



Thomas Cottrell is Bellevue Club's contributing wine columnist and the owner of La Cantina Wine Merchants.

RESOLUTION: EXPAND WINE HORIZONS

So, the New Year is upon us, a cold and dark season that mysteriously carries with it the promise of change and new things. We make New Year's resolutions, sometimes even meaning to follow through on the declarations. Hope springs eternal that at least some of these aspirations will be fulfilled; perhaps they will this year.

It's in that spirit that I'm going to try some new things myself. I've

become aware that lately I haven't been as vinously adventurous as I should be. This is going to change.

I resolve to try more new wines, from unknown producers and unexplored regions (by me, anyway) than I've been doing lately. I'll break out of the old patterns and securities—why not come along?

We'll start close to home, to make things a bit easier.

Do you realize there are more than 400 wineries in Washington state? I used to know most of them; now it seems as if I hear about a new one every few days. As far as tasting them is concerned, I've fallen behind.

With a bold spirit of exploration we'll start just up the road in Woodinville: Arlington Road, Cuillin Hills, Des Voigne, Highbridge, Ross Andrew, Sparkman, Vine and Sun and William Church—heard of any of them?

Me neither, but they are all now on my hit list. Some of them I will probably like a lot, some less so. Most of them will likely fall somewhere in the middle. That's the way it usually is with any region or group of wines. It's the discovery and the not knowing that make the process of tasting them all so fascinating ... and fun.

Much farther afield, I want to sample more of the South African wines that have been coming our way. The ones I've tasted have been exciting—and usually fine values—but there's so very much more to learn. Besides, how can we resist trying wines from regions with names like Ruitersbosch and Little Karoo, Overberg or Stellenbosch, Swartland and Tulbagh? And don't forget about Mossel Bay.

Another far-flung area I've overlooked somewhat is Spain. Yet Spanish wines are changing, for the better, faster than just about any place in the world.

It all started after the end of the Franco régime. The new plantings, building and technologies that were implemented back then have recently been paying off handsomely with new wines from newly minted regions. The proliferation of new names has made keeping up with all of them a real challenge. But we can do it.

We'll start looking for wines from Bierzo and Rueda, Valdepenas and Jumilla, Yecla and Costers del Segre, Campo de Borja and Calatayud. I've tasted a few of these and they've only tickled my appetite to have more of them come my way.

Of course, there are hundreds of new wines coming out of California as well, not to mention Australia and New Zealand. And it won't be long before we will see a wide range of offering from eastern Europe. Georgian wines (no, not that Georgia) look to be on the rise—I discovered several tasty examples just the other day.

The principle to be observed is always to try new things. In wine bars and restaurants, at your favorite wine merchants or in the grocery store—live dangerously, try something new and see what you discover.