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## Washington fest's message: Go Northwest for great wines

By Larry Lipson, Staff Writer

Don't ever pooh-pooh Northwest wines.

Look at the various lists of the world's best 100 wines, and invariably you'll notice a merlot or cabernet sauvignon from Washington state and an Oregon pinot noir somewhere near the top.

Having just judged wines from both of those states along with a few from Idaho and British Columbia for the Tri-Cities Wine Festival in Pasco, Wash., I'm more than ever convinced of their general fine quality and of the many with obvious individual superiority.

There were 214 wines entered by 85 wineries. Judges only knew what varietal and vintage they were tasting, also in some cases the residual sugar percentage.

The Best of Show turned out to be an Oregon pinot noir, the 2003 Barrel Select bottling from **River's Edge** in Elkton. River's Edge also picked up a silver medal for its 2002 Black Oak Vineyard pinot noir.

Double Gold awards went to three Washington wines: the 2002 reserve merlot from **Columbia Crest**, Columbia Valley; the 2003 syrah from **Pend d'Oreille**, also a Columbia Valley winery; and the 2003 cabernet sauvignon from **Stephenson Cellars** in Walla Walla.

There were 28 Gold Medal winners, most of them red wines.

But a 2004 **Canoe Ridge** chardonnay, a **Domaine St. Michelle** nonvintage blanc de blancs sparkler, a nonvintage white port from **Hinzerling Winery**, a 2004 **Hedges CMS** (blend of chardonnay, marsanne and sauvignon blanc) and a 2004 **Peller Estates** private reserve Trinity icewine were among the 28 golds.

Also in the gold category were a semi-sparkling muscat wine, the 2004 from **Tualatin Estate** and a nonvintage guava wine from **Pasek Cellars**, which also picked up golds for a syrah port and a 2004 late harvest viognier.

Incidentally, the first-place award in the People's Choice category voted by attendees at the festival on Nov. 12 was the 2003 Red Mountain merlot of **Barrister Winery**, given a silver award by the regular judges.

For the entire listing of entries and winners, visit [www.tricitiewinefestival.com](http://www.tricitiewinefestival.com).

**QUALITY AND VALUE:** Using an average score of wine critics and the current retail price, QPR Wines offers a

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newsletter that helps consumers pick values out of each vintage.

QPR (Quality-Price Ratio) gives as an example the information that the average price for a 93-rated 2000 Bordeaux is \$126, and points out that the 93-point 2000 Chateau Pontet-Canet can be bought for a mere \$49.

A year's subscription for 18 issues is \$35. Information: (415) 221-0345 or [www.QPRwines.com](http://www.QPRwines.com).

**NEW RELEASES:** The Sonoma County wines of Moon Mountain in current release are the 2004 chardonnay and 2004 sauvignon blanc (\$13 each), the 2003 cabernet sauvignon (\$16) and the 2002 cabernet sauvignon reserve (\$35). Information: [www.diageowines.com](http://www.diageowines.com). ... With 6 percent sangiovese in its new 2004 Angeline Russian River Valley pinot noir (\$10), Martin Ray suggests pairing it with pork chops smothered in a mushroom cream sauce. Information: (707) 543-7199 or [www.martinraywinery.com](http://www.martinraywinery.com). ... The latest Kendall-Jackson 2003 Vintner's Reserve California syrah (\$12) uses grapes from Monterey County (42 percent), smaller percentages from Santa Barbara (14), Napa (13) and Sonoma (12) counties, and 8 percent or less from other unnamed counties. Truly Californian. Information: (800) 769-3649 or [www.kj.com](http://www.kj.com). ... The new-look label called Lulu B. can be found on a screw-capped bottle of pinot noir, syrah or chardonnay from ... no, not Australia, mate, but Avignon, France, mes amis. Information: [grapevine@sopexa.com](mailto:grapevine@sopexa.com).

**SIPS & NIBBLES:** The hillside vineyard, mostly syrah and zinfandel, of Gravity Hills in the Paso Robles area of California is 1,207 feet high. Information: (805) 239-4466 or [www.gravityhills.com](http://www.gravityhills.com). ... Anderson Valley's 30-acre Handley Cellars vineyard of chardonnay, pinot noir and gewurztraminer grapes is now a Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) member. Information: (707) 895-3876 or [www.handleycellars.com](http://www.handleycellars.com).

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Larry Lipson is the restaurant critic. His Winline column appears alternate Tuesdays. Larry Lipson, (818) 713-3668 [larry.lipson@dailynews.com](mailto:larry.lipson@dailynews.com)

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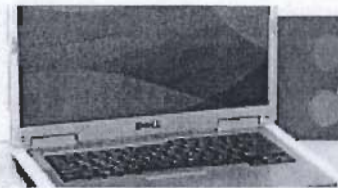


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