



GOOSE RIDGE g3 MERLOT 2019

continues to amaze



BEST BUY!

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The Northwest's 20 best wines for under \$20



Maurine Johnson, far right, is the macro cellar winemaker for Goose Ridge Vineyards and made the 2019 g3 merlot — which topped our Northwest's 20 Best Wines for under \$20 list.

The Monsons price this widely distributed bottle of merlot in the low teens, and it's another example of the red Bordeaux variety that's a stalwart grape for the Washington wine industry. Alas, sales suffered as a result of a ridiculous comment made in the 2004 movie "Sideways." (Paul Giamatti's character, a big fan of pinot noir, complains, "If anyone orders merlot, I'm leaving. I am not drinking any [expletive] merlot!") Research by Sonoma State University said that merlot sales fell by about 2% in three years after the movie's release, while pinot noir sales increased by 16%.

Last year, the federal government established Goose Gap as an American Viticultural Area, and this brand pays homage to the eastern Yakima Valley flyway for Canada geese as well as the three generations of Monsons involved in the winery. They are proud of their 2,200 acres of vineyards along Interstate 82, one of the largest plantings in the Northwest. Their massive winery produces as many as 1.2 million cases of wine each year. The unflappable Johnson is in charge of about 80% of that wine and oversees the family's 100-ton fermenters.

"The wines here are better than anywhere else I've worked," Johnson says.



THE MONSON FAMILY of Goose Ridge Vineyards near Richland wasted almost no time in hiring winemaker Maurine Johnson, who became a free agent three years ago in the wake of one of the largest transactions in the history of the U.S. wine industry.

"When Hogue was sold to Gallo, there wasn't a job for me," Johnson says. "That happens."

The Utah State graduate honed her ability to make deliciously affordable wines on a large scale during her 29-year career at Ste. Chapelle — Idaho's largest winery — followed by three vintages as a red winemaker at Hogue Cellars in the Yakima Valley. One of the first wines she made at Goose Ridge was the 2019 g3 merlot, and it tops our list of the Northwest's 20 Best Wines for under \$20.

1. Goose Ridge Vineyards

2019 g3 merlot, Goose Gap, \$15: The Monson family has its sights set on offering the best value of merlot in the U.S., and this bottling deserves to be in the discussion. Its profile of dark plum, marionberry, mocha and black licorice comes with suave tannins and Bing cherry juice, a combination that makes for a lengthy finish remarkable at any price.