



ERIKA SCHULTZ / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Brian Carter shows off a glass of his wine at Brian Carter Cellars in Woodinville. The winery is among six budding Northwest wineries we selected as deserving close attention.

With Heart and Smarts

A BACKGROUND AND A DREAM ARE BLENDED

BY BRAIDEN REX-JOHNSON
Special to *The Seattle Times*

Brian Carter knew by the time he was 15 that he wanted to be a winemaker. So he went after degrees in microbiology from Oregon State University and winemaking/viticulture from the University of California-Davis. Carter first visited Washington in 1978 and won prestigious awards during his tenure at Paul Thomas Winery in the 1980s.

In 1988, Carter partnered with local businessman Harry Alhadeff to open Apex Cellars. A giving and gifted winemaker, he also consulted for a host of Washington wineries (McCrea Cellars, Hedges Family Estate), and became the only winemaker to win the Seattle Enological Society's Grand Prize three times.

But by the fall of 2002, Carter was growing restless; he wanted

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Brian Carter Cellars

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to produce wines under his own label. But instead of making 100 percent varietal wines (sauvignon blanc, merlot, cabernet sauvignon), he dreamed of creating handcrafted, blended wines with exotic names such as L'Etalon (French for "stallion") and Solesce (Latin for "sun and essence").

Brian Carter Cellars was incorporated in 2004 and the Brian Carter Collection was introduced to the wine trade in 2006.

Early next year, Carter will release his new tempranillo-based blend, Corrida (Spanish for "bullfight"). In the meantime, you can sample his six other wines at the atmospheric "little yellow tasting room" in Woodinville.

"We source from 14 different vineyards in five different appellations in Eastern Washington, which provides me with many different colors to use on the palette of the wines I make," the 55-year-old winemaker explains. "I try to emphasize the Washington state character in my wines, which often expresses itself best when the wines are reminiscent of the wines of

Europe. Typically, these are wines that have balance – fruit, acid and tannins in harmony – making them taste good at release and yet able to age beautifully."

Winemakers think of age in terms of harvests as opposed to years, and this autumn marks Brian Carter's 29th harvest. His wines consistently provide consumers with interesting and unusual food-friendly blends at reasonable prices.

At Barolo in downtown Seattle, where four of Carter's wines are shown in a separate box on the menu, we invariably order Carter's Tutturosso – a super-Tuscan-style blend of sangiovese, cabernet sauvignon and syrah – to pair with my favorite Dungeness Crab Spaghetti and my husband's beloved Osso Buco. At Madison Park Café (owned by Carter's girlfriend, Karen Binder), we pick the Byzance, which pairs well with all manner of the café's French bistro-style food. The southern-Rhone-style blend of grenache and syrah is a fruit-forward, totally yummy mouthful.

Wines of note: Brian Carter Cellars 2005 Tutturosso, Brian Carter Cellars 2005 Byzance, Brian Carter Cellars 2006 Abracadabra