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*A new landscape is emerging in Australian wine. The tidal wave of jammy reds and critter labels has receded, and today's winemakers are highlighting regionality, diversity, balance and elegance over extreme value or brute strength. —COVER STORY*



32 New wine vision in Australia

## COVER STORY

**32 Australia's Awakening** The new wave of *terroir*-driven, small-production bottlings is redefining the wine scene Down Under, as vintners move away from the jammy styles and innocuous value-blends the nation has been known for. Now, the challenge is to change the minds of consumers while fine-tuning Australia's wine identity • *MaryAnn Worobiec*

**43 Regions to Watch** From Adelaide to Tasmania, we profile eight Australian wine regions that are delivering quality and distinctive character from a range of new and established producers

## Features

### TASTING REPORTS

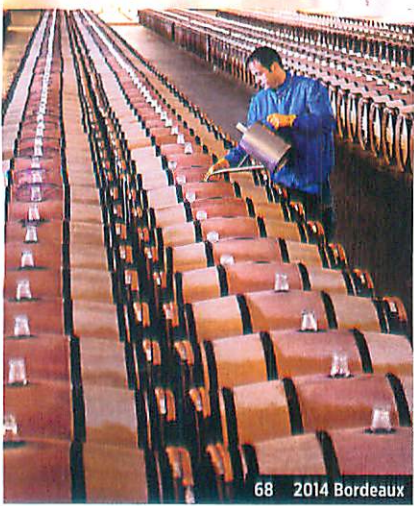
**48 Hat Trick** Oregon's Willamette Valley racks up three exceptional vintages in a row with the 2014s, '15s and '16s, offering top-tier Pinot Noir alongside a growing number of standout whites • *Harvey Steiman*

**68 Balance Restored** Bordeaux is in the right spot at the right time with the 2014 vintage, showcasing impressive reds and classic quality sweeties while keeping prices in check • *James Molesworth*

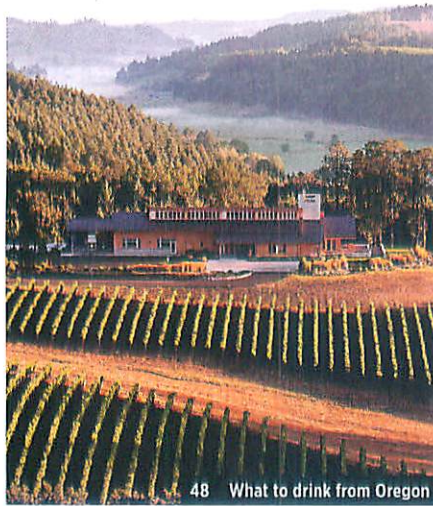
### WINE

**63 Rocks Stars** The Reynvaan family has carved out a niche for Old World-style Syrah in Walla Walla, on the Washington-Oregon border. But they had to travel a rocky road to get there • *Ben O'Donnell*





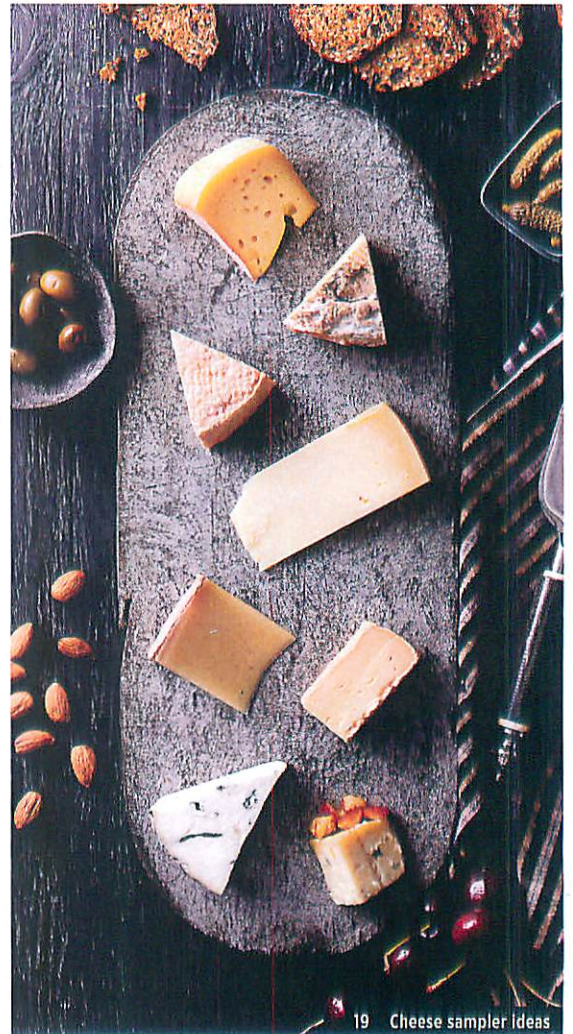
68 2014 Bordeaux



48 What to drink from Oregon



63 A Walla Walla wine family



19 Cheese sampler ideas

## Grapevine

- 13 **News** France attempts to define “natural wine”
- 15 **World** Screaming Eagle owner buys a stake in Burgundy
- 16 **Travel** Slopeside dining at Beaver Creek
- 19 **Cheese** A tasting plate of eight • *David Gibbons*
- 23 **Coffee** The Roasterie’s global beans • *Mark Pendergrast*
- 24 **Perfect Match** Roasted artichokes with a Spanish white • *Hilary Sims*
- 26 **Savvy Shopper** Bordeaux that won’t break the bank, warming winter sipping, sweet treats • *Bruce Sanderson*

## Departments

- 7 **This Issue** *Marvin R. Shanken*
- 10 **Feedback**
- 29 **James Laube** The path to ripeness
- 30 **Matt Kramer** Chardonnay today
- 116 **FAQ** Barrels

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DEEPIY STUDIO; MARK WEINBERG; ANDREA JOHNSON

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107 Reviews of wines from Italy

## The Buying Guide

- 89 Buying Guide Contents
- 91 Spectator Selections
- 92 About the Buying Guide
- 94 New Wines From Around the World

### TOP-SCORING WINES THIS ISSUE



Château d'Yquem  
Sauternes 2014  
98 POINTS, \$359



Château Gilette Sauternes  
Crème de Tête 1990  
98 POINTS, \$210

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- **Bollinger Champagne—Pinot Noir Savoir Faire:** What does Pinot Noir add to the character of Bollinger? And what does "R.D." on the label mean? Learn about the key factors that make this Champagne distinctive.
- **How to Taste Caviar:** What characteristics should you look for in caviar? Why use a mother-of-pearl spoon for tasting? Lelio Mondella of Calvisius Caviar joins senior editor Bruce Sanderson to answer these questions and more.

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The Reynvaan family at their home vineyard, Foothills In The Sun. From left: Gale, Mike, Matt, Angela and Amanda

# ROCKS STARS

*The Reynvaan family is making top Syrahs from distinctive soils*

BY BEN O'DONNELL ★ PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRÉA JOHNSON

**A**singular American winery began with a common American disappointment when Matt Reynvaan dropped out of college in 2004 and moved back in with his parents. Mike and Gale Reynvaan had recently made a second home in Walla Walla, Wash., and Matt took a job at the Walla Walla Country Club, training to be an assistant golf pro. His wholly unexpected path to wine would begin on this terrain.

Walla Walla, secluded in the southeastern pocket of the state, was notably lacking in the typical enticements for a 21-year-old. It is five hours' drive from Seattle, four from Boise. Beyond the

town limits, it's desert all the way out—a patchwork of dirt, alfalfa and wheat, stalked by elk and cougars, harassed by frost and fires.

"Cowboy country," says Matt.

But it's the sort of place in which strong grapevines are forged—and in which a rootless twentysomething could find his calling on a tractor and craft a world-beating red wine after just a handful of vintages' experience.

Six years after Matt washed up in Walla Walla, he would confront the 2010 vintage at the helm of the young Reynvaan Family Wines. It was the winery's fourth crop, and the first Matt vinified





The Foothills In The Sun vineyard lies on a gentle slope, allowing Syrah to ripen later here than elsewhere in Walla Walla Valley.

under its own roof. Then 27, Matt was working well into the night tending the vats, usually alone.

"It was tough at first, because who am I in the wine business? I remember all the times I was just questioning what I was doing. It was so nerve-racking. And a lot of family pressure," he reminisces on a late-summer day in 2016.

But with 2010, Reynvaan's Stonessence Syrah earned 98 points, "classic" quality on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale. Reynvaan has never failed to earn at least one classic rating (95 points or higher) in every vintage since. The 2013 In The Rocks Syrah (97, \$70) notched the No. 13 spot in *Wine Spectator's* Top 100 Wines of 2016.

In the late 1990s, Mike and Gale Reynvaan were living on Bainbridge Island, across the Puget Sound from Seattle. Mike was a lawyer specializing in labor practices (he has since added wine regulatory law to his résumé) and Gale was an antiques dealer. The couple took a shine to Rhône wines but also grew keen on the Syrahs of their home state. Eventually, the owner of Bainbridge's local hole-in-the-wall wineshop—another future Walla Walla settler named Charles Smith—suggested that the Reynvaans make the kitty-corner trip across the state down to the vinous southeast.

Though the Reynvaans had no intention of making wine themselves, they cottoned to the idea of owning a place near the nascent yet vibrant wine scene. One day, the Reynvaans' realtor drove them to the outskirts of Walla Walla, up into the foothills of the Blue Mountains. The whole brown-green vista of interior Washington seems to splay out below the property, but the asking price was as dear as the view.

"Gale walked around the house and said, 'This is it,'" recalls Mike. "And I said, 'Honey, this isn't it. This is like six times it!'" But that was that. Matt, the youngest of their three children, joined them shortly thereafter.

Soon Matt fell in with the local winemaker cadre; many in that crew frequented the greens where he worked. Playing one day with Mike Sharon, winemaker at L'Ecole No 41, just outside Walla Walla, "We were just getting our asses kicked," Matt remembers. Sharon told Matt, "If you get it within 10 feet of the pin, I'll find you a job." From 200 yards, the scratch golfer teed off and watched the ball roll to within a foot of the hole. He began crushing grapes at L'Ecole a few weeks later. He's worn the uniform of *terroir*-spattered jeans, dark tees and tractor brand—emblazoned caps ever since.

Meanwhile, the Reynvaans grew restless sitting on the sidelines and decided to plant a vineyard after all. They knew nothing about growing grapes, but from their tastings at Charles Smith's wineshop, they knew someone who did: French transplant Christophe

Baron, whose Cayuse wines are among the most coveted in the country. There was only one problem: Baron did not consult for other wineries.

"He was a reluctant consultant," says Matt. When invited to come by in 2005, Baron kicked the dirt around the Reynvaan homestead a bit "and then drove away. Didn't even talk to us."

The site simply did not look like wine *terroir*, Baron now explains: "My grandfather always said, 'If you can grow wheat, don't plant a vineyard!' And that is all wheat country up there." But Baron and Matt had become drinking buddies in town, and Baron eventually decided he might get a kick out of trying his hand at a new project.

Baron had his own idea, though. He'd sell the Reynvaans a piece of real estate closer to his comfort zone—right across the street from his En Cerise vineyard of primarily Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, a part of the same ancient riverbed, in Oregon just south of the Washington border.

Baron helped the Reynvaans plant 5 acres of Syrah, Viognier and Marsanne, and Matt shadowed him from early mornings at the newborn In The Rocks vineyard to late-night parties where "W2" wine farmers shared their Rhône Syrah heroes like Clape, Jamet and Gangloff. "I was just a sponge," Matt says. In the first vintages, Baron's facility also hosted Reynvaan's winemaking apparatus.

"When I taught Matt, it was always the hard way," Baron recalls. In 2005, when Baron and his team dug holes for the first rootstocks at In The Rocks, "all of the employees knew: Make sure that we're going to give Matt the heaviest crowbar. And all day long he had the crowbar that nobody wanted to use." Baron eventually revealed the jig to Matt—once the day's work was finished. The following year, at Baron's insistence, Matt would be sent to Bordeaux's Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte to receive a proper harvest education.

Though Baron remains a consultant for the Reynvaans, Matt proved a devoted pupil and a quick study. When it came time to vinify that fateful 2010 Stonessence Syrah, "[Matt] listened to what I had to say, but he went his own way. He decided to use less stems [in fermentation] than what I told him I would do," says Baron. "And when I tasted the wine, it blew my mind. I was really proud of him, because that's the first time I felt that he was really getting it. And then it was just a matter of time for him to fly with his own wings."

In the ensuing years, the In The Rocks vineyard has been strategically expanded with new plantings; it now nurtures 23 acres of Syrah, Viognier, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc and Bordeaux varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

It is the rocks themselves that first attracted Baron and gave him



the idea to bring the Reynvaans down. “This to me is Châteauneuf-du-Pape,” says Matt, disembarking from his black pickup and picking up one of the smooth, dinosaur-egg cobblestones. Even in the apple and peach orchards that neighbor the vineyards, “the fruit tastes better because of the way those roots go.” Dig down, more rocks.

Drainage is unimpeded. The stones reflect heat during the day and retain it at night; the effect is “getting the minerality from the stones, and then getting [the grapes] almost perfectly ripe,” Matt explains. “Almost like a braising type of thing.” Rhône varieties benefit, while the Cabernet, which can get “sort of charred” from the rocks, is planted in a parcel with a dusting of topsoil. The Syrahs from this patch of Walla Walla are like nothing else in the New World: smoky, savory—“almost like a pork roast my mom used to make,” Matt says.

With the 2010 vintage, the Reynvaans took a bold leap from In The Rocks to a new Syrah from the Foothills In The Sun vineyard—the backyard site Baron had wordlessly hauled out of when he had first seen it years before.

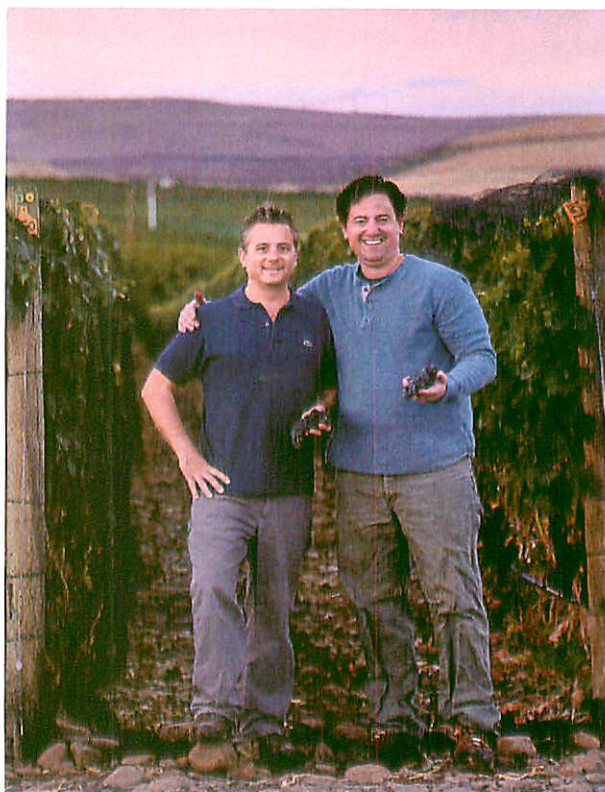
“It’s just dirt”—silty loam—says Matt of the 10-acre vineyard. “The more interesting parts up there are the other elements of *terroir*: the elevation, the wind, the drainage,” or lack thereof. “It’s kind of like a hillside thing in Napa, but maybe more gradual.”

Though located only 10 miles from In The Rocks, Foothills rises to 1,650 feet in elevation (versus 800 feet at Rocks); it was the highest vineyard in Washington when it was planted. The Syrah and Viognier can take two to three weeks longer to ripen here than at Rocks, and most of the property is dry-farmed, which is rarely possible in the Walla Walla Valley. Though the Rocks Syrahs are mineral-driven, the Foothills versions are all game, spice and pepper. “This one smells like peat moss,” declares Matt. It’s not a style for everyone. He shrugs.

The Reynvaans have 33 acres total under vine right now; they do about 2,500 to 3,000 cases a year and don’t expect to grow beyond 5,000.

Reynvaan Family makes four Rhône-style whites in small quantities. The Cabernet Sauvignon The Classic from In The Rocks saw its second vintage released with the 2013. But most cars on the train are Syrah, and the locomotive is what Matt calls “the redundancy wine”: the Syrah In The Rocks Vineyard “In The Rocks.”

The In The Rocks bottling is a “Côte-Rôtie co-ferment,” typically with about 95 percent Syrah and 5 percent Viognier. When it comes to the Reynvaan way compared to other Rocksters like Cayuse and K Vintners, Matt suggests, “I think I’ve always had a more feminine palate, a really soft kind of approach to a wine.” That’s where the



Matt Reynvaan (right) and Christophe Baron compare the namesake stones of Walla Walla’s In The Rocks vineyard to the Rhône’s Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Syrah excels here.

floral, sometimes even tropical lilt of the Viognier comes in.

Because they could, and no one else in the area did, the Reynvaans also made a co-ferment of Syrah and Marsanne from In The Rocks Vineyard. Matt recalls mulling over a not-insignificant quantity of the wine with his dad one night when Mike proclaimed it “a wine that could contend with the best in the world: The Contender!” So it would be christened. Another co-ferment from In The Rocks Vineyard, made with Grenache Blanc and called The Unnamed, will be discontinued after the 2014 vintage, following winter damage to some Syrah parcels in 2015. Finally, there is the full-tilt, goes-to-11, pure Syrah bottling, Stonessence.

The Foothills vineyard lineup follows the same pattern: In The Hills is a Viognier co-ferment, while Foothills Reserve is all Syrah.

In time, all the Reynvaans joined Reynvaan Family Vineyards. “Gale didn’t really want to ever run a winery, but she is virtually the CEO,” says Mike. Matt’s older sisters, Amanda and Angela, moved to the compound and now help with sales and bookkeeping; they debuted the whimsical, value-priced Result of a Crush label, made by Matt from “declassified” Reynvaan fruit (he sells none) and a few other sources. Matt cordoned off a few puncheons of 2012 In The Rocks Syrah for his own project, MTR Productions, to be released in 2017 after years of patient aging in the convenience store-sized Reynvaan cellar.

A new family tradition bequeaths a row of vines in Foothills vineyard to each Reynvaan family member, including Amanda and Angela’s kids, ages 1 to 14. “The grandkids know their rows,” says Mike. “They go up there, walk through it, check it out.” Perhaps one of them will be the next to bear the heaviest crowbar. □

## Recent Releases From ★ REYNVAAN ★

SCORE	WINE	PRICE
97	Syrah Walla Walla Valley In The Rocks 2013	\$70
95	Syrah Walla Walla Valley Stonessence 2013	\$100
95	Syrah Walla Walla Valley The Contender 2013	\$85
94	Syrah Walla Walla Valley In The Hills 2013	\$70
93	Syrah Walla Walla Valley Foothills Reserve 2013	\$70
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley The Classic 2013	\$75
90	Syrah Walla Walla Valley The Unnamed 2013	\$70