

Northwest Wine: Idaho wines are coming into their own

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Great Northwest Wine

It's been a long time coming, but the Idaho wine industry is coming into its own.

The Gem State's modern wine industry started in the mid-1970s, and it has taken this long to reach 50 wineries. And in the past year, the entire industry is enjoying some serious momentum. The Snake River Valley and the city of Boise are attracting excellent winemakers, and consumers, retailers and restaurants are showing their collective support for the wines being produced up and down the state.

In mid-September, the annual Idaho Wine Competition took place. Here are some of the top wines, all of which earned gold medals. They should give you a good idea of where the state's industry stands.

Coiled Wines 2012 Dry Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$17: Owner/winemaker Leslie Preston is making terrific wines at her urban location in the Boise suburb of Garden City. This bright white wine earned best-in-show honors, thanks to aromas of apple, orange oil and clove, followed by flavors of Golden Delicious apple, peach and pineapple.

Cold Springs Winery 2009 Merlot, Snake River Valley, \$15: Here's a nicely priced wine that was the top red of the competition. It comes from a small winery in the tiny town of Hammett, halfway between Boise and Twin Falls. It offers aromas of dried herbs, sarsaparilla and dark cherry, followed by rich flavors of black olive, walnut, toast and red plum.

Sawtooth Estate Winery 2012 Classic Fly Series Cinsault Rosé, Snake River Valley, \$13: Who knew anyone was growing Cinsault in the Snake River Valley? This was the top pink wine in the judging, thanks to lovely aromas of cherry and strawberry, followed by flavors of peach, pineapple and strawberry freezer jam. It has just a bit of sweetness to round the edges.

Camas Prairie Winery 2012 Strawberry Mead, Idaho, \$14: Mead, a wine made with honey, is a specialty of Camas Prairie, a longtime winery in the college town of Moscow. This offers aromas of pie cherry and dried strawberry, followed by flavors of peaches, cream and apples.

Bitner Vineyards 2009 Petit Verdot Merlot, Snake River Valley, \$23: Longtime grape grower Ron Bitner collaborates with winemaker Greg Koenig for this superb red blend. It begins with aromas of cedar, vanilla and cherry cola, followed by flavors of dried cranberry, blueberry and boysenberry, all backed with rich tannins and a lengthy finish.

Clearwater Canyon Cellars 2011 Carménère, Washington, \$28: This winery in Lewiston reaches across the border into Washington's Horse Heaven Hills for this stunning red made with the rare Carménère grape. It opens with aromas of cocoa powder and black currant, followed by flavors of plum, boysenberry and chocolate. It is beautifully balanced.

Fraser Vineyard 2011 Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, \$24: Fraser Vineyard in Boise has been making some of Idaho's top wines for the past decade. This rare Snake River Valley Tempranillo is a big, rough, Spanish-style red that opens with aromas of moist earth, oak and plum, followed by flavors of cherry and pomegranate. Rustic tannins give this terrific balance.

Huston Vineyards 2012 Chicken Dinner White, Snake River Valley, \$16: This winery near Caldwell sells more of this Riesling-based white blend than any other wine. The winery is on the regionally famous Chicken Dinner Road, hence the name of this wine. It opens with beautiful aromas of apricot, peach and orange, followed by bright flavors of orchard fruit. There's a bit of sweetness there, but it's just enough to round the edges.

Ste. Chapelle 2012 Special Harvest Riesling, Snake River Valley, \$10: Idaho's largest and oldest winery continues to make some of the state's best and least-expensive wines. Its specialty is Riesling, and this is a deliciously sweet sipper. Aromas feature hints of honey, spice and apple, followed by flavors of baked apple with a sprinkle of cinnamon.

• Eric Degerman and Andy Perdue run Great Northwest Wine. Learn more about wine at www.greatnorthwestwine.com.


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