

# Lifestyles

WALLA WALLA VALLEY'S PEOPLE - WINE - FOOD Winter '08-'09

## WINTER FUN AWAITS... *Let it Snow!*

### CHEF'S TABLE

10

Plateau's Brian Von Eggers brings a little haute to casino cuisine.

### HISTORIC HOMES

19

Modern History: A Walla Walla couple renovate an 1800s farmhouse

### CHEZ STAY

26

Step into two of Walla Walla's fine B&B's.

### VINTAGE WHEELS

40

A Sentimental Journey: Bill Greiner's cars all have special meaning—Especially his beloved “Da Rat”.



# No Lack of Substance

Waters Winery and Gramercy Cellars partner in a new label to educate young wine consumers.

Second wine labels are too often victims of their own success.

The sequence often goes like this: A premium winery finds that, after bottling its first-run wines, it has one or two barrels left of good juice that didn't quite make the cut. So this wine is bottled under a second label and sold exclusively in the winery's tasting room at a bargain price. The bottling sells out quickly, within weeks. The next year, the winery deliberately sets aside a few barrels of decent juice to bottle under the second label and, in addition to the tasting-room sales, offers the wine to mailing-list customers.

It's a great success; old customers clamor for more. So now in the third year the winery needs more juice than its prime vineyards can produce; it must hunt down extra wine grapes on the bulk market, and what it finds isn't anywhere near the quality of the juice it had used just two years earlier — but at least there's wine to put in bottles to meet demand. In the fourth year the winery is now a big player in the bulk-wine market, and staff is devoted to managing the second-label enterprise. The winery is making great money and investors are happy — but its reputation as a premium producer is gone.

Jamie Brown insists this will not be the story for Wines of Substance, his new second-label project at Waters Winery in Walla Walla. He offers compelling reasons why he's likely right.

For one thing, Wines of Substance is a partnership by Waters and Gramercy Cellars,

the winery operated by master sommelier Greg Harrington.

For another, Substance is not the product of too much good (but not great) wine; it's a planned venture with well-defined goals.

For a third, production will remain relatively limited at about 6,000 cases total of nine varietals, which now include syrah, cabernet sauvignon, merlot, riesling, malbec, counoise, cabernet franc, chardonnay and pinot gris, allowing Brown to source grapes strictly from his own vineyards and a few choice suppliers such as Les Collines and Pepper Bridge.

"For me, Substance covers everything I want to do with wine," says Brown, who was winemaker at James Leigh Cellars before founding Waters with Jason Huntley in 2005. "If I want to experiment with a grape like counoise, I can. We don't want to produce a huge list of wines at Waters or Gramercy, but Substance gives us the opportunities to try new things. The label will grow horizontally rather than vertically, meaning that we'll add different kinds of varietals if we want to, not increase the production."

At the winery, every Substance wine is priced at \$18 or less per bottle, and Brown says it will work hard to stay under \$20: "The cost of goods is actually higher than the price we're charging, but the idea is to build the brand." The target audience is "... the 30-something budding oenophile. The point is to expose younger people to fine wines. What I imagine ideally is a Waters or Gramercy customer saying, 'Put together a mixed case of



Greg Harrington holds the wine periodic table that got the ball rolling; Jamie Brown with a 'substantial' bottle.



Substance wines and send it to my kid.”

Not just fine wines, but fine Washington wines, he adds, with a taste of both place and varietal. The partnership with Gramercy is key; Harrington brings an educational component to the project. The Wines of Substance Web site ([winesofsubstance.com](http://winesofsubstance.com)) is filled with informative, useful notes written by Harrington about each wine. Brown hopes that once young customers buy a second or third bottle, they’ll be hooked. “I hope they go have fun with it. There could even be Substance parties to introduce friends to this varietal or that varietal, this vineyard or that vineyard. Substance is really intended for nouveau hip young people who want to learn about wine.”

None of the wines will be available in Waters’ or Gramercy’s tasting rooms — the partners are counting on word of mouth and “viral marketing,” the winemaker says. (Distribution does include retail stores and some restaurants, including 26brix.)

The label’s clever adaptation of the Periodic Table of Elements as a theme came, Brown chuckles, “... like all our best ideas: in a late-night drinking session.” The partners originally wanted to use the name Element, but discovered that a big Australian winery was already using the name.

“Substance provides a kind of quality control for Waters and Gramercy, our prestige brands,” he says. “It’s not really a laboratory, but it allows us to explore. If I want to try making 70 cases of carmenère, our customers will know it’s going to be good and will want to try it, hopefully. Already, we’re getting all these e-mails from people who are curious about what we’re doing, about the new things. That’s how you introduce people to everything wine has to offer.”

**STEVE BJERKLIE** writes about wine, the food industry, and many other topics for a variety of publications, including *The Economist*.