

# Inside Seattle

## Wine city

Tours. Tasting rooms. Winemaker dinners. How to enjoy a wine country weekend—without ever leaving Seattle

BY JESS THOMSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSÉ MANDOJANA

WELCOME TO PICNIC  
 JOIN US FOR  
 THURSDAY WINE  
 TASTINGS!  
 5:30-7:30  
 \$8 (+TAX) INCLUDES  
 WINE & SMALL  
 BITES FROM  
 OUR PANTRY  
 THIS WEEK  
 WINEMAKER  
 TIM SORENSON  
 OF FALL LINE  
 WINERY WILL  
 WARM THINGS  
 UP FOR US

Tastings at Picnic are low-key and friendly.

### 1. Mingle with winemakers

You have a better chance of actually meeting winemakers in town than you do in their tasting rooms. At **Picnic**, meet-and-greet tastings (5:30–7:30 Thu, 3–5 Sat; \$8; 6801 Greenwood Ave. N.; [picnicseattle.com](http://picnicseattle.com) or 206/453-5867) let you chat with the folks actually blending and bottling—like the owners of Walla Walla’s Rulo Winery. The vibe is relaxed and the pours are generous, with very little pretension. On Saturday afternoons, **Aster CoffeeLounge** (3–6 Mar 6, 13, 20, and 27; \$5; 5615 24th Ave. N.W.; [astercoffeelounge.com](http://astercoffeelounge.com) or 206/784-0615) turns its espresso bar over to local vintners, such as Parejas Cellars’ Mark Wysling, who come from the country armed with wine and conversation. >36B



Shannon Borg at 106 Pine

## 2. Take a tour

Instead of rambling through rows of grapes with a big group fresh off the bus, try an intimate tour from **106 Pine**, a new wine bar and shop, led by Shannon Borg, who curates an exhaustive collection of ultra-local producers. (Like, from just up the street at Atlantic Street Vintners, the winemakers' co-op in Seattle's emerging SoDo district.) You can pop in anytime, but we recommend signing up for one of Borg's new **Urban Wine Tours** (2–5 Sat; \$50; *reservations required*) for a behind-the-scenes tasting. Start with sparkling wine in the shop's tasting room, then head to a cheese-and-Chardonnay pairing at Ward Johnson Winery, the small family outfit hidden at the bottom of Queen Anne Hill, where you can see firsthand how wine is made. Next, attend a mini wine-pairing seminar with Richard Kinssies, director of the Seattle Wine School, before hitting its SoDo store. The tasting bar is open to the public, but only tour guests get to tilt their glasses toward the barrel for sips of upcoming vintages. Finally, head back to 106 Pine for a quick lesson on dessert wine—and a bite from the chocolate shop next door. *106 Pine St.*; *106pine.com* or *206/427-2515*.

## 3. Pick up pairing tips from the pros

Ballard's **Portalis** is a little, local wine shop with a big selection of affordable bottles and a bar that acts as a private tasting room—and classroom. A new monthly series (Mar 27; \$40; *reservations required*) focuses on pairing wines with one food each class—this month: lamb. Learn why different cuts require different tannin levels, and which full-bodied white wine is (surprise!) a perfect partner for a Mediterranean-style tagine. *Closed Mon; tastings from \$15; 5205 Ballard Ave. N.W.; portaliswines.com* or *206/783-2007*.



Portalis

## 4. Study with the wine experts

For a broader wine education, sign up for a continuing-education course at **South Seattle Community College**. At \$75 per series plus an \$18 materials fee, tuition is cheap. This month, Dieter Schafer's "Washington Wines and Wineries" series tastes through all 11 of Washington's AVAs. *Series of three classes starts Mar 2; southseattle.edu*



A wine dinner at Volunteer Park Café

## 5. Wine and dine

What's a wine country weekend without gluttony? You'll find the most exciting food and Washington wine pairings at **Monsoon** in Seattle and **Monsoon East** in Bellevue (\$\$\$; *monsoonrestaurants.com*), where chef-owner Eric Banh gives customers an easy table-side talk on pairing with Vietnamese food while pouring, say, an elegant Pinot Noir with an otherworldly steamed black cod. **Volunteer Park Café** (\$\$; *closed Mon; 1501 17th Ave. E.; alwaysfreshgoodness.com* or *206/328-3155*) hosts wine dinners (*à Maurice Cellars* on Mar 13; \$95), where chef Ericka Burke creates a festive vibe and a homey menu with a particular wine in mind. The winemaker is always at the table too. At **Sip** (\$12 for three



*tastings; 909 Fifth Ave.; siprestaurant.com* or *206/682-2779*)—a group of three wine bars with a new downtown location—flights, seasonal bites, and business are conducted from chocolate-toned couches that are as easy to sink into as its international wine list.

## 6. Bring home a bottle (or four)

You'll have to dodge the tourists, but Pike Place Market has some of the city's best shops for Washington wines. **Pike & Western** (\$25 for seven tastings; 1934 Pike Place; [pikeandwestern.com](http://pikeandwestern.com) or 206/441-1307) has limited releases of local cult labels like Woodward Canyon Winery and Mark Ryan Winery, plus a staff that gives excellent pairing advice. A half-block up, the **Tasting Room** (tastings from \$2; 1924 Post Alley; [thetastingroomseattle.com](http://thetastingroomseattle.com) or 206/770-9463), tucked away on Post Alley, lets you taste any boutique wines before buying.



### » Mark your calendar

**On March 11, you can sip your way through the Willamette Valley without trekking south, at Seattle's first Willamette Valley Wineries Block Party, held in SoDo Park by Herban Feast.**

5:30–8:30; \$45 before Mar 1, \$55 after; reservations required; [willamettewines.com](http://willamettewines.com) ■