

Barnard Griffin makes impressive showing with first wines

Would anyone pay \$13.65 a bottle for a first-vintage chardonnay by a new Washington winery?

Perhaps, if the wine has been handcrafted by Rob Griffin, the award-winning, former winemaker at Preston Wines Cellars in Pasco. Griffin is now winemaker at Hogue Cellars in Prosser.

Griffin has just released his Barnard Griffin label wines, and the 1983 chardonnay from Balcom and Moe Vineyards is selling for \$13.65 a bottle at Le Cave du Vin in Richland, its only Tri-City outlet.

Barnard Griffin is only a sideline to his main job at Hogue, one of the new wineries in the state.

The name Barnard is from his wife Deborah Barnard. "This is

a very small venture," Griffin said.

His first vintage included 300 cases of chardonnay, 100 cases of fume blanc and 30 cases of riesling.

Griffin said he doesn't think his venture will get very big, perhaps reaching 1,000 cases at the peak. That compares with Preston at an annual production of up to 45,000 cases or Hogue at 30,000 cases.

One of the attractive things about the new wine is its label, which features a drawing of yellow and red tulips.

The label was designed by Gary White of Pasco.

"Actually, I'm getting more comments on the label than the wine," Griffin said.

However, those who have



Bob Woehler

tasted his wines, and this writer is one of them, have been impressed with the chardonnay and the fume blanc, especially the fume.

Both wines are rich, complex and show promise.

Griffin hopes to gain a reputation for premium white wines like Gary Figgins of Leonetti Cellars in Walla Walla has won with red wines.

He plans to make only a few varieties — chardonnay and fume blancs mostly — and doesn't expect to back off on his prices.

"I don't think I'll get involved in making red wines on my own," he said.

Griffin made many award-winning fumes and chardonnays at Preston, including the memorable Preston 1977 chardonnay, which won the first grand prize ever awarded at the Seattle Enological Society tasting.

"I think my experience is with the whites and that's where I hope to concentrate."

The chardonnay was barrel fermented and aged in French oak. It is dry to the taste and has lingering complex taste to go along with an intriguing aroma.

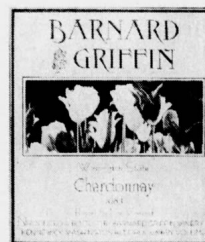
The fume is selling for \$9.47 at Le Cave du Vin. It is a blend of grapes from Balcom and Moe Vineyard in Pasco and Caroway Vineyard in Kennewick.

The wine has a distinct herbal characteristic without excessive grassiness, is very dry, smooth and balanced on the palate.

It has that natural tartness of a fume, which makes it quite enjoyable to serve with food.

I haven't tasted the white riesling, which isn't out yet.

The white riesling will sell in the \$7 range, and, according to Griffin, has 1.3 percent sugar with a fruity aroma and a spicy



rather than a floral taste, giving the wine some complexity.

"I think when you can work on small lots you can develop wines with individual characteristics," Griffin said.