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## 2020 Washington Merlot Report

*October 20, 2020*

As temperatures start to drop and football blares in the backgrounds, fall means a shift from white wine and rose to reds. Merlot is experiencing a solid comeback post-Sideways. It was 2004 and I was sitting at a great restaurant in Seattle when my father ordered a 2000 Leonetti Merlot. As a graduate student I was slowly advancing my wine education and I was struck by the pillowy texture of this incredible wine. I won't soon forget that seminal moment of exploring top notch Washington Merlot.

This report highlights some of the great Merlot wines produced in Washington. Merlot is one of the great varietals that the state produces and it can certainly be argued that Merlot is what Washington does best. For me, I think the AVAs produce quite divergent wines. Merlot from Yakima Valley is typically higher-toned with bright red cherry tones, lacking the black, even blue fruit that you can see on Red Mountain and certainly lacking the scorched earth, tar or even creosote tones.

Over the past year I have had the chance to taste some of the greats from Washington. I adore the 2016 Long Shadows 'Pedestal' Merlot (OB, 96) which is dense, layered and has massive cellaring potential. One of the great Leonetti Merlots that I have tried, the 2018 Leonetti Merlot (OB, 95) is really just an infant now and needs a few more years of bottle age. Conversely the 2017 Abeja 'Columbia Valley' Merlot (OB, 94) is silky and expressive right out of the gate, showing great structure, mid-palate weight and smooth tannins. I both the 2015 Andrew Will 'Ciel du Cheval' Red Wine (OB, 94) and the 2017 Avennia 'Valery' Red Wine (OB, 94) for different reasons, the Andrew Will being inky brooding and more non-fruit note driven and the Avennia being quite pretty and floral with deep tones coming into play mid-palate. Also don't miss on outrageously good new Merlots by Doubleback (OB, 94) and Passing Time (OB, 94) with NFL legends connecting with superstar winemakers on both projects.

The pandemic has brought plenty of stress and confusion but based on the quality of Merlot wines that Washington currently offers, you can be sure to have a great glass as we move into cooler temperatures and socially distance at home.

### ABEJA

**2017 Abeja 'Columbia Valley' Merlot-** Sourced from a host of great vineyards this wine was aged in 48% new oak for nineteen months prior to bottling in May 2019. The tones of red bell pepper and milk chocolate covered Bing cherry sing with tobacco and sandalwood accents on this fantastic nose. The palate is silky smooth and remarkably textured, as this seamless wine effortlessly glides across the mid-palate. Layers of red and dark fruits combine with coffee grounds and chocolate tones with sagebrush accents on the palate. Gorgeous to enjoy in its youth, the 2017 'Columbia Valley' Merlot is a spectacular wine by a very talented winemaking team at Abeja. Be sure to give this a one hour decant if enjoying in its youth. Drink 2020-2035- **94**