

## Tasting Notes: Salmon-Safe Wine

By Shannon Borg

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*A new Salmon-Safe winegrowing program casts a different view on the way that fish and wine go together*

With all the talk of organics and sustainability in winegrowing comes a new buzzword: “Salmon-Safe.” And bottles from wineries who have joined this program are swimming off wine shop shelves. But you may wonder exactly how the wine in your glass can affect the fish on your plate.

Essentially, Salmon-Safe winegrowing is an effort to help preserve and sustain Northwest salmon habitats by requiring that vintners commit to not polluting the groundwater and surface water that may flow from vineyards into the streams and rivers where salmon live and spawn. Each vineyard must meet a rigorous set of guidelines specific to efficient irrigation and water conservation measures, erosion control, integrated pest management, and native vegetation and habitat management.

Vineyards across the state are earning Salmon-Safe certification from the Low Input Viticulture and Enology (LIVE) group of Oregon, including Stillwater Creek—Novelty Hill Winery’s estate vineyard. Located about 30 miles northeast of Mattawa, it’s the first Columbia Valley vineyard to acquire the designation. The 245-acre vineyard (named Vineyard of the Year by Seattle magazine in 2007) is one of the steepest sites in the state, with hills running at 22 percent grades in places. This makes for great drainage—but also creates opportunities for herbicides and pesticides from the vineyard to drain into the groundwater and surface water that eventually end up in the Columbia River about 20 miles away.

Other, smaller vineyards are even closer to riparian habitats. Abeja and àMaurice Cellars are neighbors with vineyards near Mill Creek, part of a sensitive watershed east of Walla Walla, where bull trout, steelhead and chinook salmon have historically returned to spawn. The last significant chinook run was in 1925, but many groups, including the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, have been working to restock this stream. Efforts have included the removal in 2005 of the Kooskooskie dam about 10 miles upstream from àMaurice and Abeja, and habitat improvements all along the creek. With dozens of acres of vineyard that are a part of this watershed, it becomes obvious why Salmon-Safe practices are essential. To date, more than half of the vineyards in the Walla Walla area are certified Salmon-Safe, and the number is growing across the state.

Anna Schafer, winemaker and partner at àMaurice Cellars, says that her family’s commitment to sustainable winegrowing—including Salmon-Safe practices—was not negotiable. “Before we planted our vineyard, we just ‘grew dirt’ for two years,” she says of the process the vineyard went through to repair a soil imbalance caused by wheat and pea rotation on the land—and to gain Salmon-Safe certification in 2006. (The vineyard is also certified by VINEA, the Walla-Walla-based Winegrowers’ Sustainable Wine Trust that promotes sustainable wine growing.) “We agree that making sure the vineyard doesn’t disrupt or pollute our water system is essential to making our industry sustainable, and to making great wine,” she says.

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Stewardship Partners, a Seattle nonprofit organization that helps private landowners restore and preserve their natural landscapes, has been promoting Salmon-Safe wines through events such as an upcoming photography exhibit by Seattle magazine contributor Roddy Scheer. The opening of Agriculture on the Urban Fringe: Farming and Conservation in the Snoqualmie Valley, co-sponsored by Seattle magazine, is Sunday, September 20, 5–8 p.m. at Novelty Hill–Januik Winery (14710 Woodinville-Redmond Road NE, Woodinville; contact Nikki Dunbar at 425.481.5502 for tickets; \$35), and includes food and Salmon-Safe wine pairings. The opening is part of the 10th anniversary of Stewardship Partners and benefits that organization and Salmon-Safe. The exhibit continues through November 1.

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### SHANNON'S WINE PICKS

September, 2009

#### **2008 à Maurice Sparrow, Columbia Valley, \$33**

This delightful Viognier smells of ripe mango and lychee, with a wonderful briny minerality balanced by mouthwatering acidity. *Pair with: Dungeness crab salad with roasted asparagus.*

#### **2007 Buty Connor Lee Vineyard Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, \$35**

This lush and fragrant Chardonnay explodes with ripe peach and soft spice, and a touch of ginger on the finish for an excellent food wine. *Pair with: Pumpkin soup with nutmeg and crème fraîche.*

#### **2007 Novelty Hill Roussanne, Stillwater Creek Vineyard, Columbia Valley, \$18**

The Stillwater Creek Vineyard creates the perfect climate for this warm-weather grape to ripen to its full potential, showing aromas and flavors of peach and spice, a lush mouthfeel and a dry finish. *Pair with: Roasted chicken with preserved lemon.*

#### **2007 Abeja Syrah, Mill Creek Vineyard, Walla Walla, \$32**

This cooler climate Syrah is grown on the Abeja estate on the banks of Mill Creek. A classic Rhone-style wine, this red shows complex aromas and flavors of black cherry and a bit of spice, with less alcohol than many Washington Syrahs. *Pair with: Grilled lamb with red wine-lavender reduction.*

#### **2006 Pepper Bridge Cabernet Sauvignon, Walla Walla Valley, \$55**

This Cabernet Sauvignon blend comes from two Salmon-Safe vineyards—Seven Hills' and Pepper Bridge's estate vineyards. An incredibly elegant wine, showing dark plum, toast and coffee flavors. *Pair with: Roasted lamb with red wine reduction sauce.*

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