

Wine Spectator

10 Approachable Washington Reds

New reviews of Syrahs and Rhône-style reds from the Columbia Valley for \$30 or less

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

Washington state produces some of the most distinctive Rhône-style red wines in the country. Vintners have homed in on ideal growing sites for Syrah throughout the Columbia Valley, and the best examples of the grape are often expressive, with pure fruit flavors and bright acidity. This report focuses on moderately priced Syrahs and Rhône-style blends, with the majority available for less than \$30.

One of the best values from the region comes from Purple Star, a relatively new label that donates 15 percent of its proceeds to Seattle Children's Hospital. Owner Kyle Johnson, who made the wines at the now-shuttered Olsen Estates, mainly used grapes from Olsen Vineyards in Yakima Valley, with a dash from Red Mountain. L'Ecole No. 41 is a blend of Syrah from four vineyards, and with several thousand cases produced, it should be relatively easy to find. Some vintners like to add a touch of Viognier to their Syrah for additional aromatics and texture, as is the case with Guardian's The Informant.

There are several single-vineyard wines on offer here as well. Columbia Crest turned to Coyote Canyon Vineyard in the Horse Heaven Hills AVA for its reserve bottling. Meanwhile, Gård winemaker Aryn Morell used grapes from the winery's estate vineyard in the Frenchman Hills for its savory Syrah.

DAMA Syrah Columbia Valley 2009 Score: 92 | \$25

Vibrant, focused and juicy, with beautifully shaped blackberry, black currant, green olive and spice flavors. There's just enough transparency in the texture to let it all shine through on the long finish. Drink now through 2018. 200 cases made. —H.S.

COLUMBIA CREST Syrah Horse Heaven Hills Coyote Canyon Vineyard Reserve 2010 Score: 91 | \$30

Smooth and vibrant, with green olive and fig overtones to the blackberry flavors, pushing against peppery tannins on the long finish. Best from 2014 through 2018. 300 cases made. —H.S.

L'ECOLE NO. 41 Syrah Columbia Valley 2010 Score: 91 | \$25

Grippy tannins give way to fleshy plum and currant fruit, shaded with hints of fennel and peach fuzz, lingering well. Best after 2014. 2,430 cases made. —H.S.

PURPLE STAR Syrah Columbia Valley 2009 Score: 91 | \$16

Smooth, polished and expressive, layering its blackberry, plum and spice flavors on a velvety carpet of tannins, coming



Kevin Cruff

From Columbia Crest comes a smooth and vibrant 2010 Syrah.

together on the refined finish. Drink now through 2018. 378 cases made. —H.S.

GUARDIAN The Informant Wahluke Slope 2010 Score: 90 | \$30

Smooth and savory, with meaty, earthy grace notes to the black cherry and licorice flavors, finishing with polish. Syrah and Viognier. Drink now through 2018. 250 cases made. —H.S.

KANA Dark Star Columbia Valley 2009 Score: 89 | \$20

Firm in texture, with prickly tannins around a gentle core of black cherry and spice flavors, lingering nicely on the finish. Syrah, Mourvèdre and Grenache. Best from 2015 through 2017. 600 cases made. —H.S.

MCKINLEY SPRINGS Horsepower Horse Heaven Hills 2009 Score: 89 | \$16

Fresh and vibrant, this is juicy with dark berry and licorice flavors that show a hint of wet rock on the finish. Fine tannins don't get in the way. Syrah, Barbera, Malbec, Petit Verdot and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2015. 898 cases made. —H.S.

AIRFIELD Mustang Yakima Valley 2011 Score: 88 | \$25

Fresh and vibrant, with a dusky undertone to the black olive and roasted meat flavors, lingering well. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2016. 714 cases made. —H.S.

CANOE RIDGE Cherry Street Reserve Columbia Valley 2010 Score: 88 | \$24

A fresh, vivid style, offering blackberry and rare roast beef flavors on a lean, lithe frame. Syrah, Malbec and Grenache. Drink now through 2017. 3,500 cases made. —H.S.

GÅRD Syrah Columbia Valley Lawrence Vineyards 2010 Score: 88 | \$29

A savory style, this red layers notes of cinnamon and hops over dark berry and cherry fruit, coming together on the refined, taut finish. Best from 2015 through 2018. 252 cases made. —H.S.