

# Wine Spectator

## Winemaker Charles Smith Opens Jet City, An Urban Winery in Seattle

Washington vintner consolidates his winemaking while also putting a tasting room in the city

Harvey Steiman

Washington vintner Charles Smith will fling open the 21-foot-tall doors of his Jet City winery to the public Saturday. Billed as the largest urban winery on the West Coast, Jet City occupies a 32,000-square-foot former Dr. Pepper processing plant in the Georgetown district of Seattle. The runways of Boeing Field stretch south, directly across the street.

"Buying this building was purely about winemaking," Smith told *Wine Spectator*. Smith's K Vintners and other high-end bottlings will be produced here beginning with the 2015 vintage. "Before, we were making wine in three different facilities in Walla Walla. I've always needed to consolidate everything I was doing in Walla Walla, and then I realized it made sense to move it all to Seattle, where we could reach 100 times the number of people we could in Walla Walla."

Several dozen Seattle-area wineries, including some of the best in the state, truck grapes over the Cascade Range to turn them into wine. Smith joins a list that includes Baer, Betz, Cadence, Domaine Ste. Michelle, Efeste, Gorman, Januik, Quilceda Creek, Sparkman and Andrew Will.

Wahlke Wine Co. in Mattawa, in eastern Washington, will continue to make Smith's high-volume bottlings, among them Kung Fu Girl Riesling and Boom Boom Syrah.

Smith hired Tom Kundig, of Olson Kundig Architects, who designed his wineries and tasting rooms in Walla Walla, to work on the space. "This is also an opportunity to set up the winery for each project under one roof," said Smith. "For the Bordeaux varietals (Wines of Substance, for example), I have a winery within the winery for that. If it's Rhône varietals (K Vintners and most of the top-end Charles Smith bottlings), I have that."

"I have the tools, the tanks and the space to be single-minded about it," he said. "We were using three facilities to accomplish what we can do in one. I'm excited. I think we can elevate one more level."

The design welcomes visitors too. Two tasting rooms look out through two stories of windows on the building's front toward the airstrip. Mt. Rainier rises in the distance. In the other direction visitors can watch the winery at work. The ground floor is designed in a rustic Northwest regional style while the larger upper story evokes an early 1960s aviation lounge.

Smith wants each tasting room to have a different lineup of his wines but hasn't decided how to divide up the portfolio. His brands include K Vintners, Charles Smith Wines, ViNO, Secco Italian Bubbles, Sixto, Wines of Substance and Charles & Charles (the latter a joint venture with Charles Bieler that focuses on rosé).



The facility also has a large commercial kitchen and enough floor space to do special events. "I'm not a restaurant, but there will be food," Smith said. "I can use it for business events and rent it out for community events. I don't know. We'll see. I like for things to reveal themselves rather than say this is how I'm going to do this."

An invitation-only opening event Tuesday drew 1,500 people, Smith said. "It was intermingled, all levels of Seattle," he said. "It's the first time I've seen that since I was here in the '80s. We had five food trucks, two bands, and I opened 100 library wines. It was raucous."

Plans are for the winery and tasting rooms to be open Wednesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Jet City is located at 1136 South Albro Place, Seattle, WA 98108.