

## Wine from Dungeness Valley-grown grapes a Nouveau hit

By Diane Urbani de la Paz, Peninsula Daily News

PORT ANGELES - You could say this is the taste of life in the Dungeness Valley.

It starts with citrus - grapefruit notes tickle the palate - and then the essence of pear slips across the tongue.

"The finish is very long and the fruit flavors stay in the mouth," say the tasting notes for Olympic Cellars' Vin Nouveau, the first commercial wine made from Dungeness Bay Vineyard grapes.

Olympic's Kathy Charlton and Libby Sweetser picked the fruit last September, under a Sequim sun.

Then Benoit Murat, Olympic's young French-born winemaker, turned it into 35 cases of white wine - and watched it sell fast.

Joy's Wine Bistro in Port Angeles put the Nouveau on the menu and, last Thursday night, ran out. Owner and chef Joy Siemion smiled as she recalled a conversation between one woman and her server.

"You know those [grapes] aren't really grown here," the woman said, apparently certain they came from eastern Washington, as does most fruit for wines made this side of the Cascades.

The server gently told her the truth: The Nouveau is a blend of Madeleine angevine and Madeleine sylvaner varietals raised in a vineyard on Hytime Lane, about seven miles from downtown Sequim.

"These are cool-weather grapes," said Charlton. "They don't ripen and have the sugar content that comes when really hot days happen. "So the wine is light and crisp, closer to a Sauvignon Blanc." Now the wine is growing rare. "We have about 10 cases left," Charlton said Friday.

That means 120 bottles are being divided between two outlets: the Olympic Cellars tasting room on U.S. Highway 101, and Joy's.

Charlton and Murat thought of waiting until spring to bottle the Dungeness blend. But "I was ready to go. I was excited," Charlton said.

"It's like we're tasting our own terroir," terroir denoting the special characteristics of geography that bestow individuality upon the wine.

Murat, who moved from Toulouse in the south of France in 2004, had a different response. "I was not very excited, but I said, 'OK, let's do it.' Then I tasted it." To his surprise, "it's really good. I really like it."

As an experiment, he and Charlton are preparing to establish their own vineyard of Madeleines outside their winery. They hope to take cuttings from Bainbridge Island Vineyards for a planting in March, which happens to be Washington Wine Month.

It could be a sight foreshadowing the Peninsula's agricultural future: the winery in what was once a dairy barn, with grapevines out front.

"It'll be four years before we see our first cluster," Charlton acknowledged.



Benoit Murat, winemaker for Olympic Cellars, displays a bottle of 2006 Le Vin Nouveau at Joy's Wine Bistro in Port Angeles on Saturday. (Photo by Keith Thorpe/Peninsula Daily News)