

RJ's Wine Blog

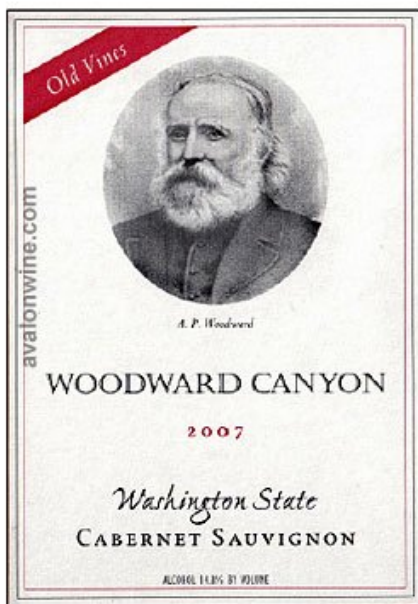
Because what the world needs is another opinion about wine...

My Top Wine Picks for 2010...

Posted on [December 14, 2010](#)

It's that time of year again when the wine world is inundated with "Best of..." and "Top [*pick your number*] Wines of the Year." We all do them and we all have our own opinions of what's best. But, let's be honest...unless you're Wine Spectator or another large reviewer that gets to taste just about every wine on the market, it's very hard to come out with a comprehensive list of this type. So, this year I'm going to do it a bit different. No top ten list, like I've done in the past – this year I've focused simply on wines that were memorable for me throughout the year, for better or worse.

Enjoy!



*****WINE OF THE YEAR*****

2007 Woodward Canyon Cabernet Sauvignon Old Vines Although this was probably opened

well before its prime, I was absolutely stunned by how well this is drinking right now. Layers upon layers of complexity on both the nose and the palate. Eucalyptus, leather, tobacco and crostini (that's a new one for me) on the nose, with rich dark fruit, leather and tobacco flavors on the palate. Absolute stunner! **My rating: 96 / Classic**

BEST OVERALL LINE-UP

Food & Wine was not fooling around when they awarded Gramercy Cellars with the "Best New Winery in America" Award. It's been a long time since I've been impressed with a whole line-up of someone's wines. There's usually at least one that's not to my taste. But, not in this case. All very impressive wines from a winery that's come of age very quickly.

If you want to read the whole review you can check it out at [Gramercy Cellars](#), but here are some quick ratings:



2007 Gramercy Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon

Cabernet Sauvignon – My rating: 94 / Outstanding

2008 Gramercy Cellars The Third Man – My rating: 92 / Outstanding

2008 Gramercy Cellars Tempranillo Inigo Montoya Tempranillo – My rating: 94 / Outstanding

2008 Gramercy Cellars Syrah – My rating: 92 / Outstanding

BEST BUBBLY UNDER \$20

NV Gruet Brut Oh, this one makes me proud having grown up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Who would have thought that a good sparkling wine would come out of the Southwest, let alone Albuquerque? But there's more wine making and grape growing in the area than you might think. This particular Brut, under \$20 (even in the Marin, CA store where I bought it) is a great QPR bubbly.

Very rich but also mellow and not too overbearing, with tons of great citrus and acidic notes. One of the best sub-\$20 bubbly I've ever tasted. **My rating: 88 / Very Good**

*****BEST OVER THE TOP WINE*****

2004 Château Lafite Rothschild This one and the Mouton Rothschild were worth the price of admission at the Wine Spectator Grand Tour tasting in New York. Unbelievable wine – intense, complex and so well balanced. Different flavors and textures come in waves every sip and the finish lasts for a good long time. This was my first Chateau Lafite and it exceeded all my expectations. **My rating: 97 / Classic**

*****BEST SURPRISES*****



2008 Double Diamond (Schrader) Cabernet Sauvignon

Amber Knolls Vineyard For my palate, this wine is a stunner and one of the more unusual wines I've tried this year. The first thing I noticed was the incredible red chile component. Not red pepper or the chiles passed off in grocery stores as authentic. I'm talking about chile ristras hanging from the awning of a rundown adobe hut just outside Belen...or, better yet, a ristra hanging off the side of a home in the Taos pueblo. Not cooked, but still dry and reeking of the warmth, heat and slight bitterness of a dried red chile. Seriously, that's like home to me. You'd think it's a weird flavor on a red wine, but, man, this one really made me feel homesick. Black fruits, cumin, star anise and a touch of cinnamon top off the flavor profile. Huge mouthfeel, but with restrained tannins and a long, lingering, take me back home kind of finish. Outstanding wine and well worth trying if you can get your hands on some (the 2008 is already sold out). Very nicely done, Schrader. **My rating: 93 / Outstanding**

2008 Rôtie Cellars Northern Blend Big fan of what's going on at Rotie Cellars. First introduced to this wine and producer at the Wine Bloggers Conference in Walla Walla this last summer. It was not part of any of the organized tastings, but was still one of the most hyped wines at the event. Beautiful structure, perfect balance, big black fruit – a true stunner and one worth trying. Truly great Northern Rhone out of Washington. **My rating: 92 / Outstanding**

*****BEST DOMESTIC RED WINE UNDER \$20*****

2007 Tamarack Cellars Firehouse Red Raspberry, blackberry, mocha, smoke (from the Carménère ...rare addition for a US blend, at least in my experience) and pepper – it's lush, broad on the palate and well balanced, with a long, lingering finish. This is an incredible wine for the price (about \$15) and if I can find any more, I'll pick up everything I can get my hands on. **My rating: 90 / Outstanding**

*****BEST BORDEAUX UNDER \$20*****

2005 Château Bel Air la Royère I gotta tell ya, I did not expect this...this is a great bottle of wine! Picked it up through Garagiste and am completely stunned by the quality given the low price point. Cherry, tobacco, leather, cedar on the nose, with an explosive, broad mouth feel and probably the longest finish I've ever experienced on a sub \$20 Bordeaux. Almost makes me wish I didn't open this bottle. Definitely could use some more time, but the body, the tannins, the structure, the acid, the elements – they're all there. This is the real thing. And I will hold on to my other 5 bottles like it was first BMX bike or, better yet, my current collection of Hot Wheels (even my own son is going to have to fight for those). **My rating: 90 / Outstanding (VERY high QPR on this wine)**

*****BEST WHITE WINES UNDER \$20*****

2008 Lucien Albrecht Pinot Gris Cuvée Romanus Excellent Pinot Gris and under \$20. Crisp lemon and citrus, with a smooth, buttery broad palate and long finish. Recommendation from the sommelier at Cafe Campagne in Seattle and absolutely hit the mark. Immediately picked up a case. **My rating: 90 / Outstanding**

2008 Ross Andrew Winery Meadow White Blend This is a very nice, easy drinking white wine blend, made up mostly of Pinot Blanc, but with undisclosed additions of Pinot Gris, Riesling and Gewurztraminer. The nose is definitely the combo of all four varietals with meyer lemon, floral notes, minerals and just a touch of lemon grass. On the palate, very well balanced, with a strong showing from the meyer lemon and minerals. It's crisp, but still has a smooth, buttery undertone. Low-mid acidity with a long, minerally finish. **My rating: 88/ Very Good**

*****BEST WHITE WINE OVER \$20*****



2009 Matthiasson Napa Valley White Wine This is a beautifully structured wine. Good, clean citrus notes, rich and broad mouthfeel, multiple layers, all supported by a perfect mineral base. No question I have a bit of a crush on this wine, but I do think it's for good reason. It is, simply put, one of the best whites I've tasted in years. You cannot lose with either the 2008 or 2009 and it's well worth trying to get at least one of each, if not more. **My rating: 93 / Outstanding**

*****BEST WEEKDAY ITALIAN WINE*****

2007 Vietti Barbera d'Asti Tre Vigne I'm a big fan of Vietti as a producer – haven't met one of their wines I didn't like. Tart cherry, herbs and pepper, with a very broad mid-palate, great acidity and mid-length finish. Looking forward to getting more of this for the cellar. On a side note, doesn't pair well with Girl Scout Thin Mints cookies...although I'm perfectly fine eating and drinking them separately. **My rating: 89 / Very Good**

*****WORST WINE WITH THE MOST HYPE*****

2006 Havens Wine Cellars Merlot Really bummed out with this one. Bought a case at what I thought was a steal for \$6.99 a bottle at K&L Wines, one of my favorite and most trusted wine sources. Opened one bottle and thought it had gone bad, so opened another, which was okay the first night but the second night it tasted like the first bottle. Not worth giving tasting notes on this one except to say it tasted like wine in a can – very tinny and bitter. **My rating: 70 / Not Recommended**

***** "COMPLETELY CONFUSED" *****

2008 Chariot Gypsy One of the all-time most hyped wines at Trader Joe's, this wine has a fanatical