

A Talcott Publication

Chef

The Magazine for Foodservice Professionals

- [Home](#)
- [Equipment Solutions](#)
- [Recipe Cards](#)
- [Catering](#)
- [Beverage & Spirits](#)
- [Advisory Board](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Online exclusive: Private label wines boost profits, lure customers -- especially during tough times

Some of the top restaurant owners in the Pacific Northwest have a powerful marketing weapon – a unique, affordable way to cultivate customer loyalty, stand apart from the competition and give diners a reason to return, again and again.

“A private label sets you apart,” says April Pogue, sommelier at Earth and Ocean at the W Hotel in Seattle. “It’s more of a marketing tool and it makes it more special. You can’t get this wine anywhere else.”

Earth and Ocean has a wine reputation to uphold. The restaurant earned Wine Spectator’s “Award of Excellence” and was named to *Wine Press Northwest’s* “2007 Best Wine List,” not to mention its connection with the hotel lauded by *Conde Nast* and *Travel + Leisure* magazines. When the restaurant wanted to create a private label wine, Pogue turned to Northwest Cellars.

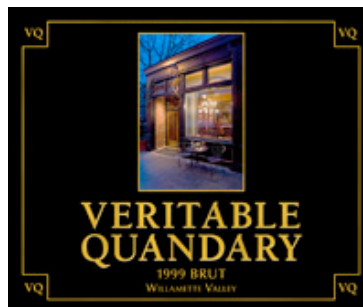
Northwest Cellars, based in the Seattle suburb of Kirkland, Wash., specializes in creating hand-crafted still and sparkling wines, exclusively for its private-label customers. The winemaker and distributor’s client list currently includes about a dozen of the top restaurants in the Northwest. They can label and ship to almost any state in the U.S.

Custom-label customers have the option of designing their own label, or leaving it in the hands of Northwest Cellars team of graphic designers. Pogue only had to go as far as her own bar for label inspiration – a bartender, who’s also an artist, came up with the Earth and Ocean artwork. Pogue says the personal connection to the label helps the staff drive sales, often to the tune of four cases a week.

“Our customers and staff love it,” says Pogue. “It’s a huge seller.”

Earth and Ocean serves Northwest Cellars Brut and Brut Rose by the glass as its house sparkling wine, and as part of several specialty cocktails. The W Hotel uses the personal label wine as a room amenity.

Mackay Restaurants, another driving force behind the Northwest dining scene, designed private labels to reflect the character of each of its six restaurants and hotels: El Gaucho and Inn at El Gaucho, Seattle; El Gaucho, Portland, Ore.; Waterfront Seafood Grill, Seattle; Troiani



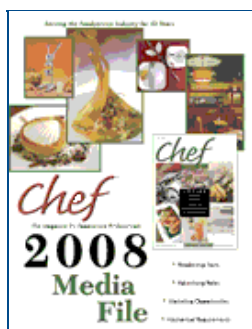
[Click Here! Chef Ad Index](#)



[Click Here! Equipment Solution's Virtual Trade Show](#)



[Subscribe NOW](#)



[Download Media Kit](#)





Subscribe NOW

published by
TALCOTT

Restorante Italiano, Seattle; and Sea Grill, Tacoma, Wash.

“In the long run it makes a profit,” says Sandra Wright, Mackay Restaurants’ director of sales and marketing. “But it’s really about the lifetime loyalty of the customer, which you can’t put a price on.”

El Gaucho, winner of two *Wine Spectator* “Awards of Excellence,” put the Northwest sparkling wine to the ultimate test – a side-by-side tasting with Billecart-Salmon champagne.

“The Northwest Cellars Brut Rose actually paired better with El Gaucho’s food,” says Dominique Calle, Inn at El Gaucho manager. “I felt very comfortable putting our logo on this quality product.”

El Gaucho uses its custom label mostly for special events and celebrations, as a way to build customer loyalty.

During the holidays, Mackay Restaurants sends its label to over 100 VIP clients in each of its restaurants – including Waterfront Seafood Grill, the Washington Wine Commission’s “2007 Restaurant of the Year.”

“Our guests were impressed with the quality,” says Christian Sparkman, Waterfront Seafood Grill manager. “As long as our wine is in their fridge, in front of (our customers), so is the Waterfront Seafood Grill.”

In the past, private label wine has earned a dubious reputation. It used to be a novelty – all about the label – and the quality of the wine was forgotten. The marketing value was most often poured down the sink with the unpalatable wine.

Northwest Cellars focuses on what goes in the bottle, first. The five-year old company works with some of the top winemakers in Oregon, Washington and California. Hundreds of wines are barrel tasted, before choosing the best. Then, the company’s own winemakers go to work, creating custom blends that often can only be found through Northwest Cellars.

“It’s a remarkably good value,” Sparkman says. “It’s high quality with accessibility of price. It makes good fiscal sense.”

Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah or Cabernet Franc typically make up Northwest Cellar’s Red Blends. White Blends often come from Chardonnay, Viognier, Semillion and Sauvignon Blanc.

Sparkling wines, created in authentic Champagne style, are blended from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Wholesale prices range from \$7.95 to \$15.50 per bottle. Northwest Cellars only requires a one-case minimum order.

Veritable Quandary, a 37-year restaurant landmark, was looking for a way to showcase its classic Old-Portland, Ore., style. Its custom-label Northwest Cellars Brut is a photographic celebration of its history.

“Because we’re a restaurant that’s been an established figure in Portland, we wanted to be able to offer our customers something special,” says Nicole Rocco, Veritable Quandary’s wine director “It’s the only domestic sparkling wine we’re pouring by the glass. Our customers love it.”

Rocco says the creaminess of the Brut and its ability to pair with Veritable Quandary’s changing, market-driven fare, is the reason she chose to add it to her already extensive wine list.

“We have a lot of customers who drink sparkling wine here,” says Rocco. “It’s the perfect reflection of our love for wine and Northwest cuisine.”

Erin Burks’ favorite place in the world is



