



PAUL GREGUTT.COM

Corliss

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Visitors to Walla Walla at any time in the past few years can't help but have noticed the ongoing construction just off the freeway on Second Avenue. One of the town's old brick buildings - actually a former bakery, long shuttered - was undergoing a massive facelift. A new winery was going in, and rumors were swirling. The owners were secretive, the wines unreleased, the vintages piling up. And now, finally, the mystery is solved, and you are the first people in the world to read about it.

Corliss Estates is the name of the project. The owners are Michael Corliss and Lauri Darneille, and the winemaker is Kendall Mix. Corliss is a long time developer from the Seattle area, and his passion is wine. Great wine. In a wide-ranging interview at the winery he talked for the first time anywhere about his plans for establishing a world-class winery, and we tasted the wines from several vintages, including the first to be released - the 2003's!

Visitors to Corliss Estates' website have the opportunity to sign up for the mailing list, and this will soon be the only way to obtain these highly limited wines. Given the commitment and the quality, the pricing seems more than justified. As Corliss writes on his home page:

"We are pleased to announce that the first releases from Corliss will occur before the end of the year. Eight years in the making, this will be a memorable milestone and we are delighted to share our collection of wines with our friends who have followed our long journey. More information on how to purchase the wines will be forthcoming in October. In the meantime, we thank you for your continued interest in Corliss wines."

I am told that the wines will be released in mid-October. This is going to be a very important winery. Corliss has vineyard holdings on Red Mountain and in Walla Walla and will be doing more planting on Red Mountain next spring. Though these first wines have already been well-aged, they are still quite young, taut, rippling with muscle and beautifully proportioned. All will score in the 92 -95 range from me. Here are my notes:

Corliss Estates 2003 Red Blend
36M/24CS/23CF/13PV/4Malbec

This is a sophisticated Bordeaux blend, with muscle and depth. It's supple and dark, the fruits dense and ripe showing wild berries, currant and plum, black cherry and peppery herb. The finish is long and seamless, with black olive and graphite along with barrel toast and smoke. The extended time in barrel and bottle - a total of five years prior to being released - has certainly helped to smooth this powerful wine and render it more supple and approachable. Nonetheless, it is intended to be cellared, and it has the stuffing and balance to last indefinitely.

Corliss Estates 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon
76CS/15M/4S/4Malbec/1Cab Franc

I like the sculpted aspect of this wine, the cut and definition. It shows nice purity of fruit, raspberry and boysenberry, cassis and pepper. The herbal component is ripe and tends toward black olive and black pepper; nothing leafy or green. This even more than the Red seems like a long-term cellar candidate.

Corliss Estates 2003 Syrah

100% Syrah and 100% Stillwater vineyard fruit. This is what I consider to be classic Washington Syrah, completely different from the fruit bombs of California. It's got muscle and steel, and the tightly compacted berry fruit flavors are loaded with streaks of herb, pepper, iron ore, and dried herb. It's got a tight spine of acid and a dense core with herb and earth; it is flat out gorgeous.