



A Wine Lover's Feast

Celebrate “crush”—the grape harvest season—with a casual dinner party that’s all about the wine BY KELLEY L. MOORE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS BARWICK



Opposite page: Grapes are the stars of the show at a crush celebration to salute the harvest. This page: Presenting the bounty at various levels creates depth and adds interest to an ordinary buffet. The Tuscan buffet stands (*small \$250, large \$265, at Stuhlbergs, 1801 Queen Anne Ave. N; 206.352.2351*) are perfect for displaying the desserts and complement the pewter salt and pepper grinders (*\$120 each at Stuhlbergs*). A tall vintage fireplace screen (*\$750, at Mandrake's Antiques, 4501 Shilshole Ave. NW; 206.784.1808*), is a dramatic backdrop for the antique farm table (*\$2,350 at Mandrake's*). Entertaining expert Kelley Moore's own Italian pottery holds an arrangement of blooms in autumn hues. Chef Kaspar Donier fills small glasses with chilled tomato saffron soup and tops them with mozzarella, cherry tomato and marjoram skewers.



Clockwise from top left: Eastside boutique winery DeLille Cellars. Kaspar Donier's chilled soup shooters kick off a flavorful crush meal. DeLille's gazebo is the perfect spot to relax before the fun begins. A bottle of wine with a personalized tag (\$1.50 each at Stuhlbergs) is the ideal party favor. Beet, pear and Oregonzola salad. Winery president and co-owner Greg Lill and girlfriend Stacy Peterson. Opposite page: Lill, Kelley Moore and DeLille winemaker and co-owner Chris Upchurch sort grapes.





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or most of us in Seattle, autumn days conjure images of descending maple leaves and early sunsets. East of Seattle, summer's end signals the opportunity to participate in a timeless tradition preserved locally by our state's burgeoning wineries: the annual harvest of grapes known as "the crush." Romantic notions of the winery lifestyle give way as the hard work of harvesting the grapes and preparing them for winemaking takes center stage.

One local winery that embraces the crush season in full party spirit—as I do—is DeLille Cellars, a boutique winery in Woodinville known for its Bordeaux-style wines. In late June, I spent an afternoon with president and co-owner Greg Lill, his girlfriend, Stacy Peterson, and winemaker Chris Upchurch, along with some of their friends, to get a sneak preview of the harvest—and to throw a pre-crush dinner party.

As I drove up the gravel driveway to the 10-acre estate I felt as though I was entering a European chateau. Grazing sheep border the grounds, a trickling brook leads to a pond where blue herons stand watch and a charming gazebo sits under towering old-growth pines—a shady spot from which you can admire it all. I felt like I was thousands of miles from Seattle.

For the past 13 years, DeLille, whose signature wine is Chaleur Estate Red, has employed more than 400 volunteers during the crush season. They spend four to six hours a day over a period of 20 days from Labor Day through Halloween sorting the good grapes from the bad ones and loading them into a machine, where the grapes are stripped of their stems and skins and prepared for the winemaking process.

"The volunteers are critical to the quality of what we do," says Lill. "They are passionate about being a part of the process and become salespeople for our product."

DeLille Cellars (14208 Woodinville-Redmond Road NE, Woodinville; 425.489.0544; delillecellars.com), founded in 1992, has produced some of the most sought-after Bordeaux-style wines in the world: the signature Chaleur Estate Red, the affordable D2, Harrison Hill and Chaleur Estate Blanc. The winery's Northern Rhône-style Syrah, Doyenne, has been rated one of the 15 great Syrahs of the world by *The Wine Advocate* editor Robert Parker. The people behind the bottles are father-and-son team Charles and Greg Lill (although Charles recently retired) and co-owners Chris Upchurch (also winemaker), Jay Soloff (also CFO) and Pat Lill-Jorgenson. DeLille is open to the public only during a handful of events, such as the St. Nicholas Day Open House (December 4) and Passport Weekend (an April wine-tasting event), and by appointment. Sign up for the winery's mailing list to get first crack at prereleased wines. With an order you'll receive an invitation to release parties. For information or to get on the mailing list, call 425.489.0544 or write to contact@delillecellars.com.

the menu

From chef Kaspar Donier of Kaspar's Catering and Events (19 W Harrison St.; 206.298.0123; kaspars.com); wines from DeLille Cellars

Chilled Tomato Saffron Soup
with Mozzarella, Cherry Tomato
and Marjoram Skewers
Wine: 2003 Chaleur Estate Blanc

Beets, Pear and Oregonzola Salad
Wine: 2002 D2

Grilled Organic Veal Chop
Wine: 2002 Chaleur Estate Red

Roasted Harvest Vegetables with Balsamic Syrup
Wine: 2003 Doyenne Aix

Duck Rillettes with Organic Greens
Wine: 2002 DeLille Cellars Harrison Hill

Artisan Cheese Plate with Fig Bread
Wine: 2002 Doyenne Syrah

French Hazelnut Macaroons
Wine: 2004 Doyenne Roussane

Caramelized Apple Wonton Napoleon
Wine: 2003 Chaleur Estate Blanc

the setting

Rustic farmhouse elegance

the favors

A bottle of wine with a personalized tag is the ideal party favor. Talk with your local wine shop to select a new release, or share a bottle of wine from your favorite region or winery. If you don't have time to create a personalized tag, stop by Stuhlbergs (1801 Queen Anne Ave. N; 206.352.2351) to buy preprinted tags—they are the perfect quick fix.



This page: Greg Lill carries grapes along a familiar path. Kelley Moore with winemaker Chris Upchurch's wife, Theadora. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Moore creates a petite fall arrangement of dark red dahlias (*Northwest Wholesale Florists, 400 Fairview Ave. N; 206.622.5370*). Place the wine and glasses on a circular table to create a nice flow, give the scene a romantic glow with a low-hung crystal chandelier (*\$375 at Lucca Great Finds, 5332 Ballard Ave. NW; 206.782.7337*) and accent with Italian pottery (*\$195 at Stuhlbergs*) filled with balls of artichokes and grapevines to incorporate the theme of the day. Kaspar Donier with DeLille assistant winemaker Chris Peterson. Moore's vintage silverware is wrapped in chocolate-colored linen napkins (*\$8 each at Stuhlbergs*) and tied with Midori ribbon. Moore holds the 2002 Doyenne Syrah.

At the end of crush, volunteers celebrate with a barbecue and sample the fruits of past years' labors. The most coveted ticket of all takes place on the last day of crush: DeLille's annual Paulée de Woodinville, an exclusive \$245-a-plate black-tie gala. This year's seven-course dinner, paired with vintages from around the globe, will be prepared by chef Johnathan Sundstrom of Lark.

For our crush-preview dinner party, I set a scene of rustic elegance, with heavy Italian pottery, a magnificent vintage fireplace screen and autumnal shades of gold.

Chef Kaspar Donier was at the grill, ensuring that we had the right fare to pair with DeLille's offerings, from the grilled organic veal chops to the sweet finish of the napoleon. Donier, one of the preferred chefs at DeLille for private catered events, recently transformed his 16-year-old Lower Queen Anne restaurant, Kaspar's, into a special-events and catering facility (it's also open as a restaurant on select days).

The menu for our celebration was vibrant with the colors of autumn—Merlot, gold and a hint of taupe—that enhanced the beauty of the antique farm table. "The harvest is one of my favorite times of year because it is a bountiful time," says Donier. "I am always excited to see the new vintages released and pair them with different foods from year to year."

To create your own crush celebration at home, start with the invitation: Include a wine wheel that helps users pair wines with foods (*\$18*

each from Les Cadeaux Gourmets, 1629 Queen Anne Ave. N, Suite 100; 206.283.2270; lescadeauxgourmets.com). It's a fun way to announce the theme, and the wheels will come in handy when your guests plan their own food and wine pairings.

Next up is the menu. Matching a wine to each course enhances the flavors of both the wine and the food, and creates an opportunity for interesting table conversation as you explain your choices. Visit your favorite wine shop and ask about the appropriate pairings for your menu. To take full advantage of the harvest theme, serve foods that are abundant in September, such as heirloom tomatoes, new potatoes, beets, pears, apples and squash.

To make the evening educational as well as festive, hire a sommelier to conduct a wine tasting. Wine experts from many local restaurants are available for hire, such as Jake Kosseff (*206.390.8310; liquidlove@winepimp.com*), the sommelier at Campagne, and Shayn Bjornholm (*206.992.4132; sbjornwriter@hotmail.com*) of Canlis. Keep in mind that it's a pricey plus. Kosseff's fee, for example, begins at \$300 for an evening.

Of course, you'll want to send off your guests with a little something to enjoy at home. Share a bottle of your favorite wine with each guest—I love to give local dessert wines—and create a personalized tag with a description of the wine and a suggested food pairing. It will be a gift—and a feast—your friends won't soon forget. **\$**



crush events

Not so interested in staining everything purple? There are plenty of ways to celebrate harvest month where all you need to do is eat, drink and be merry.

Harvest Festival Open House, September 23 & 24

One of the newest Washington state AVAs (American Viticultural Area—cork-dork speak for wine region)—the Columbia Gorge, with its stunning scenery and wineries on both sides of the Columbia River in Washington and Oregon—hosts a grouping of harvest events. Visit columbiagorgewine.com for details.

Catch the Crush, September 24 & 25

The Columbia Valley Winery Association—15-plus wineries, including Columbia Crest and Terra Blanca—offers harvest activities, from free-run juice tastings (sips of pure, just-fermented wine straight out of the fermentation vats) to live bluegrass performances and vineyard picnics in Benton City, Kennewick and Pasco. For details and a list of participants, visit columbiavalleywine.com or call 866.360.6611. *Shayn Bjornholm*

volunteer at crush

As with any functional art form, becoming an accomplished crusher requires practice. Fortunately, you don't have to be in France or Italy to participate. There are many opportunities to volunteer locally and assist with the crush. DeLille Cellars, for example, has 400 volunteer positions available every year and begins assembling its team as early as June. Once those positions are filled—which happens quickly—the waiting list begins. They might need help at a moment's notice, though, so be ready to go when you get the call. To request a list of area wineries that need volunteers, send an e-mail to ambassador@washingtonwine.org.

