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Wine X Online Edition

July 2018

By Pamela and Gary Baker

Blessed with 200 wineries, Washington State's Tri-Cities is known as the "Heart of Washington Wine Country." With 300 days of sunshine per year, the region also makes a perfect weekend getaway.

The Tri-Cities gets its name from the towns of Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco. Trio seems to be the theme in this viticulturally rich area situated around the confluence of three beautiful rivers, the Yakima, the Columbia and the Snake.

With so many choices of wineries, the Tri-Cities region can be an overwhelming experience for first time wine aficionados. But, we love a challenge, so we set out to find the best wineries, restaurants and lodging in the area. With these wineries so spread out, you need a strategy to take in some of the best wineries. Herein, we present a two-day tour of the region, that highlights some of its finest wineries and restaurants.

Day One: We Visit Three Wineries – Barnard Griffin, J. Bookwalter, and Goose Ridge

Started in 1983 by husband and wife team, Deborah Barnard and Rob Griffin, Barnard Griffin Winery, (878 Tulip Lane), makes a delightful stop for its art, wine and food. Co-owner Deborah invited us to tour her fused glass art gallery where visitors can view, purchase or make art. With glasses of sparkling albarino in hand, Rob Griffin and his daughter, Megan, a winemaking duo, took us on a tour of the production facility. We finished off our visit with lunch on the patio at the winery's restaurant, The Kitchen.

Pam dined on the Cubano sandwich, a delightful combination of pork shoulder, ham, swiss cheese, Dijon mustard and pickle, superbly paired with a glass of sangiovese ros. Gary enjoyed the cornmeal crusted fish and chips, accompanied with a glass of sauvignon blanc.

Just two-minutes' walk down Tulip Lane from Barnard Griffin is the J. Bookwalter winery. This well-known winery incorporates Bookwalter's love of books and all things literary throughout

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the tasting room. The Bookwalter's book theme is reflected in his wine names, with labels like Conflict, Protagonist and Couplet. This winery, artfully designed with casual and cozy rooms, and outdoor patio and gardens, also serves great food.

For a Zagat-rated winery restaurant, return to Bookwalter's Winery for dinner at the "Fiction" restaurant. Here you'll experience locally driven farm-to-table cuisine. In this casual and friendly atmosphere, the dishes are made with the freshest organic and local ingredients possible. Try the uniquely named blended wines or their craft bar cocktails on one of their many patios. Gary enjoyed the mushroom and herb risotto with a glass of 2014 Suspense, a red blend of 65% merlot and 35% cabernet franc. Pam ordered the Snake River steak tacos with a glass of the 2014 Protagonist, a red blend of mostly cabernet sauvignon.

Boasting the largest contiguous vineyard in the Washington State, Goose Ridge Estate Vineyard and Winery (16304 North Dallas Road: exit 104 off Interstate 82 from Richland) is an impressive sight. We were invited to take a drive with the winemaker, Andrew, to the top of this massive vineyard. Looking out over this expansive vineyard, with row after row of vines as far as our eyes could see, you soon realize how big the Goose Ridge operation is. The grape vines were just starting their bud break. And yes, we saw Geese flying overhead on their way to the river.

Owned and operated by the Monson family, Goose Ridge Winery specializes in limited productions of handcrafted wines from select, estate grown grapes. The family has farmed in the Columbia Valley for four decades. Pam loved the 2016 Reserve Chardonnay, a delightful wine with a hint of vanilla nose, and soft, creamy taste.

Be sure to try Goose Ridge's "wine in a can", perfect for a picnic or when you don't want to open a full bottle. Specially treated, the 12-ounce cans protect the wine's classic aroma and subtle taste. Stacks of these six-packs filled with chardonnay—plus a red wine blend—are found in the tasting room. You can mix and match your six-packs, so we bought both.

A worthwhile stop nearby, the Country Mercantile, (5015 Ava Way) began as a humble roadside fruit stand. It's grown—along with the Tri-Cities community—into a local and statewide shopping icon. A feast for the eyes and senses, the Country Mercantile is filled with row after row of shelves crammed with every imaginable gourmet food and gifts. Sweet smells of candy and chocolate from the fudge factory waft across the store. You can shop here for practically any farm fresh produce, and ice cream and gelato. The deli soups and sandwiches, and artisan breads, baked fresh onsite, are delicious.

#### Day Two: The Red Mountain American Viticultural Area (AVA)

Washington's smallest AVA, established in 2001, Red Mountain is named after its soil's reddish hue, that produces red varietals, most notably cabernet sauvignon, malbec, merlot and syrah. Hiking trails traverse this hillside. Visitors can even go wine tasting on horseback or on the back of a tractor drawn wagon.

Today, 15 wineries call Red Mountain home. We tasted at three – Kiona, Col Solare and Fidelitas. Kiona, Red Mountain's oldest winery, is the 2018 Washington Winery of the year. Family run, Kiona specializes in deep, rich reds, but also produces delicious and reasonably priced whites.

Situated high upon Red Mountain's slopes, Col Solare is one of its newest wineries. This stunning facility, with fabulous views, was built in 2006, and the vines were planted in 2007. Owned by the Antinori family from Italy, Col Solare specializes in red blends. The Shining Hill, an English translation for Col Solare, is a blend of cabernet sauvignon, syrah, cabernet franc and merlot.

Fidelitas started in 2000, specializes in bordeaux style whites and reds. But owner and winemaker Charlie Hoppes' favorite is his 2015 Red Mountain Merlot because merlot is what

originally put Washington on the "wine map."

We also visited Kennewick's newly opened Columbia Gardens Urban Wine and Artisan Village. We think this project is about to become the Tri-Cities wine tasting place.

Adjacent to Clover Island, overlooking the Columbia River, the City of Kennewick has turned its historic waterfront into a pedestrian friendly, regional gathering place. It's currently home to two wineries, Bartholomew and Monarcha. Phase II of the Columbia Gardens project will add 2500 square feet for more wine tasting rooms. Phase III will bring Columbia Basin College's culinary arts program to the village, rounding out the concept and implementation of the project.

Victor Palencia, born in Mexico where the Monarch butterflies winter, named his Monarcha label after the butterflies' migration path from Mexico to the Pacific Northwest. He features distinctive "Palencia" wines that reflect the terroir of the region.

Bart Fawbush, owner and winemaker of Bartholomew Winery likes to work with unique varietals and sources all his grapes. Expect to taste unexpected varietals like tannat, albarino or ros of carmenere.

Wine tasting makes us hungry, so we headed to dinner at LuLu Craft Bar and Kitchen, on the Columbia Point Waterfront and conveniently located next to our hotel. Locally sourced food here is an understatement. The pork, beef, potatoes and onions come from the family farm. Try the hand-cut potato crisps for a starter. Delicious!

If You Go

Lodging:

We stayed at the Lodge at Columbia Point in Richland, a rustic, luxurious property on the Columbia River. Rooms are spacious and river view rooms come with balconies to take in the stunning views of the river. Complete with its own wine tasting room, this is the perfect place for a wine weekend getaway.

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Pamela and Gary Baker are freelance writers based in Northern California. They've written for regional, national and international magazines, newspapers and websites including Via Magazine, Destinations, and Australia and New Zealand Magazine. Pamela is also a wine blogger at Chardygirl.com. To read more of their stories, visit PamandGaryBaker.com

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