

Wine Adviser

Walla Walla's Dazzling Chateau Rollat...

By Paul Gregutt

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There is some special magic to the autumn season that seems to spring wine surprises on you at every turn. This past week was a gem.

It began with an unexpected phone call from Matthew Loso, the winemaker and owner of Matthews Estate in Woodinville. "There's someone you should meet," he said, without indicating who or why.

My curiosity bone was rattled. Loso makes great wine and suffers no fools. We met in the bar at an area restaurant, and I was introduced to Bowin Lindgren, the owner of Chateau Rollat, and his consulting winemaker, Christian LeSommer.

Lindgren spent 35 years "climbing the corporate ladder" with an East Coast pharmaceutical company, then retired with the goal of learning to make wine. He phoned LeSommer out of the blue and (says Lindgren) badgered him mercilessly until the poor man agreed to make a visit to Walla Walla. Lindgren had set up camp there in the fall of 2004.

Among the wineries listed on LeSommer's résumé are Chateau d'Yquem and Chateau Latour, where he was general manager and wine master for more than a decade. He is now the consulting manager for Domaines des Barons de Rothschild.

They agreed on a plan, recalls LeSommer, to produce "the best possible expression of ripe Walla Walla fruit" — specifically, Bordeaux blends of Seven Hills and Pepper Bridge cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and merlot.

The first releases of Chateau Rollat (ROLL-ah) are just out and dazzling. The mid-level wine, a 2005 'Rollat' Cabernet Sauvignon (\$38), presents supple, ripe and sweet fruit on a bed of fine tannins. The word that kept cropping up as I tasted the wine was "polished." It has a sophisticated finesse that moves the beautiful fruit flavors into a more elegant dimension than all but a handful of Washington wines. The Rollat is available by the glass at the Waterfront, the Herbfarm and the Barking Frog, and at a few Eastside wine shops. For purchase information call 509-529-4511.

Rollat's still more substantial sibling is the 2005 'Edouard' Cabernet Sauvignon (\$62), which will be released at barrel tasting weekend in Walla Walla in early December. All Chateau Rollat wines are being made at Va Piano for the moment, though a dedicated winery is in the planning stages. The Edouard, in French terms, is a vin de garde — a wine to put away for some years. "I hope it will be a giant among wines," says the winemaker. Based on my first impressions (dark, smoky, nuances of bark, soil, subtle layers of earth and barrel), I believe it will.