

Wine Spectator

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WASHINGTON STAR POWER: **KYLE MACLACHLAN**

The haze over Walla Walla Valley hangs thick in the air on an August afternoon as the dashboard thermometer approaches 107° F. As he drives along country roads, passing vineyards and fallow wheat fields, Kyle MacLachlan has one thing on his mind: coffee.

The irony of this is not lost on MacLachlan. Coffee was the favorite beverage of his iconic *Twin Peaks* character, Agent Dale Cooper, and after tasting wine for most of the day, MacLachlan is in need of a cup. For the record, he likes it black, just like Cooper. His other drink of choice, of course, is wine. For the actor—whose best-known work, covering both TV and film, also includes *Desperate Housewives*, *Portlandia*, *Sex and the City*, *Blue Velvet* and the original *Dune*—wine started as a hobby but grew into his own



Kyle MacLachlan (center) in the 1960s, with brothers Craig and Kent Jr.

BY **TIM FISH**

Known for Twin Peaks and Desperate Housewives, the Yakima native takes wine as seriously as acting

Washington label, Pursued By Bear. MacLachlan takes the wine business as seriously as he does acting.

“I’ve seen these celebrity wines come and go, but Kyle is the real deal,” Napa Valley winemaker Doug Shafer says of his friend. “It’s not like he’s slapping his name on it, not just lending his name. He’s into it. He knows wine and loves wine.”

The wines MacLachlan makes prove the point. Pursued By Bear consistently receives outstanding scores of 90 points or higher on *Wine Spectator*’s 100-point scale, led by the winery’s flagship bottling, the Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley, which debuted with the 2005 vintage. Bear Cub is a value-oriented Cabernet-Merlot blend, while Blushing Bear is a dry rosé made with Grenache and Mourvèdre from Walla Walla. There are two limited-production wines: Twin Bear Walla Walla Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and Twin Bear Columbia Valley Chardonnay.

MacLachlan’s signature on the back label is the only way consumers know he’s involved in Pursued By Bear. “If the wine can’t stand on its own, what’s the point of doing it?” he says. That comment explains a lot about how MacLachlan approaches wine and life. Napa vintner Ann Colgin, who has known him since 1998, puts it this way: “His bottlings are a true reflection of his theatrical background and



MacLachlan brings the same passion and commitment to his winery, Pursued By Bear, as he does to his acting roles.

Photograph by
RICHARD DUVAL

his desire to create something really good.”

For a celebrity vintner, MacLachlan is indeed hands on. Not only is he involved in selecting vineyards and oak barrels, as well as establishing his preferred style of wines, but also he regularly tastes and tweaks blends in partnership with winemakers Daniel Wampfler and Amy Alvarez-Wampfler.

Wampfler tells a recent story that speaks to MacLachlan’s devotion. After making a design change to their label, the two of them traveled to the printer in Portland to supervise the press check. “Kyle was looking through the magnifying glass, checking colors and making sure everything was perfect,” Wampfler says. “The printer said they had done a lot of celebrities’ projects, but he was the first to ever show up.” MacLachlan laughs, adding, “Well, being the mayor of Portland, it was important I was there”—a reference to his role as the zany mayor in the TV series *Portlandia*.

MacLachlan admits that he is meticulous, or, as he says with jest, anal retentive. “I think it’s important to get everything just right. You’re creating something personal, and you’re sharing it with people and want them to have a good experience, and that includes all the little bits and pieces that go into it, like the glass and labeling. Even the tasting room—I want them to feel like they’re in a friendly place that has a little bit of my personality, a little fun.”

The Pursued By Bear tasting room opened in 2023 in Walla Walla, just off Main Street, where more than a dozen other wineries pour for consumers. The wines are made a few miles away at Abeja Winery, where the Wampflers are also the winemakers. Indeed, MacLachlan’s tasting room is tongue in cheek: A 6-foot-tall bronze statue of a bear stands against a mural of misty pine trees, a *Twin Peaks* allusion that was both intentional and intentionally subtle.

“I knew I had to acknowledge what is perhaps the most iconic thing I’ve done,” MacLachlan says.

The story behind the bear is more intricate. “When we started, I said, ‘No, this is not going to be a wine with my name on it.’”

In a 2008 interview with *Wine Spectator*, MacLachlan explained how the name for Pursued By Bear came about. He was having dinner with a group of friends that included Steve Martin, who suggested the name should be a reference to acting. “And something popped into my head. There’s this wonderful Shakespearean stage direction: ‘Exit, pursued by a bear,’ from *The Winter’s Tale*, and Steve said, ‘That’s it!’ The only problem is that I have to tell the backstory a lot.”

Kyle Merritt MacLachlan was born in Yakima, Wash., in 1959. His father, Kent, was a lawyer turned stockbroker, and his mother, Catherine, worked for the local school district. Two younger brothers, Craig and Kent Jr., completed the family. “Dad practiced law for a couple of years, hated it, and became a stockbroker, which allowed him to play golf in the afternoons. It suited his lifestyle,” says MacLachlan, who picked up his golf habit from him.

The MacLachlan boys spent the summers helping their father tend the apple trees, vegetables and flowers in the family’s backyard. “We were free labor,” he jokes. “No, actually, we all loved it, so farming was already in my blood.”

The Washington wine industry was just establishing itself in the late 1970s, so MacLachlan’s parents drank Paul Masson or Budweiser. When his friends in high school were chugging beer, MacLachlan discovered wine through a girlfriend’s family. “They had proper sit-down dinners, and we were allowed one glass of wine,” he recalls. “And it was great, because wine for me started with food. It was a California Chardonnay. I remember feeling so grown up.”

He continued the tradition on dates with his girlfriend, convincing someone of age to buy them a bottle—typically Blue Nun, an inexpensive and slightly sweet white that was popular at the time. “That’s all we could afford,” he says. “We would do a picnic. It was very romantic and in a cemetery.” He smiles wryly. “But it was a very beautiful cemetery, and, more importantly, there was a little area in the back surrounded by trees that was quite private. You can, well, imagine the rest.”

MacLachlan went on to study acting at the University of Washington, graduating in 1982, and in the meantime took roles at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and at other regional theaters. He was performing in a production of Molière’s *Tartuffe* in Seattle when

a casting agent tapped him to play Paul Atrides, the hero of director David Lynch’s 1984 adaptation of *Dune*.

Although the movie was a disappointment at the box office, it launched MacLachlan’s career and began a collaboration with Lynch that included movies, TV and wine. In 1983, after MacLachlan screen-tested for *Dune*, Lynch sent a bottle of Lynch Bages to his hotel room. “It must have been a 1980 or 1979. The Kyle today would recall but the Kyle back then was clueless.”

Not only do Lynch and MacLachlan still exchange bottles of Lynch Bages on occasion, but it set the path for the actor’s love of



Paul Atrides in *Dune* (1984)



Agent Dale Cooper in *Twin Peaks* (1990)

“One of the things I have always been impressed about Kyle is his humbleness. He’s Eastern Washington through and through.”

—Chris Figgins

wine. Throughout the 1990s, he explored the wines of the world and developed a particular passion for Cabernet Sauvignon. Living in Los Angeles, he gravitated toward Napa Valley in the late 1990s, where he met Colgin and Mark Aubert, her winemaker at the time, who were working out of a custom-crush facility.

“That was my first inkling about the possibility of one day making wine on my own,” MacLachlan says. “I realized you don’t need a winery. You don’t need a forklift or even to own the land. And it started to percolate.” Yet the cost of making wine in Napa was prohibitive even then. It was MacLachlan’s wife, producer Desiree Gruber, who pointed him back to his native state. “Napa’s not the story,” she told him. “The story is Washington.” A chance meeting with vintner Eric Dunham set the wheels in motion.

Together they launched Pursued By Bear with a 2005 Cabernet, producing 300 cases at Dunham’s winery from his own vineyard sources. MacLachlan, who is accustomed to reading reviews about his movies and TV shows, recalls the excitement of reading the first review of his wine, a 91-point rating from Harvey Steiman, who was covering Washington for *Wine Spectator* at the time. “It was like, ‘Wow, we’re real. Now we’re in the game.’ And I haven’t really looked back.”

In the early days, MacLachlan let Dunham handle most of the

working details of the business, but that changed when Dunham died unexpectedly in 2014. Wampfler, who was Dunham’s winemaker at the time, ensured that winemaking would remain consistent, but MacLachlan knew he had to step up. “I became more and more the master of my own destiny,” he says. “I started paying more attention to vineyard sites and looking at new vineyard sources. It was time to sail my own ship.”

MacLachlan splits his time between Los Angeles and New York but connects with his winemakers every few days and visits Walla Walla frequently. During the recent actors’ strike, he was able to focus on the winery and spend more time with Desiree and their teen son, Callum, who’s an avid surfer.

He continually seeks new challenges in wine. An estate vineyard is a possibility, and his goal is to plant in the increasingly coveted Mill Creek area of Walla Walla. Pursued By Bear Chardonnay was launched with the 2022 vintage, and new vineyard sources will soon make it a Yakima Valley bottling. A Merlot is also on the way. “I never thought I’d ever have this many wines,” he says.

Yakima bred, MacLachlan feels at home in Walla Walla, and Washington’s wine community has embraced him. “One of the things I have always been impressed about Kyle is his humbleness,” says Leonetti winemaker Chris Figgins. “He’s Eastern Washington through and through and a valuable member of our Walla Walla wine community.” As Wampfler puts it, “If you didn’t know what he did for a living in Hollywood, you could never tell.”

For his part, MacLachlan enjoys his life as a vintner, whether pouring at tastings, visiting sommeliers during his travels or attending events, including the Auction of Washington Wines this past August. “You become part of a group, you know, we’re here together. I talk to other winemakers, and this is about raising the bar for everyone in Washington state.” □



MacLachlan with winemakers Daniel Wampfler and Amy Alvarez-Wampfler