

MY TOWN

What to Do in Seattle: Tips From the City's Wine Guru

TRAVEL | BY JONATHAN ZWICKEL | JULY 29, 2015 2:30 PM



Charles Smith Wines

As a four-prop plane drops low above his glistening new winery in Georgetown, the South Seattle neighborhood a mile from downtown and directly adjacent to Boeing Field, Charles Smith raises his voice above the noise. “It just landed 300 yards from where we’re standing!” he yells. Smith is Washington State’s fourth-largest wine producer; among his seven labels and dozens of varietals, a handful have received 100-point ratings from respected sources. But he’s best known as the wine guy of the people — dedicated to making accessible and affordable wines — and, increasingly, as a symbol of bohemia in a rapidly gentrifying city.

Smith, who’s officially “in his early 50s,” has a head of bouncy, silver Sideshow Bob hair and a standard uniform of a black T-shirt, jeans and slip-on Vans. He first arrived in Seattle from Sacramento in 1988 and blended naturally into the city’s dank rock ‘n’ roll vibe. Soon after, he followed a woman to Europe, where he managed a Danish rock band and traveled the continent on an epicurean shoestring before returning to the northwest, his sole assets a used Chevy Astro Van and a meager bank account. He brought both to Walla Walla, Wash., the seat of the Pacific Northwest’s burgeoning wine country, and bottled his first vintage — 330 cases of Walla Walla Valley Syrah — in 1999. Good Central Washington-grown fruit and savvy marketing led to almost instant success for K Vintners, his flagship label. This August, a short 16 years after

that initial bottle, he opens [Charles Smith Wines Jet City](#), a 32,000-square-foot, \$8 million production facility and tasting room inside a former Dr. Pepper bottling plant. By fall it will produce 45,000 cases a year, qualifying it as the West Coast's largest urban winery.

This weekend, the first-ever [Seattle Art Fair](#) takes over the nearby stadium district, an art-world spectacle funded primarily by local tech billionaire Paul Allen. Like most of Seattle, Smith is hopeful that visitors to the fair will see the city with new eyes — or, rather, that they'll recognize the city for what it's always been. “We're a cornucopia of things, and that's what makes our culture rich,” he says. Especially so in his beloved Georgetown, where he recommends a slew of his favorite places to eat and drink and things to do.



Red banquette seating and artfully framed placemats at Zippy's Burgers; a former brewery becomes a home for Fran's Chocolates

Zippy's Burgers: Zira Cook; Fran's Chocolates

EAT

Zippy's Burgers

“I go for the Zip Royale — a double cheeseburger, the best wax-paper-wrapped burger you can get — and a milkshake made with Full Tilt Ice Cream. Inside, it's small, it's rocking. Sit out on the sidewalk at a makeshift table and watch the world go by while you're eating tater tots.”

5633 Airport Way S, zippysgiantburgers.com

Fonda La Catrina

“You walk into Fonda and everyone in in the community is there, from workers from the design center to punk-rock girls with neck tattoos. It's a melting pot of the community bellying up to the bar, eating superior Mexican food — traditional,

elaborate — and drinking Mexican beers. I get a prawns à la diabla enchilada and their mezcal Tommy Scratch — a scratch margarita, but instead of tequila I have them put in mezcal. Del Maguey Vida — it's the least expensive and smokiest. Takes the margarita to another level. That's where I'm headed today."

5905 Airport Way S, fondalacatrina.com

Slim's Last Chance

"When it's time to play hooky in the middle of the afternoon, we head to Slim's. That's where we go to hide out. It's a chili shack with cool rockabilly girls working the bar, with sleeve tattoos. Cold beers, some chili cheese fries. They're all about the Texas chili, no beans. Pitchers of Roger's Pilsner, shots of mezcal is the recipe at Slim's. If we stay long enough, maybe there's a band coming onstage at night — rock 'n' roll or real-deal rockabilly swing."

5606 1st Avenue S, slimslastchance.com

Hitchcock Deli

"It's not a New York deli. It's a small sandwich place where you can get beers or bottles of wine and eat something wonderful made by someone right there. There is a God, right? Their pastrami is that good."

6003 12th Avenue S, hitchcockdeli.com

Fran's Chocolates

"The president of Fran's Chocolates set up her production and showroom here in Georgetown, in the old Rainier Malting Company, which was part of Rainier Brewery. You can go there and look through the window where they're making truffles. You walk in the door and they offer you a beautiful piece of chocolate. How cool is that?"

5900 Airport Way S, franschocolates.com

The Runaway Cafe

"I'm trying to find the appropriate words for the Runway Cafe — the bar in my parking lot. It's a real DIY bar. It's like, 'We opened a business, we threw in some tables and mismatched chairs, here we are.' When I started my winery, I had 15 barrels of wine. These people wanted to open a bar and that's what they did. You can get a beer there that's made less than a mile away. We don't drink local just to drink local; we drink local because it happens to be the best."

1128 S. Albro Place



The taproom at Georgetown Brewery. *Ingrid Bartels*

DRINK

Georgetown Brewery

“Georgetown Brewery makes the famous Manny’s Pale Ale and Roger’s Pilsner — that’s my drink. They have a taproom where you can try all their beers and get growlers to go. It turns out the same architect I worked with, Tom Kundig of Olson-Kundig Architects, built their brewery. They’re on the north end of Georgetown and I’m on the south end. So we’re bookended by alcoholic beverages.”

5200 Denver Avenue S, georgetownbeer.com

Cadence

“A little winery in the neighborhood of South Park, one of my favorite in the state. They’ve been making wine for almost most 20 years now, all Bordeaux varietals, Cabernet and Merlot, higher-end wines that are just delicious. Ben Smith is part of what used to be called the Boeing Wine Club. A lot of being people there were interested in wine, and he’s one of them — he was an engineer at Boeing. You can have more than one passion. That’s what makes the richness of life.”

9320 15th Ave. S, Unit CF, cadencewinery.com



Ganja Goddess, a retail store for cannabis, left, and an installation view of Woodside/Braseth Gallery.

DO

Ganja Goddess

“That’s my regular place. You walk in and you see everybody: housewives, Rastafarian guys with dreadlocks, college students, guys in suits, a winemaker, everybody. I’m not a big smoker, but the idea is that we have the personal freedom to do it if we want. Just because it’s legal doesn’t mean you have to partake. Just because cake is legal doesn’t mean you have to shovel a whole load in your face.”

3207 1st Avenue S, ganjagoddessseattle.com

Woodside/Braseth Gallery

“If there’s anybody that knows everything about Pacific Northwest art, it would be John Braseth. He’s the guy I first went to when I was learning about the classic painters from Washington — Guy Anderson, Richard Gilkey, Alden Mason — and those are the people I own pieces by in my house. I’ve been in Seattle so infrequently with living in Walla Walla that it’s all about discovery. I can discover Seattle all over again myself.”

1201 Western Avenue, Suite 105, woodsidebrasethgallery.com