

SCHAEFER ON WINE: DeLille Cellars: Commitment to excellence

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Washington State's wine industry is about the same age as Santa Barbara County's and, similarly, has made great strides in quality. Both areas are exploding with new interest and just may be entering the golden age of winemaking based on the high praise seen for the wines in the last decade. In Washington, the winery that started it all and put Washington on the map is Chateau Ste. Michelle. Its success spawned the establishment of other wineries, like Quilceda Creek, Figgins, Leonetti and Woodward Canyon, to name a few.

Then there's DeLille Cellars in Woodinville. Formed in 1992 by four partners, the DeLille mission is to produce blends from Bordeaux-style varietals, sourcing grapes from some of the oldest vineyards in the prestigious Red Mountain AVA as well as other selected sites in the Yakima Valley. Including their primary label, DeLille, they also produce wines under the Doyenne and Chaleur Estate monikers. I tasted through these wines on a recent winery visit:

- Doyenne Rosé 2013 (\$29): The aromatic nose of strawberry, cherry and a hint of herbs is beguiling. Moderate-bodied and refreshing in the mouth, it shows good primary flavors of wild strawberry and red raspberry. It's very much in the Bandol style of rosé, say of Domaine Tempier, where the grapes are specifically grown to make a pink wine not a red one. A lovely rendition, it finishes dry and upbeat. Perfect for an opening round of appetizers.

- Chaleur Estate Blanc 2013 (\$37): A white Bordeaux-style blend of 65 percent sauvignon blanc and 35 percent semillon, it jumps out of the glass with lichee nut, citrus, honeycomb and LePage's glue (a good thing!) on the nose. Rich, full-bodied, textured and focused on the palate, the flavors follow the aromatics, with the addition of ripe fruit like citrus and melon, as well as a honeyed quality that gives it a roundness in the mouth. Incredibly mouth-coating, more lemony citrus emerges with time in the glass and rounds out the mix. Delightful.

- Doyenne Metier Rouge 2012 (\$44): This is DeLille's homage to southern Rhone, a grenache, mourvedre and syrah blend, that has plenty of black fruit, like blackberry and boysenberry, along with a streak of licorice and what the French call "garrigue," or taste of the earth. Medium- to full-bodied, it has a solid concentration of fruit that's shaded by a wonderful savory spiciness.

- Chaleur Estate Red 2008 (NA): Only available at the winery, this red Bordeaux blend of about two-thirds cabernet sauvignon and one-third merlot shows how well the wines from this estate can age. Both the aromas and flavors are consistent: black cherry, dark plum, along with a seasoning of graphite, white pepper, rosemary, sage and thyme. Then in swings the blackberry and black currant flavors. The tannins are resolved and this wine is very giving right now, six years after harvest. I highly recommend that all of their red wines be aged to get the full effect of how much complexity is built into them.

- DeLille Cabernet Sauvignon "Four Flags" 2011 (\$65): This is the second "Four Flags" vintage and it's obvious that the vineyard and winery crew have really dialed in on what makes this wine special. Black raspberry, cassis, lead pencil and dark and brooding spices come through on the nose. The mouth entry is full-bodied and rich while the purity of the clean, fresh fruit becomes readily apparent. It has a surprisingly floral

aspect that buffers and highlights the hard core of dark fruit. It's seamless, elegant and balanced, all the way to the upbeat and lip-smacking finish.

Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section. Email him at food@newspress.com.