

## Wines and Wine Producers of the Year, 2006

By Michael Franz  
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I recently asked all of our regular contributors to send me their selections for the wines and producers they most admire based on their experiences during 2006.

You'll find some fascinating choices and rationales in the paragraphs that follow, but first I should indicate just a bit more about what each writer was asked to provide.

The first entry under each contributor's name identifies the writer's Producer of the Year, which may be bestowed upon an entire winery or a particular winemaker. The option to go with either an especially admirable winery or a particular winemaker recognizes the fact that winemaking is both a collaborative endeavor involving many hands and an individual expression of personal artistry.

### **Patrick Comiskey's Producer of the Year: Pepper Bridge Winery**

Winemaker: Jean-François Pellet  
Managing Partner: Norm McKibben

Pepper Bridge, the vineyard, lies in the heart of the Walla Walla Valley, on a ridge above an ancient swath of the Walla Walla River. It was developed by the region's patriarch, Norm McKibben, who knew it was a good piece of land for the quality apples that had grown there years ago. In this past year the vineyard's fruit has been an integral part of dozens of wines — great wines, like L'Ecole No. 41's "Apogee" and Reininger's impressive red blends. But this was the year where, critically, Pepper Bridge the winery came into high acclaim. Winemaker Jean-François Pellet says it took him a half-dozen years just to get his head around the region, but there's no question he has, crafting Cabernets, Merlots and blends of incredible complexity, elegance and power, and practically defining Walla Walla character in the process.