

Paul Gregutt's NW Wine Guide[©]

Abeja

At a recent tasting with wife and husband winemakers Amy Alvarez-Wampfler and Dan Wampfler I asked them how Abeja was faring in the current challenging environment for wineries.

“Not bragging,” said Dan, “but we’re in growth mode. We’ve been at Abeja a decade. Co-winemakers, co-GMS and I’m co-dependent [said with a grin]. We’ve grown from 5000 cases in 2016 to plus 17,000 this year, along with Pursued By Bear. We’ve gone from less than 30% estate to more than 70% estate. That vertical integration has fueled methodical slow growth. We share our newest Skysill vineyard with Jackson Family.”

Along with the Abeja wines there’s a much-loved Beekeeper lineup which now includes Syrah, GSM and a Sauv Blanc. The full service restaurant, under the direction of award-winning chef Mike Easton, also pours wines from a Kitchen at Abeja series that includes both Pinot Noir and Roussanne.

Abeja 2024 Viognier – All Mill Creek estate grapes, fermented in a mix of stainless and neutral oak. Luscious and loaded with a tart/sweet mix of tangy lemon and lime, peaches and apricots. Not oily or bitter, nor perfumy, it’s a well-ripened, full-bodied style with a mouthfeel not far from Chardonnay. Dan says try it with pumpkin curry soup. 301 cases; 14%; \$48 (Walla Walla Valley) 95/100

Abeja 2024 Washington Chardonnay – Celilo, Conner Lee and some estate fruit from Mill Creek and Skysill go into this well-crafted wine. This hits a home run right out of the chute, full-bodied and sappy with orchard fruits, especially apple, peach and apricot. Washington Chardonnays are always ripe, sometimes over-ripe, but the balance here accents the fruit without sacrificing texture or detail. 1509 cases; 14%; \$48 (Washington State) 94/100

Abeja 2023 Walla Walla Valley Chardonnay – The aim, say the winemakers, is to make a Chardonnay more in a Burgundian mode, from high elevation sites delivering more complexity, a dash of salinity, and less tropical and more stone fruit flavors. The flinty matchstick scents confirm the reduction. This is 100% barrel fermented, 70% neutral, and bottled a year later than the companion Chardonnay. It's sleek and textured, more cool climate than tropical, with excellent length and details of apple skin and flesh, white peach and Asian pear. 321 cases; 14%; \$65 (Walla Walla Valley) 94/100

Abeja 2023 Merlot – Abeja has always been known for its outstanding Merlots. I don't recall a better Merlot than this new 2023 – a blend of fruit from Ciel du Cheval, Bacchus, Dionysus, Weinbau and the estate. It's 100% varietal, classic top tier Washington Merlot, beautifully rendered, full-bodied and complete in every way. There simply aren't many options for varietal Merlot from anywhere in the country that have the mix of fruit, acid, power and presence that you find here. Riper versions can be found in California, but without the structural support, and the best ones are far more expensive. This is the sort of wine that should make all the national top 100 lists if anyone out there is paying attention. 1295 cases; 14.6%; \$55 (Columbia Valley) 96/100

Abeja 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon – This has 9% Merlot, 8% Cab Franc and 3% Petit Verdot in the mix. Blue, black and red fruits are on display, following lovely aromatics and highlighted with firm threads of herb and skin flavors. The careful blending completes the palate, filling in nooks and crannies with streaks of mixed berries, plums, barrel toast, caramel, tobacco and more. In many ways this widely-distributed Cabernet represents not only Abeja but the best of Washington to much of the country. Dan Wampfler calls it their “flagship wine” and it's a good choice for that. 5296 cases; 14.5%; \$68 (Columbia Valley) 95/100

Abeja 2022 Heather Hill Cabernet Sauvignon – This single vineyard 100% varietal Cab really stands out. The texture, freshness, density and detail set it apart as a unique and compelling wine. It wraps together a dusting of pollen, threads of sandalwood and barrel spices, and a mix of red fruits – strawberry, raspberry and tart cherry. Aged in 42% new barrels it has generous highlights of sweet baking spices along with subtle notes of pipe tobacco, bourbon tea and caramelized pastry. The tannins are smooth and polished, putting a sheen on the lingering finish. 695 cases; 14.5%; \$95 (Walla Walla Valley) 97/100