

WASHINGTON

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TASTING ROOM[®]

The magazine for
people who love
wine tasting

Editor's Top Picks

**SINGLE-VINEYARD
WINES FROM
STILLWATER CREEK**



STILLWATER CREEK *vineyard*

WRITER *John Vitale*

Planted with *seven clones of Cabernet alone*,
this distinctive vineyard and its *elite selection*
of clones are a *favorite* among
many *winemakers* »

Stillwater Creek Vineyard sits on
the Royal Slope of the Frenchman
Hills, where 14 varieties of red
and white grapes are grown

TASTING
ROOM *vineyard*

RIGHT Mike Januik makes the wines for both Novelty Hill and Januik Winery and has been working with Stillwater Creek since the beginning

BELOW Tom Alberg of Stillwater Creek Vineyard and Novelty Hill



“
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IN THE **REDS.**

—MIKE JANUIK
Novelty Hill-Januik Winery

FANS OF Washington wine may be familiar with the name Stillwater Creek, a vineyard designation that appears on dozens of boutique wine labels by the likes of JM Cellars, Adams Bench, Reininger Winery, Saviah Cellars, Pondera Winery and numerous others. But a trip to Novelty Hill Winery in Woodinville, founded by prominent Seattle venture capitalist Tom Alberg and his wife Judi Beck, reveals the bigger picture—the vision for their winery coincided with the birth of Stillwater Creek Vineyard in 2000.

During an event in 1999, winemaker John Bigelow (JM Cellars) introduced Tom Alberg to his brother-in-law, Mike Januik, who had just left his position at Chateau Ste. Michelle as head winemaker to launch Januik Winery. “The conversation quickly turned to wine, and we began discussing an idea I’d had about wine grape growing on the Royal Slope of the Frenchman Hills where my family has owned property since 1968,” says Tom. He invited Mike to visit the site, who quickly confirmed its suitability for grape growing.

“Mike felt the soil and aspect of our property, now known as Stillwater

Creek, was ideally suited to wine grapes,” says Tom, who with his family started developing the 235-acre parcel into the world-class vineyard it is today.

Mike consulted on the planting of the vineyard, and when it was complete he suggested the Alberg’s consider making wine with their grapes. “Confident in the knowledge we had an exciting vineyard source and buoyed by the fact we had an acclaimed winemaker on our team, my wife Judi Beck and I launched Novelty Hill,” says Tom.

Since the first grapes were harvested in 2002, Mike Januik has been making the wines for Novelty Hill (in addition to his role as winemaker for Januik Winery), relying on fruit sourced from Stillwater Creek Vineyard.

Tom Alberg’s interest in using technology and innovation in the vineyard to make superior wines paved the way for what he calls an “elite selection of clones” to be planted, with new ones being added from time to time. To illustrate, last year’s planting of two new Cabernet Sauvignon clones brings the total to seven for this variety alone.

“Different clones of each variety express themselves in slightly different

“ THE ABILITY TO **BLEND A SINGLE VARIETY** WITH **MULTIPLE CLONES** PROVIDES **INCREDIBLE LAYERS OF FLAVOR.** ”

—JOHN BIGELOW, JM Cellars



Red varieties account for 80% of the wine grapes at Stillwater Creek, where Cabernet and Syrah thrive on the steepest southern slopes

RIGHT John Bigelow of JM Cellars is a huge fan of Stillwater Creek

BELOW Erica Orr is consulting winemaker and enologist for Baer Winery



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”
—ERICA ORR,
Baer Winery Consultant

ways, and it is those differences that often make for a more interesting wine when blended together,” points out Mike Januik, who has worked with all 14 varieties grown at the vineyard. “Stillwater Creek, in my opinion, combines a perfect combination of structure and suppleness in the reds.”

John Bigelow at JM Cellars located up the hill from Novelty Hill-Januik Winery, has been working with fruit from Stillwater Creek since its inception. “Once the vineyard was planted, I committed to several blocks of grapes including Cabernet clones 8 and 191, Joseph Phelps clone of Syrah, Mourvèdre, Merlot clones 3 and 348, Malbec, Viognier, Chardonnay clones 95 and 15, and Petit Verdot,” John says.

He agrees with his brother-in-law about the advantages inherent in blending clones, saying, “The ability to blend a single variety with multiple clones provides incredible layers of flavor. I love these clones in our wines, but I also love the wines of Baer, Pondera, Novelty Hill, Sparkman, Sightglass Cellars, and many others coming from the blending of these clones.”

The Mourvèdre and Syrah found

in John’s red blend, Nietos, are both from Stillwater. “The rich, dark color [of the wine] is the signature of this vineyard. The tannins are so fine coming straight from the grapes that no fining is needed,” he says. “The vineyard is a winemaker’s dream.”

Stillwater Creek’s vineyard manager is Ed Kelly, who managed premium vineyards in Napa and Sonoma prior to signing on in 2011. “I call him the wizard of minerals,” says John Bigelow. “He understands the connection between the health of the vine and the minerals it receives from the soil better than any vineyard manager I have worked with in twenty years.”

Karen and Buzz Buckingham of Sol Stone Winery in Woodinville have been making wine for 14 years and recently added Stillwater Creek to their list of vineyards. Their first Stillwater release is the 2016 Chardonnay, with Cabernet and Grenache still in barrel.

“Specifically, we blended two different Chardonnay clones together, 95 and 15, to achieve the end result, and then barrel fermented,” says Karen. “Structurally, the fruit is well ripened and flavorful which we attribute to the vineyard’s site, which has enough altitude to produce cool nights while the days are of sufficient heat to



LEFT Cabernet Sauvignon hanging on the vine at Stillwater Creek

BELOW Winemakers Karen and Buzz Buckingham of Sol Stone Winery in Woodinville



“ STRUCTURALLY, THE FRUIT IS
WELL RIPENED AND FLAVORFUL. ”

—KAREN BUCKINGHAM,
Sol Stone Winery

produce fruit that has acid contents we like for our style of wines.”

Known for their Bordeaux varietal red blends, Woodinville-based Baer Winery has been exclusively using grapes from Stillwater Creek since 2004. Consulting winemaker and enologist Erica Orr has worked closely with owner Lisa Baer since 2007. “The vineyard manager Ed Kelly has made a career of sustainable viticulture and has been working with us here in Washington for the past six years really maximizing the potential of this site,” says Erica. “The vines are now in their ‘sweet spot’ of maturity which means the crop and the leaf canopy and root system are in balance and harmony.”

Like others, Baer Winery’s formula for success behind their mesmerizing red blends may be attributed, at least partially, to the wide selection of clones available. They pull in several clones of almost everything they harvest, including two clones of Merlot, five

clones of Cabernet Sauvignon, two clones of Cabernet Franc, and three clones of Chardonnay.

“The Chardonnay we press together and ferment as one wine, but all the red clones are picked separately, fermented separately, aged separately in barrels until we are confident in the blend composition to go forward with the blend assembly before bottling,” shares Erica.

Veteran winemaker Mike Januik has been relentless in his quest to push the envelope of Washington wine quality for over three decades. Although he has access to grapes from many top sites, he admits he will always feel a unique connection to Stillwater Creek.

“I’ve seen the vineyard transformed from a raw piece of sage covered acres to one of the best vineyards in the state, and it is in large part because of this that it will always hold a special place for me,” he concludes. 🍇



Turn the page
for reviews on 16
designates from
Stillwater Creek
Vineyard »

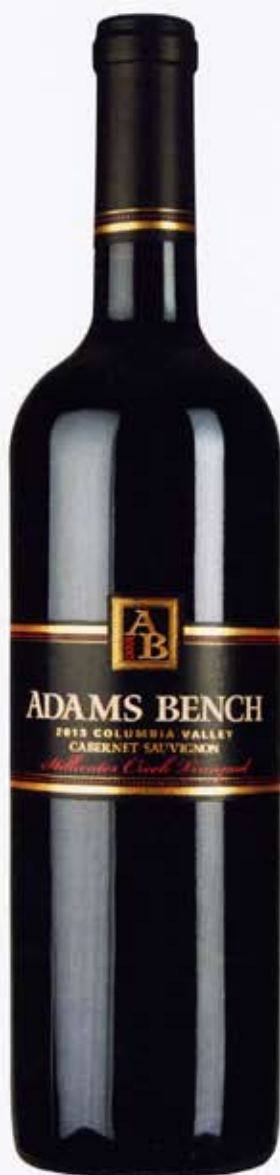
STILLWATER CREEK VINEYARD DESIGNATES



JM Cellars 2015 Nietos

www.jmcellars.com

Nietos (Spanish for grandchildren) is a unique blend of 50% Mourvèdre and 50% Syrah. Posh, svelte and powerfully structured without being the least bit weighty. Alluring, smoky aromas lead to highly expressive and brooding flavors of black plum, violet, loamy earth, grilled meat and leather, interwoven with peppercorn and light-footed tannins that soar through the endless finish. **\$55**



Adams Bench 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon

www.adamsbench.com

Tim and Erica Blue aged this version in 100% new French oak cooperage. The hallmark of this red wine is its remarkable structure – powerful, yet pillowy, with crushed velvet tannins that swirl with seamless flavors of silky black and dark red fruit and expressive accents of violet, tobacco and pencil shavings. Stays focused, ending with magnificent structure, power and elegance. **\$70**



Baer Winery 2013 Arctos

www.baerwinery.com

The Baer Family has been exclusively sourcing grapes from Stillwater Creek since 2004. This powerful Cabernet-based blend stays remarkably light footed on the palate, with uplifting structure and pillowy tannins that set the stage for polished flavors of blackberry, cassis, graphite, tobacco leaf and floral violet. Loamy notes complement the profile and build depth on the momentous finish. **\$43**



Pondera Winery 2013 Reserve Malbec

www.ponderawinery.com

Woodinville winemaker Shane Howard crafted this ripe, structured red wine that is concentrated yet fresh, with lively acidity supporting the dark plum, black currant and bright blueberry-tinged flavors, with a supple finish of polished granite and well-burnished tannins. Pair with a rich red sauce or lean cuts of meat. **\$45**



**Enchanted Cellars
2013 Merlot**

www.enchanted-cellar.com

Will and Debbie Miller aged this Merlot for 24 months at their winery located just outside of downtown Walla Walla. A plump, rich and juicy style, gushing with a core of dark chocolate-covered cherry and blueberry, layered with nuances of vanilla, loamy earth and granite minerality. Gains traction on the end, where sweet tannins display muscular grip on the powerfully structured finish. **\$32**



**Finn Hill 2012
Merveille Merlot**

www.finnhillwinery.com

Rob Entrekin crafted this big and bold red wine using Merlot clone 348 at his Woodinville winery. Aged in 100% new French oak, it is plush, well-structured and generous in body, yet not weighty, exhibiting a concentrated beam of dark cherry, plum and black currant flavors streaked with bright acidity and accents of gravel, warm spice and fine tannins that linger on the finish. **\$35**



**Eye of the Needle
2014 Reserve
Cabernet Franc**

www.eyeoftheneedlewinery.com

From acclaimed wine negociants Bob and Lauren Bullock comes this voluptuous, powerful and well-sculpted version. Bold, and deeply concentrated flavors of black raspberry, blackberry, vanilla bean, tobacco and sandalwood interlaced with earth, spice and cola notes. Powdery fine tannins give extra weight to the uber-long finish. **\$35**



**Helix by Reininger
2013 Sangiovese**

www.reiningerwinery.com

This 100% Sangiovese is a blend of clones 19 and 23. Firm in structure, with well-integrated tannins and proper balance to the underlying acidity. There's solid depth to the seamless core of black cherry, cranberry and coffee flavors. Fresh earth and hints of orange peel stretch out on the tightly focused finish. Try pairing with veal marsala. **\$30**

STILLWATER CREEK VINEYARD DESIGNATES



Novelty Hill 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon

www.noveltyhilljanuik.com

Renowned winemaker Mike Januik makes all the Novelty Hill wines including this harmonious Cabernet. Smooth in texture, ringing with high-toned blackberry, black raspberry and currant flavors inlaid with bright violet, barrel spice and gentle tannins. There's concentration on the deep, focused finish. **\$30**



Tildio 2013 Malbec

www.tildio.com

Katy and Milum Perry are based in the Lake Chelan Valley. This wine was aged 23 months in Taransaud and Gamba French oak barrels. Rich, polished and focused, this version is studded with vibrant spice and mineral notes that resonate on the finely meshed layers of dark plum, blueberry, leather, cocoa and herbs de Provence. Ends with lean tannins on the structured finish. **\$38**



Merry Cellars 2014 Syrah

www.merrycellars.com

Patrick Merry launched Merry Cellars in 2004 with an inaugural vintage of 400 cases, and has now grown to an annual production of 5,000 cases at his Pullman winery. Supple and full bodied, with abundant ripe plum and juicy red currant flavors inlaid with tobacco and peppercorn spice. Sage and clove notes mingle with powdery tannins on the mineral driven finish. **\$36**



Saviah Cellars 2015 Chardonnay

www.saviahcellars.com

Richard Funk sourced this version from a one-acre block of Chardonnay clone 75 grown at a higher elevation with a slight northern aspect, and aged for nine months in French oak barrels. Fragrant, striking a clean balance between the lively mix of pear, green apple and citrusy lemon curd flavors, elevated with pronounced mineral and spice notes lingering on the aftertaste. **\$25**



**L'Ecole N° 41
2015 Sémillon**

www.lecole.com

Marty Clubb spearheads the second-generation family-owned winery, which has garnered national and international accolades over the years. Rich and unctuous, this elegant full-bodied white wine is layered with deeply concentrated flavors of pear, peach, mango and lemon oil, tempered with zesty spice, stony minerality and dried herb notes that drive the complex finish. **\$21**



**Sol Stone 2016
Chardonnay**

www.solstonewine.com

Husband and wife winemaking team Buzz and Karen Buckingham aged this white wine in a combination of oak barrel and stainless steel tanks. Exudes intensity and vitality, with sleek structure and rich honeyed flavors of fig, pear, melon and tropical fruit layered with notes of blanched almond, lemon citrus and gentle spice on the up-tempo finish. Pair with seafood, chicken and hearty cheeses. **\$24**



**Damsel Cellars
2014 Syrah**

www.damselcellars.com

Mari Womack's signature wine, this red is supple and alluring, with a purity to the plush texture, cascading with steeped blackberry and currant flavors that meld seamlessly with distinctive nuances of cured meat, espresso and loamy earth. Subtle hints of caramel and pepper come alive on the richly satisfying finish. Pair with herb-encrusted lamb and soft blue cheeses. **\$28**



**Novelty Hill 2014
Grenache**

www.noveltyhilljanuik.com

The winery's estate vineyard has Grenache planted on a steep, south-facing section of the vineyard notable for the chunks of fractured basalt found in the soil. Silky and medium dense with modest tannins, this Rhône varietal evokes aromas and flavors of juicy red berries, black cherry, licorice and briary spice notes that push through the complex finish. **\$28**