

By Thomas Cottrell

### ALEXANDRIA NICOLE WINERY

Chateau Ste. Michelle you've heard of, right? Columbia Winery? Check. And you know all about Hogue and Leonetti; everyone who loves wine around here does.

That's four out of the more than 360 wineries currently operating here in Washington State. What about the rest of them?

Do you have the same difficulty I do keeping track of them all?

Part of the problem is that the vast majority of wineries in the state produces fewer than 5,000 cases annually (and a large number of them are much smaller than that). Finding the wines on the shelf can be a considerable challenge.

Here's another problem—like every other wine region in the world, Washington has a small number of excellent wineries, a small number of pretty poor wineries and a large number of wineries in the middle. This last group ranges from not-too-bad to pretty impressive and

back to average. The trick is sorting them out. That's where I come in.

Every now and then I intend to use this space to profile a small winery from the Northwest—one of the good ones, one you aren't likely to have heard of before. I hope to make it a delicious process of exploration for all of us.

We start with Alexandria Nicole. Jarrod Boyle is an energetic young man with a vision. A viticulturist, he dreamed of turning a piece of land into a vineyard and, with a bit of luck and much effort, pulled it off. The Destiny Ridge Vineyard is the result, first planted in 1998.

Perched high on the Horse Heaven Hills overlooking the Columbia, not far from Prosser in the Yakima Valley, the vineyard has a stunning view of the river. Two hundred thirty-two acres are planted with 15 different grape varieties, everything from the basics—Riesling and Merlot to the esoteric Petit Verdot and Tempranillo.

It makes for plenty of material for a venturesome winemaker, so much

so that excess fruit is sold to other vineyards each year. Alexandria Nicole currently produces a Merlot, a Syrah, a Bordeaux-style blend called Quarry Butte, a Viognier and a Sauvignon Blanc. They've also turned out a delightful Cabernet Franc Rose (2004, well worth picking up if you spot a bottle) and a Lemberger (2004, also sold out and equally delicious).

The style of the wines is what wins winemaker Robert Smasne the awards and accolades—solid, pure fruit flavors married to just the right amount of oak. Nothing sticks out except the quality of the wine in the glass. His stints working at wineries such as Amavi and Pepper Bridge have obviously helped.

Currently in release: *2004 Reserve Viognier* (\$21)—a whole 197 cases produced—fruit-driven, with a classic touch of spice and a fresh acidity. Look for hints of melon and citrus that linger through the smooth finish. The *2004 Sauvignon Blanc* (\$20)—202 cases of this one—has a fine balance of the grapefruit style of Sauvignon so popular these days, combined with a touch of herbs and figs. Every sip brings something new to the palate. The *2002 Syrah* (\$27)—575 cases—is a personal favorite, lush and showy, spicy/peppery with heaps of berry and plum fruit. There's oak here, but balanced to the fruit; soft on the palate and long on the finish. Make sure you decant the *2003 Merlot* (\$27)—505 cases—an hour or two before you serve it. It's still young and can use the breathing time (or time in the cellar). But the wine rewards you with sweet, earthy notes, a touch of tobacco and plenty of ripe fruit. Small quantities of Malbec, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon add complexity to the mix.

The winery is out in the vineyard—visits are by appointment only. But there's a tasting room in Prosser at 717 Sixth Street, 509-786-3497. They are open Wednesday through Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. (to 9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday), with occasional musical performances and tapas served on the days they're open later. For more information, visit [www.alexandrianicolecellars.com](http://www.alexandrianicolecellars.com).

As for the name of the winery? Alexandria Nicole is Jarrod Boyle's wife. He decided early on to honor her in this special way.