

LIFESTYLE

MARY EARL | Picks inspired by the Kitsap Wine Festival

By Mary Earl

The eighth annual Kitsap Wine Festival this past weekend showcased some wonderful wines. Most of the wineries were from Washington, but there were a sprinkling of other regions, too.

The scene was Bremerton Harborside Fountain Park with its views of the water, ferries and even a few tall ships. Live music, lots of bottled water, walk-thru misters and bites from local restaurants complemented the wine tasting.

We began our wandering, with a bit of bubbly from Gruet Winery. Founded in 1984, this New Mexican winery has roots in the Marne region of Champagne. Now, you're probably thinking the same thing I was thinking when my brain was trying to comprehend New Mexico and Champagne in the same sentence.

But if you recognize their high elevation vineyards (4,000 to 5,000 feet) have the same sandy soils, the same daytime highs and nighttime lows that Eastern Washington has, it makes sense for the cooler climate Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes that go into these bubblyies.

The non-vintage Blanc de Blanc is 100 percent Chardonnay with bready, lemon zest, and green apple aromas that are echoed on the palate. Aged en tirage (on the yeast) for about 24 months, it received a Best of Class from the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition.

Since I gravitate to red wines for the most part, rosés are my go to chillable red on hot summer days. Gruet's Brut Rosé has a beautiful rosy color, fine bubbles and rich, cherry and raspberry fruit flavors. This full-bodied sparkler is made with 100 percent Pinot Noir and aged en tirage for a minimum of 24 months.

Davenport Cellars served up an RHD Cab blend that had to be my favorite red. A blend of 54 percent Merlot, 31 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 10 percent Malbec and 5 percent Cabernet Franc sourced from prestigious vineyards like Seven Hills and Sheridan Vineyard in Rattlesnake Hills and Pepper Bridge, Kiona and Les Collines Vineyards in Walla Walla. Only 97 cases were produced. It sells for \$27.

Gecko Cellars 2009 red is a gorgeous wine for \$15. A blend of Grenache, Merlot, Mouvedre, Cab, Syrah, Cinsault and Barbera, the 14.8 percent alcohol was nicely balanced by all the flavors of the different grapes.

Harbinger Winery is three miles west of Port Angeles. Owner and vintner Sara Gagnon is deft at handcrafting award-winning artisan wines. The Bolero is the best reason for that scenic road trip west.

Grapes, composed of 75 percent Tempranillo — with a little bit of Grenache and Syrah — are sourced from Rattlesnake Hills. American and Hungarian oak barrels add vanilla and caramelized notes that enhance the flavors of raspberry and hints of chocolate. The wine has two silver medals around its shoulders.

And since you're practically to the ocean, enjoy the highly aromatic Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and Riesling blend that would be cool and refreshing as the ocean itself. The description on the website explains: "the palate is jolted awake by the all-up-in-your business balance of fruit and acidity that leave you feeling as invigorated as a glacially-fed river plunge. This wine pairs beautifully with Thai cuisine, fresh shellfish, and sharp or goat cheeses." Amen, sister and congrats on the gold medal for this beautifully-crafted wine.

Yakima's Naches Heights Vineyard — or NHV as it's called — is in the Naches Heights AVA. The winery has changed its farming practices over the years. It used to grow conventionally with pesticides and herbicides. That has completely changed to growing their grapes sustainably, organically and bio-dynamically so they are salmon-safe.

NHV has produced award-winning wines including a blend of Tempranillo, Syrah and Cab Franc from the Two Coyote Vineyard that draws you in with its gorgeous nose. It's the one to have with anything hot off the grill and any tasty tapas such as Mushroom Pinchos, red onion and orange salad, stuffed cherry tomatoes, Serrano ham and manchego cheese with pickled onions and olives.

Produced in Lakewood, Stina Cellars 2012 Wahluke Slope Petit Verdot received a gold medal and Cellar Selection from the World Wine Championships. And it's no wonder; this dark-purple-black-colored wine has lovely aromas and flavors of cedar, dark berries and chocolate with a silky texture, medium body and finish. Wonderful now but has the structure to age for five to seven years.

Its pomegranate wine is sweet with bright acidity that is juicy, complex and very well made. This gold medal wine is a perfect mixer for the cocktail hour. Try it in your bubbly with a garnish of hibiscus or a refreshing pomegranate julep.

Stina Cellars Siegerrebe from the Winlock area just south of Chehalis is from 15 year old vines. Siegerrebe was created by German viticulturalist in 1929. It's a cross of Madeleine Angevine and Gewürztraminer. The wine is very aromatic with delightful flavors of grapefruit, lychee, and spice notes.

Willamette Valley Vineyards poured a Pinot Gris that was very, very good. I don't usually reach for Pinot Gris or Grigio but the lively aromatics from the 2 percent Muscat added reminded me of melon, pear, lychee and floral blossoms.

Impressive! And the rich mouth feel is the result of adding 6 percent barrel fermented Pinot Blanc. The lush flavors of citrus and pear finish gracefully. You need to try this.

And try their made-for-hot-summers red wine. The Whole Cluster Pinot Noir was awarded 90 points and an Editor's Choice in an international wine magazine. It goes through carbonic maceration where the whole bunches of grapes are fermented without crushing. While fermenting, the weight of the fruit presses the wines while individual berries explode with their juices. The result of this process is a refreshing, light bodied, brightly colored fruity red wine — which you can chill!

August is Washington State Wine Month, so grab a wine partner and go taste Washington at the over 850 wineries statewide.