

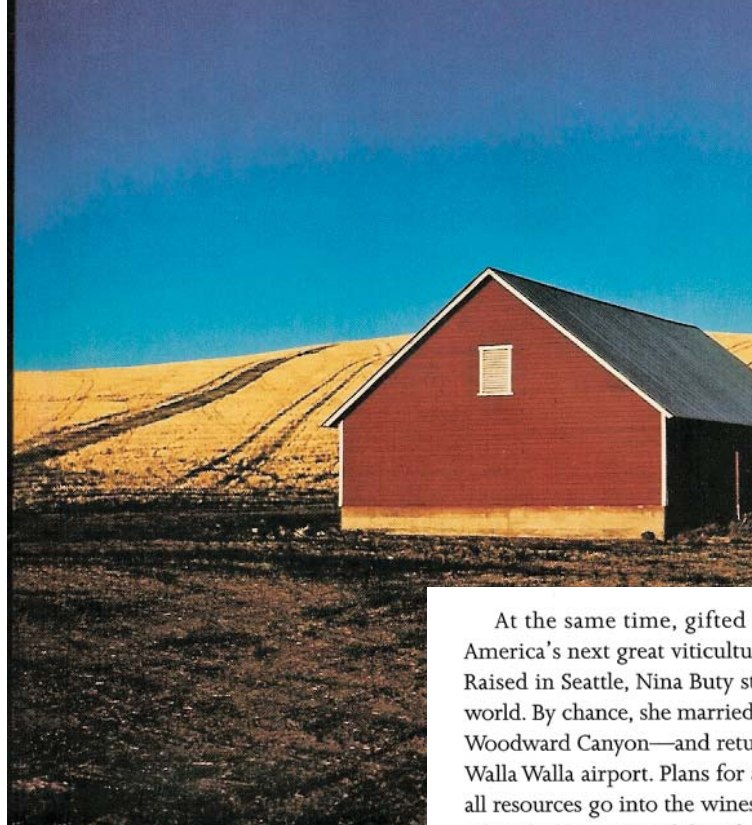
TRAVEL + LEISURE

MARCH 2005

America's Latest Vintage

In the sleepy southeastern corner of Washington State, a quiet revolution is under way. BRUCE SCHOENFELD meets some of the passionate (even obsessed) vintners, chefs, and farmers who are making Walla Walla this country's next great wine destination. Photographed by João Canziani

BACK TO THE LAND
Buty Winery's
Nina Buty and Kahlou
at the top of Scenic Loop
Road overlooking Walla
Walla Valley



At the same time, gifted winemakers and resourceful businessmen are streaming in, seeking America's next great viticultural region or simply a fresh start, filling those once empty parking spots. Raised in Seattle, Nina Buty studied art history at Walla Walla's Whitman College, then left to travel the world. By chance, she married a local oenologist—Caleb Foster, who'd worked at the pioneering winery Woodward Canyon—and returned in 2001 to help him create Buty Winery, in a concrete hut beside the Walla Walla airport. Plans for a showcase facility with a sculpture garden are off in the future; for now, all resources go into the wines. Foster's oenology texts share shelf space with Buty's art books, and their crisp Chardonnays and densely packed Cabernet- and Merlot-based blends serve as both commercial products and Buty's artistic statements. "In a sense, making a wine is just like building a sculpture," she says.

As she steers into the parking lot of the Foundry, where works by Funk Art's Robert Arneson are displayed beside David Bates's three-dimensional pastiches and the works of local sculptors, Buty tells me she never thought she'd live in Walla Walla once she left Whitman. "Creativity has always been here, but before now the ideas were only sustainable for a month or two," she says. "Restaurants would open with all kinds of ambition, but they couldn't stay in business for long. Now, with the influx of money, and people who have come to Walla Walla to enjoy the wine, we've reached a critical mass."

WHERE TO SIP

Walla Walla's producers are far more informal than those in Napa. This means that face-to-face encounters with winemakers are eminently possible, but it also means you should call ahead to make sure someone will be there when you arrive.

Buty Winery

Beefy reds and a full-throttle Chardonnay in a glorified Quonset hut by the airport. 535 E. CESSNA AVE.; 509/527-0901