

# cult favorites

Washington State joins the ranks of world-class wine producers. | by Teri Citterman



Last New Year's Eve the Golitzin family was celebrating together when the phone rang. Paul Golitzin, the winemaker at Quilceda Creek, picked up the receiver and, to his surprise, wine critic Pierre Rovani was on the other end. Rovani had called to inform the Golitzins that they had just been granted entry to the most exclusive wine club of all: *Wine Advocate's* influential critic Robert Parker had awarded Quilceda Creek's 2002 and 2003 cabernet sauvignons perfect scores of 100 points each. The Golitzins had been producing wine at their Snohomish winery for close to 30 years and are well respected as pioneers in the state's wine industry. Even so, this marked the first time a Washington wine was recognized with a perfect score—a triumph claimed by few wineries in the world. As tears flowed, so did '96 Dom Perignon and '89 Cristal. "Everyone was really emotional," said Golitzin, then 35. He says he has not stopped smiling since. "This is something people work for their entire lives and, most of the time, never achieve."

Such anointment by the wine press breeds high prices, scarcity, worship, and significantly, admission to the ranks of cult wine. While the word "cult" conjures sinister associations, when it

comes to wine, the word is less scary but just as mysterious. What makes a wine cultish rests on the tongue of the beholder.

Centuries ago, history records Bordeaux's highly acclaimed Haut-Brion as the world's first cult wine. Napa has its handful of cult wineries including Araujo Estate Wines, Bryant Family Vineyard, Colgin Cellars, Harlan Estate, and Screaming Eagle. In a recent auction on WineCommune.com, bids for three bottles of a 1997 Screaming Eagle cabernet sauvignon came in at \$5,000 and more. Here in Washington State, Leonetti Cellars stands solid with its consistently high scores, the latest a 97, for its 2003 Leonetti Reserve. Chris Figgins, winemaker at Leonetti in Walla Walla, says, "In some ways, we've caught up and surpassed Bordeaux and Napa in quality." He says critics are finally figuring out Washington wine and aren't afraid to score them in the peer group where they belong. "We have a handful of wineries making world-caliber wine in an industry that's barely 30 years old," says Figgins.

*Wine Spectator* says cult status accrues to wines that are "rare" and "majestic" and have received glowing reviews and stratospheric scores. So who are the hero makers who have the power to propel a wine to cult status? Certainly Robert Parker has his place, as do *Wine Spectator* and *International Wine Cellar's* Steve Tanzer. Though much of the judging is subjective, says Quilceda's Alex Golitzin, a cult wine consistently cracks scores of 95-plus.

## WHAT TO SHOP FOR

### WASHINGTON CULT-CALIBER WINES INCLUDE

**Andrew Will's** 2003 Ciel DuCheval Vineyard Red \$50

Score: 94+ *Wine Advocate*

**Betz Family Winery** 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Père de Famille \$45-\$50

Score: 95 *Wine Enthusiast*

**Betz Family Winery** 2002-03 Syrah La Serenne \$45-\$50

Score: 93 *Wine Spectator*

**DeLille Cellars** 2002-03 Chaleur Estate Red \$65-\$70

Score: 95+ *Wine Advocate*

Other cult wines include certain vintages from Cayuse and Cadence, and Woodward Canyon's Old Vines Cabernet Sauvignon.

crush





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Some say expert marketing is behind the cult wine phenomenon, but most agree it really comes down to expert winemaking. For Bob Betz, owner and winemaker for Betz Family Winery, it's a matter of exceptional vineyard fruit and unrivaled cellar practice. The wines are usually made in limited production, and as a result, demand outweighs the inventory and may drive prices five, 10, sometimes 20 times higher than originally set.

When a top wine is released, people scramble to buy, but not necessarily at the local wine shop. Highly rated wines are mostly sold through a winery's limited mailing list; and most have waiting lists to get on the mailing list. At Leonetti, wine aficionados may wait up to seven years to make the list. The spots are so highly coveted that parents leave them to children in their wills and spouses fight over them in divorce proceedings. Phone Quilceda, and the message informs callers that the prized cabernet is sold out, but provides instructions for getting on their waiting list. Sign up on Quilceda's Web site, and the following message comes back: "Your name has been successfully added to our waiting list. At this time we are unable to honestly predict when your name will be activated. However, as vintage production levels increase over the next several years, we will notify you in writing." The cult followers will be waiting. ✨

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**Esther Schor** - EMMA LAZARUS: AMERICAN ORIGINAL  
Wednesday, November 1, 2006, 7:00 PM  
Henry Art Gallery

In 1903, sixteen years after Emma Lazarus's death, a plaque with her poem "The New Colossus" was mounted onto the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. The addition transformed a monument to the American Revolution into a symbol of hope for millions of immigrants and made Emma Lazarus famous. As Esther Schor shows in her new biography, *Emma Lazarus*, this was only a surprising epilogue to a life of remarkable achievements.



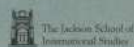
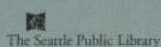
**Claudia Roden**  
Monday, November 20, 2006, 7:30 PM  
Nordstrom Recital Hall at Benaroya Hall

"Claudia Roden is no more a simple cookbook writer than Marcel Proust was a biscuit maker," declares historian Simon Schama. In her many books—including *The Book of Jewish Food*, *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, and *The Food of Italy: Region by Region*—the Egyptian-born Roden weaves together memoir, history, anthropology, and recipes to tell the story of a culture through its cuisine.

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**McCarthy & Schiering Wine Merchants**  
[2401-B Queen Anne Ave N, Seattle, 206-282-8500; 6500 Ravenna Ave NE, Seattle, 206-524-9500]

**Pete's Wine Shop** [58 Lynn St, Seattle, 206-322-2660; 134 105th Ave NE, Bellevue, 425-454-1100]

**Pike and Western Wine Shop** [1934 Pike Pl, Seattle, 206-441-1307; [www.pikeandwestern.com](http://www.pikeandwestern.com)]

**Esquin** [2700 Fourth Ave S, Seattle, 206-682-7374; [www.esquin.com](http://www.esquin.com)]

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