

Review of the Industry

HOT SMALL BRANDS

Hot Small Brands of 2008

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IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, *Wine Business Monthly* identifies some wines that winemakers will want to check out. Our sixth annual “Hot Small Brands” list includes some of today’s most exciting brands from small- and medium-sized wineries—a select group. Ten wines from North America appear on the list.

When WBM published the first annual list of “Hot Small Brands” in 2003, we sought to identify and recognize small- or medium-sized wineries—none that produced more than 150,000 cases a year—that had experienced the most growth in a short period of time. We measured that growth in case sales. This was during a time in which there were vast supplies of wine on the bulk market. It coincided with the emergence of what marketers called “lifestyle” brands and what would later be dubbed the “critter craze.” Fun and whimsical labels were gaining ground, and several wineries launched new brands that took off quickly. Many of our early picks went on to new heights, some continued to grow organically, and others were later acquired by corporate wine companies.

The list, and the criteria for inclusion, has evolved—as has the industry. Most of the wines included in this year’s list are not made in large quantities. These are wines that members of our editorial staff think are important for winemakers to taste. We tend to highlight wineries and brands that represent market trends or innovation, that take a leadership position in their regions, or that make unusual varietals or unexpected wines.

The Hot Small Brands list has always been about standing for something. Most of the wines represented here are from up-and-coming wineries that have achieved success by delivering on quality. Several represent seemingly overnight success stories that were years in the making.

WBM will be serving these wines at a reception we will be hosting on Tuesday night during the annual **Unified Wine & Grape Symposium** in Sacramento, California.

1. **GRAZIANO** Mendocino, CA
2. **FOUR VINES PEASANT** Paso Robles, CA
3. **BECKER VINEYARDS** Texas Hill Country, TX
4. **RED TAIL RIDGE** Seneca Lake, NY
5. **SOJOURN CELLARS** Sonoma, CA
6. **DOMAINE DROUHIN** Dundee Hills, OR
7. **JEFF RUNQUIST WINES** Clarksburg, CA
8. **MARILYN REMARK WINERY** Arroyo Seco, CA
9. **TRIO VINTNERS** Columbia Valley, WA
10. **PURPLE WINE COMPANY** Napa Valley, CA

Hottest Small Brands of 2007

1. **WILLAMETTE VALLEY VINEYARDS**
(Turner, Oregon)
2. **CEJA VINEYARDS**
(Carneros, California)
3. **TANGENT**
(San Luis Obispo, California)
4. **CLOS DU VAL**
(Napa, California)
5. **KUTCH WINES**
(Russian River, California)
6. **CORO MENDOCINO**
(Mendocino County, California)
7. **J.R. STOREY**
(Sausalito, California)
8. **L'ECOLE N° 41**
(Lowden, Washington)
9. **KING FAMILY VINEYARDS**
(Crozet, Virginia)
10. **GRUET WINERY**
(Albuquerque, New Mexico)

Hottest Small Brands of 2006

1. **A TO Z WINEWORKS**
(Dundee, Oregon)
2. **HOUSE WINE**
Magnificent Wine Company
(Walla Walla, Washington)
3. **LIBERTY SCHOOL**
Treana Winery (Paso Robles, California)
4. **SHANNON RIDGE**
High Valley (Lake County, California)
5. **TWENTY BENCH**
Nine North Wine Company
(Napa, California)
6. **CYCLES GLADIATOR**
Wimbledon Wine Company
(Napa, California)
7. **BEDELL CELLARS**
(Cutchogue, New York—Long Island)
8. **ARTESA VINEYARDS & WINERY**
(Napa, California)
9. **BLACK STAR FARMS**
(Suttons Bay, Michigan)
10. **BUENA VISTA CARNEROS**
(Sonoma, California)

Hottest Small Brands of 2005

1. **PARDUCCI WINE CELLARS**
Mendocino Wine Company
(Ukiah, California)
2. **SOLOROSA**
SoloRosa Wines, (St. Helena, California)
3. **CHEAPSKATE**
WineSmith (Napa, California)
4. **VELVET RED**
St. James Winery (St. James, Missouri)
5. **INCREDIBLE RED**
Peachy Canyon Winery
(Paso Robles, California)
6. **HARD CORE**
Core Wine Company
(Santa Maria, California)
7. **KUNDE ESTATE**
Kunde Estate Winery & Vineyards
(Kenwood, California)
8. **HITCHING POST**
Hartley Ostini Hitching Post Winery
(Buellton, California)
9. **ANDRETTI WINERY**
Andretti Wine Group (Napa, California)
10. **ESSER VINEYARDS**
Esser Vineyards (Napa Valley, California)

Hottest Small Brands of 2004

1. **RED TRUCK**
Cline Cellars (Sonoma, California)
2. **CARTLIDGE & BROWNE**
Greenfield Wine Company
(American Canyon, CA)
3. **SEVEN DEADLY ZINS**
Michael David Winery (Lodi, California)
4. **OLIVER WINERY**
Oliver Winery (Bloomington, Indiana)
5. **ANGELINE WINES**
Martin Ray Winery (Santa Rosa, California)
6. **ROCK RABBIT**
Purple Wine Company
(Graton, California)
7. **THREE THIEVES BANDIT**
Three Thieves (Lodi, California)
8. **SOFIA MINI**
Niebaum-Coppola (Rutherford, California)
9. **SCREW KAPPA NAPA**
Don Sebastiani & Sons
(Sonoma, California)
10. **GRACELAND CELLARS**
Signature Wines (Oakland, California)

Hottest Small Brands of 2003

1. **HRM REX-GOLIATH**
Smith & Hook and Hahn Estates Winery
(Soledad, California)
2. **MCMANIS FAMILY VINEYARDS**
River Junction AVA (Ripon, California)
3. **SEBASTIANI VINEYARDS & WINERY**
(Sonoma, California)
4. **CASTLE ROCK WINERY**
(Palos Verdes Estates, California)
5. **BLACK OAK**
Chateau Diana (Healdsburg, California)
6. **JEWEL COLLECTION**
Jewel Wine Company (Lodi, California)
7. **TIN ROOF**
Murphy-Goode Winery
(Geyserville, California)
8. **THREE THIEVES**
(Lodi, California)
9. **JEST RED**
Hambrecht Vineyards and Winery
(Healdsburg, CA)
10. **J GARCIA WINES**
Allied Domecq (Geyserville, California)

9. TRIO VINTNERS 2006 ZINFANDEL COLUMBIA VALLEY: ZINFANDEL ROCKS IN WASHINGTON STATE 2006 TRIO VINTNERS ZINFANDEL

This is another wine that really surprised us. Who knew that Zinfandel did well in Washington state? It does. Zinfandel is not made in large quantities anywhere in Washington—there are probably 50 acres planted in the entire state—but there are a handful of producers making it. Zinfandel can do very well in Washington's warmer and windier sites. Whether it will ever be made in large amounts in Washington isn't a viticulture question—it's more of a marketing question.

The **Trio Vintners Zinfandel** comes from grapes grown along the Wallula Gap on the Columbia River, close to where the Walla Walla River joins it, some 20 miles from Walla Walla.

PRICE: \$26

ALCOHOL %: 16.2%

BLEND: 76% Zinfandel,
16% Mourvedre,
7% Sangiovese, 1% Syrah

COOPERAGE: Aged in a mixture
of new, seasoned and neutral
French and American and
Hungarian barrels.

CASES PRODUCED: 80

Trio Vintners is a partnership between three Walla Walla winemakers: **Tim Boushey**, **Denise Slattery** and **Steve Michener**. They went back to school and studied winemaking together at **Walla Walla Community College**, earning Associated Applied Arts and Sciences degrees from the **Institute for Enology and Viticulture** in June of 2006. In 2007, they crushed more than 26 tons of fruit, including Syrah, Riesling, Sangiovese, Mourvedre, Chardonnay, Tempranillo, Carmenere and Zinfandel.

The collaboration is a bit unusual but makes sense. There's a lot to do in a winery, and the three have no staff. They do it all, dividing up work and collaborating on winemaking decisions. "All of us had a desire to be in the business," Slattery said. "Pooling our efforts and collaborating was the fastest way to get

up and running with very limited resources."

The winery and tasting room are located in one of the "incubator" sites at the Walla Walla Regional Airport. The incubator site is a joint economic development project between the Port of Walla Walla and Washington state. The buildings are not subsidized, though, and no equipment is provided. A business must be brand new to get in and can stay six years. There are five wineries at the site, each operating completely separately.

