

North stars

Washington wines reach for the stratosphere

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This spring, Alex Golitzin got a phone call every winemaker dreams of. Both his 2002 and 2003 Quilceda Creek Cabernet Sauvignon had been awarded 100 points by Robert M. Parker Jr.'s influential Wine Advocate.

Washington wines have long been contenders in the score wars, but winemakers there saw Golitzin's back-to-back perfect ratings as an undeniable affirmation that the state had arrived as a world-class winemaking region, on a level playing field with California and Oregon.

"It establishes credibility for Washington state without a shadow of a doubt," says Golitzin, one of the state's first producers of high-end red wines.

Washington wines

It is still hard to find some of Washington's newest AVAs on the label; the first bottles are just starting to appear on shelves, so look for them starting with the 2005 vintage. In the meantime, the state's most established and most ambitious winemakers are producing plenty of bottles worth tracking down.

Reds

2003 Buty Rediviva of the Stones Walla Walla Valley (\$40) Winemaker Caleb Foster blends about one-quarter Cabernet Sauvignon to three-quarters Syrah, all sourced from the Cailloux Vineyard, owned by Cayuse's Christophe Baron. It's heady and fleshy, filled with blackberry, currant, cranberry and a dose of sweet oak. The Cab adds backbone and the finish is pitch-perfect.