

# WASHINGTON SYRAH

DIVERSE GROWING REGIONS SUPPORT QUALITY VERSIONS OF THIS RHÔNE-STYLE RED

BY TIM FISH

Washington is second only to California as America's largest wine-producing state, but when it comes to diversity and value, it's second to none. There are 19 different American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) in Washington and, because of the state's size and topography, a wide range of red and white grape types thrive there.

Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot traditionally have been Washington's top players, but Syrah has been catching up in the past 20 years, in part because it can succeed just about anywhere, in regions both cool and warm. Soil also plays a role. During the Ice Age, the cataclysmic Missoula floods deposited a rich bounty of soils. Over eons, the Columbia River spread this soil throughout the Columbia Valley.

Many of the best Syrahs are grown in the Rocks District of Milton-Freewater, a subappellation of the Walla Walla Valley AVA, but there are excellent Syrahs made throughout Washington.

Winemaker Chris Gorman has a knack for creating blends with richness and complexity from a range of sources. He also has a thing for eccentric names, such as *The Devil You Don't Know* Columbia Valley 2019, which is 50% Syrah, 40% Grenache, plus a touch of Mourvèdre. He aged it 18 months in new American oak, which adds to its distinction.

In recent years, Wahluke Slope has emerged as one of Washington's best regions for red values—and Syrah is no exception. The region has been supplying grapes for Columbia Valley bottlings for years, but it was only approved as an AVA in 2006. Wahluke, a Native American word for “watering



Winemaker Chris Gorman

## EDITOR'S TIP

*Where to begin when exploring the Evergreen State's offerings*

➤ The Rocks District of Milton-Freewater boasts great Syrahs, but there are excellent versions made throughout Washington state. In recent years, for example, Wahluke Slope has emerged as one of the state's best regions for red values—including Syrah.

place,” is bordered on the south and the west by the Columbia River.

Two producers have bet on Wahluke Slope with significant success. Charles Smith, who has multiple labels, makes numerous bottlings that carry the AVA, and most deliver bang for your buck. One example is *K Syrah Wahluke Slope The Deal Sundance Vineyard* 2017, which was harvested from a vineyard planted in 1997, fermented whole cluster with native yeast and aged 21 months in 30% new French oak puncheons.

Thomas Voegle has built the brand *Luke* entirely around Wahluke Slope, and it's hard to argue with his thinking. Across the board, *Luke* wines represent some of the best values in Washington. A prime example is *Luke Syrah Wahluke Slope* 2018, which was harvested from four different vineyards and aged in a mix of French and American oak.

Marty Clubb, head winemaker at *L'Ecole No.*

*41* in Walla Walla, consistently overdelivers for the price, thanks in part to a partnership with the iconic *Seven Hills Vineyard*. His 2018 bottling from the site offers lively currant, crushed stone and olive flavors. *Kestrel* is a long-established grower in Yakima Valley, and its *Falcon Series Syrah* rose to the occasion with the 2016 vintage. Additionally, the *Two Vintners Syrah* was blended from vineyards in Yakima, Walla Walla and Wahluke Slope, and it was fermented mostly whole cluster and aged for 18 months in 20% new oak puncheons.

## TIM FISH'S SMART BUYS IN WASHINGTON SYRAH

93	\$40	<b>K Syrah Wahluke Slope The Deal Sundance Vineyard</b> 2017
92	\$30	<b>Gorman The Devil You Don't Know Columbia Valley</b> 2019
91	\$25	<b>Two Vintners Syrah Columbia Valley</b> 2017
91	\$35	<b>K Syrah Wahluke Slope Milbrandt</b> 2018
91	\$35	<b>K Syrah Washington Motor City Kitty Oldfield-Boushey Vineyard</b> 2018
91	\$36	<b>L'Ecole No. 41 Syrah Walla Walla Valley Seven Hills Vineyard</b> 2018
90	\$24	<b>Gordon Estate Syrah Columbia Valley</b> 2016
90	\$25	<b>Kestrel Syrah Yakima Valley Falcon Series</b> 2016
90	\$25	<b>Luke Syrah Wahluke Slope</b> 2018
90	\$25	<b>Sparkman Wilderness Columbia Valley</b> 2018
89	\$25	<b>L'Ecole No. 41 Syrah Columbia Valley</b> 2018

