



## WINE IN THE SPOTLIGHT: EFESTÉ 2009 LOLA CHARDONNAY

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In a remarkably brief period of time, EFESTÉ's Brennon Leighton has leaped to the forefront of Washington winemakers. Granted, he'd completed four years of study at UC Davis, and apprenticed for some time at Chateau Ste. Michelle, working with the exceptionally talented Erik Olsen and his successor, Bob Bertheau, on Eroica and the Horse Heaven Hills sauvignon blancs.

But the first vintage of EFESTÉ wines—2005—was released just three years ago, and it was not until the vintage of 2007 that Leighton was solely in charge of the winemaking. Yet with each new vintage has come acclaim—and case production has grown. And I am confident that there is no one making better white wines here than Leighton, and few that can match him. His selection of vineyards, his pinpoint picking decisions, his lovely, delicate touch at every step of the way, coaxes extraordinarily expressive aromas out of his wines, both whites and reds.

But the Wine in the Spotlight is his (just released?) EFESTÉ 2009 Lola Chardonnay. When he poured its predecessor at a meeting in Waitsburg last summer, he noted that the 2008 was his first chardonnay, and the first year where almost everything at the winery was done with indigenous yeast and native malolactic fermentation. Only 105 cases were made of that wine, which I scored as a 92 and wrote that it was "truly done in a Burgundian style, with bracing minerality and sweet, liquorous oak and apple cider flavors. The tangy fruit mixes fresh lemon and orange juice, pineapple and candied rind."

It must have sold out quickly, because here comes the 2009, sourced entirely from the Evergreen vineyard, and the equal of (though not the same as) the astonishing 2009 from Woodward Canyon (previously noted in this blog). Leighton's Lola is the sort of wine that makes you rethink domestic chardonnay entirely—it is light years beyond the dull, apple-flavored juice, sometimes slathered in new oak, that generally typifies the category.

From California I can think only of Peter Michael and Kongsgaard (in my experience) as comparables, and they cost at least three times as much. When first opened, the 2009 Lola had me immediately gushing: "This is as good as the best from California—textural, creamy, a delicious mix of lemon custard, meringue, caramel, papaya and toasted coconut. At one third the price of comparable bottles, this young wine just seduces from the instant it hits the tongue." Over the course

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of dinner (salmon and sautéed spinach) and a couple of hours, the wine expanded dramatically, becoming a vinous "candy in a glass"—not sweet, but supremely succulent and satisfying.

The only downside is that the Lola chardonnay, along with EFESTÉ's Babbitt rosé, Tough Guy merlot, Eleni syrah and Emmy (a Rhône blend); are all sold exclusively through the wine club.

On a number of occasions over the years, I've urged readers to sign up for specific wine clubs before the gates closed. Among them were Abeja, Betz, and Cayuse—all now with long waiting lists. I suggest you join the EFESTÉ Inner Circle wine club while you still can.



Efesté winemaker Brennon Leighton