

the next chapter

BOOKWALTER WINERY is a destination
for memorable *wines, conversation*
and *entertainment*, and a place
where good stories are born

WRITER *Kirsten Telander*

Visitors enjoy soothing
vibes from a jazz quartet
while sipping on
J. Bookwalter wines at
the winery and lounge in
Richland, WA.



Pergolas, English-style gardens and floral-lined brick paths connect indoor and outdoor spaces.

The man behind J. Bookwalter wines is an avid reader, music host, part philosopher and marketer...did I mention winemaker?

As if his “full time and a half job” running Bookwalter Winery wasn’t enough, winemaker and entrepreneur John Bookwalter opened what is known as Washington state’s first wine lounge in October of 2003 and never looked back. The Richland tasting room lounge became an instant hit and has expanded into a series of rooms conducive to gathering, including intimate outdoor spaces on the winery’s ten-acre grounds that inspire escape amidst the urban sprawl nearby.

Bookwalter and I talked while sitting in comfy, clubby chairs in what used to be a banquet room with avocado colored carpet and off-green walls. Now the space could serve as a relaxed set for a Pottery Barn shoot; treated concrete floors in rich, dark amber, warm ochre walls, and burgundy velvet curtains set the stage for relaxation and conversation.

We were surrounded by groups gathering over wine and small plates of artisan cheeses, meats and olives. In fact, the lounge concept originated from the growing coffee house movement across the country, primarily in the Northwest. “I saw people gathering around coffee—they were buying it to just sit and hang out,” said Bookwalter. “So I figured it made sense that wine, being that same centerpiece of conversation, could bring people together. They come here to get caught up and shoot the breeze.”

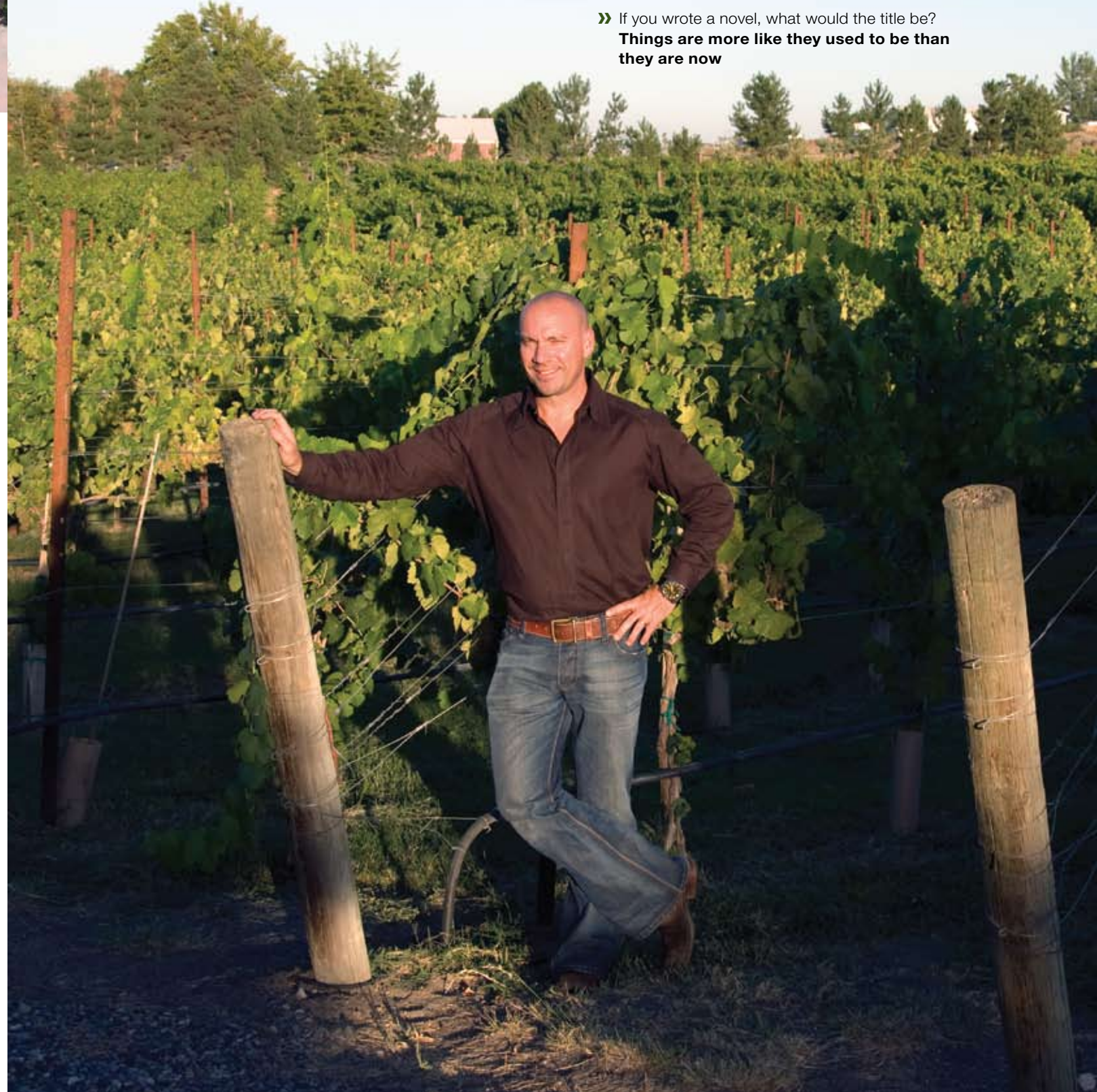
Like any good winemaker, Bookwalter surrounded himself early on with some of the brainiacs in the business, first with Zelma Long. Long became one of California’s wine pioneers after a tenure at Mondavi in the 70’s, followed by Simi, and her own Zelphi Winery.

“I was so fortunate because Zelma was the first true winemaker I got to work with outside of my father. Temperamentally, she was sound and detail-oriented, which is what’s required. A lot of people think that winemaking is this high-falutin’ super art form—and it can be, but in the beginning it’s about fundamental hygiene, blocking and tackling. You can’t run around the end until you just learn how to block,” says Bookwalter, who is often quoted using football analogies.

More recently, he has partnered with a Frenchman, Claude Gros, whom he met while Gros was in the states as the consulting winemaker on the Sea Smoke »

getting to know JOHN BOOKWALTER

- » Favorite fiction character? **Speed Racer**
- » Top three writers? **James Michener, Michael Shaara, Bryce Courtenay**
- » Favorite vacation spot? **anywhere in Mexico**
- » Which person do you most admire? **my parents**
- » What is your greatest luxury? **reading and exercise**
- » Favorite meal? **barbecue with friends**
- » What does your “happy place” look like? **sun, sand, beer**
- » Greatest fear? **failure**
- » Quirkiest trait? **my twisted sense of humor**
- » Most treasured possession? **my Chevy 3500 diesel truck (I know, I'm a redneck at heart)**
- » Music on your ipod? **Club/Trance, Kings of Leon, Thievery Corporation**
- » Big break? **still waiting for it**
- » Best advice received? **your first loss is your least loss**
- » Wine release you are most proud of? **Chapter wines**
- » If you wrote a novel, what would the title be? **Things are more like they used to be than they are now**



IN RICHLAND
Bookwalter Winery Tasting Room & Wine Lounge
Getting There Queensgate Rd. exit off Interstate 182, Richland, WA
Winter Hours Sun. 12-6pm, Mon. & Tues. 12-8pm, Wed. to Sat. 11-10pm.
 (Hours extended in Spring, Summer & Fall)
Live Music Wed. to Sat. evenings, all year
Food Pairings Regional artisan cheeses, meats, olives
Contact 509-627-5000
www.bookwalterwines.com

IN WOODINVILLE
J. Bookwalter Tasting Studio
Getting There 14810 NE 145th St., Woodinville WA (Enter via the Hollywood Schoolhouse parking lot)
Hours Sun.-Thur. 12-5pm, Fri. & Sat. 11-6pm
Contact 425-488-1983
www.bookwalterwines.com



ABOVE Several acres of vineyards blend harmoniously into the flower gardens spread around the winery.



RIGHT The tasting room interior is a patchwork of fun, intimate spaces.



ABOVE Woodinville's tasting studio is home to an eclectic collection of antiques, including these circa 1925 gasoline pumps.

LEFT Nick James, manager of J. Bookwalter Tasting Studio in Woodinville, pours for Maile Taketa.

project in California. “We met and I thought, this guy’s a rock star. I liked what he had to say about the wines and what he thought he could accomplish with us.”

Specifically, Gros thought he could freshen up the wines, brighten them up. “I agreed, and how did we accomplish that? It’s all in the winemaking and barrel selection. It’s a little bit of everything. For us to remove one element is not easy. It’s the complete process and how you manage the vineyards,” says Bookwalter. “Claude is very much a contrarian in the sense that he’s not a big fan of old world wines. He’s a fan of high quality wines wherever they come from, and that quality comes from very strict management of the vineyard, very honed techniques in your winery and aging your wines in a proper cooperage.”

One of Bookwalter’s secret weapon fruit sources is Conner Lee vineyard. “Conner Lee is a huge part of what we do because that’s a vineyard my dad has managed for 25 years. It’s turned out to be one of the most exceptional vineyards we work with,” says Bookwalter, who also uses Ciel du Cheval, Klipsun, and Dionysis vineyards as his showcase fruit.

Tasting room guests this winter will be treated to the release of the 2007 vintages. “In our cellar, 2007 is the vintage of the decade,” says Bookwalter. “It’s the complete package. Ripe but not overripe, the tannins are fine grained, balanced. For us, we worked vigilantly with different tool sets in the winery and it was a collision of a good vintage and better winemaking.”

While sampling the fruits of ’07, you can enjoy live music. The winery hosts entertainment four nights a week. “It’s very casual, there’s no pretentiousness here,” says Bookwalter, referring to the lounge atmosphere. The winery is open a whopping 362 days a year.

When asked about his reputation as an advocate for Washington wine, Bookwalter mentions first his involvement with the Washington Wine Institute, which is the political advocacy group for the state’s wine industry. “I quickly became their vice chair and then I decided that because I’m more of a marketing guy, I could lend a little more value to the other side—the Washington Wine Commission, which is more marketing driven. I was elected five years ago and this year I am the chair of the commission. So maybe that’s why I have the reputation,” he says laughing.

“My corporate background began at Gallo. The first thing they teach you is that the rising tide raises all ships, meaning that if you have a category that’s undeveloped and you want to grow it, you’re going to have to grow the category

in order to grow your wines. To me, Washington state is a category,” Bookwalter explains.

When asked about future goals for the winery, Bookwalter says while laughing, “Like any winemaker right now, sell all the wine you make.” Part of his success has been making outstanding quality wine at a reasonable price point.

In earnest, he adds, “When you think of the top five percent of Washington wine producers, I would certainly like to be part of that conversation. I’m not saying we’re there—we’ve made every mistake in the book and we’ll make more I’m sure, but long term, my goal is to be part of that conversation.”

Somehow, I suspect that John Bookwalter and his wines are already the topic of more conversations than he knows. But I’ll leave that for the next chapter.

A JUICY STORY INSIDE EVERY BOTTLE

Be sure to taste J. Bookwalter’s upper end blends, which are the Protagonist, Conflict, and Chapter 3. I got a sneak peak at the 2007 Foreshadow Merlot, which lives up to the definition, “Suggesting, hinting, indicating or showing what will occur later...”, and it’s already showing well.

2007 FORESHADOW MERLOT

Foreshadowing are hints of what is yet to come. Prepare yourself, reader, for an exciting odyssey as the deeply concentrated fruit from this showcase Merlot unfolds with age.

Tasting Notes: Baker’s chocolate, black cherries, cola and anise abound. **\$36**

2006 PROTAGONIST RED MOUNTAIN BLEND

The protagonist is the leading character in a fictional text and this Merlot-based blend is worth rooting for. **Tasting Notes:** Dried figs, plums and chocolate-covered cherries followed by a toasty, signature Red Mountain earthy minerality and long finish. **\$50**

2007 CONNER-LEE VINEYARD CONFLICT

No story is complete without a conflict between man, nature or self. This single vineyard blend promises to resolve all conflicts! **Tasting Notes:** Cola, black olive, spice, plum, and black cherries dominate the nose and palate followed by a velvety, silky finish. **\$50**

2007 CHAPTER 3

Each chapter brings us further along in the plot, and it’s tough to pry Chapter 3 out of your hands. **Tasting Notes:** Blended from their finest vineyards, it’s easy to see why the 2007 vintage is being hailed as near perfect. Blackberry jam, lavender, anise, black currants and subtle graphite hints are followed by a finish that seems to last for eternity. **\$78** 🍷

STAY IN TOWN

Hampton Inn Richland

Excellent location on the scenic riverfront trail.
486 Bradley Blvd., Richland
Ph: 509-943-4400
www.hamptoninn.com

Red Lion Hotel Richland Hanford House

Also located right on the Columbia River.
802 George Washington Way, Richland
Ph: 509-946-7611
www.redlion.rdln.com

DINE IN TOWN

Katya's Bistro and Wine Bar

Romantic dining and a superb local wine menu.
430 George Washington Way, Richland (next to Hampton Inn)
Ph: 509-946-7777
www.katyasbistro.com

Monterosso's Italian Restaurant

Italian classics and local wines in a vintage train car.
1026 Lee Blvd., Richland
Ph: 509-946-4525