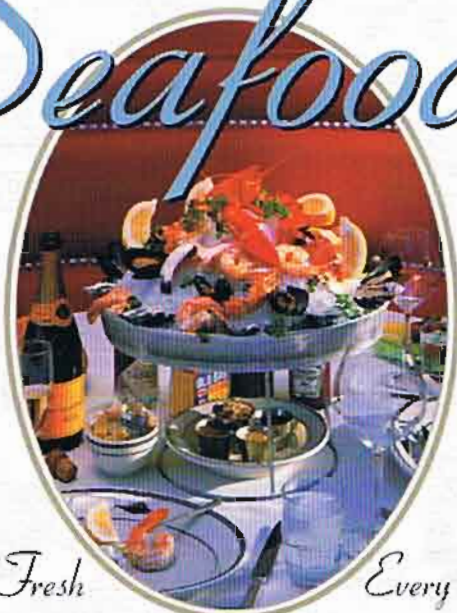
2003 QUILCEDA CREEK RED WINE (QUILCEDA CREEK), COLUMBIA VALLEY, \$35

Paul Golitzin pays homage to the second labels of the great chateaux of Bordeaux here—a typical Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot/Cabernet Franc blend with power, elegance and reasonably hefty tannins structured to age (just not quite as long as that other wine they make). **PAIRS WITH:** Grilled herb-marinated pork medallions and a wild mushroom tart.

2003 AMAVI SYRAH (PEPPER BRIDGE WINERY), WALLA WALLA VALLEY, \$25

Not a second label, Amavi is a great example of a separate "sister" winery producing premium Syrah for a great price. This wine has good acidity, roasted blackberry and black pepper dustings with a touch of smoked bacon. **PAIRS WITH:** A sandwich of rosemary-roasted lamb loin and garlic mashed potatoes.

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