



Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report[®]

Opinionated reviews by a writer who travels incognito and always pays his own way

Touring the Exquisite Dalmatian Coast of Croatia



UNLIKE THE HEAVILY URBANIZED French Riviera or overbuilt stretches of the Spanish and Italian shorelines, Croatia's Dalmatian coast remains remarkably unchanged. Bone-white mountains rear dramatically above

the Adriatic, an expanse of cobalt blue bordered by aromatic shrubs and dotted with more than 1,000 islands. Here, you can rediscover the Mediterranean world of 50 years ago.

In addition to this stirring scenery, the long history of the region (Dalmatia was originally a Roman province) has endowed it with two of the most intriguing cities in Europe, Split and Dubrovnik, both of which are UNESCO

World Heritage sites. In the Middle Ages, Dubrovnik was a city-state of sufficient wealth and influence to rival Venice. And today, it remains a magical place, with an extraordinarily picturesque walled city (intact despite the best efforts of Serb gunners during the Balkan upheavals of the early 1990s). Split grew up around the palace that the Roman Emperor Diocletian built at the water's edge in A.D. 300, and its enchanting old town contains many impressive Italianate Belle Epoque buildings.

Until recently, the absence of charming and comfortable places to stay meant that the only agreeable way to visit the Dalmatian coast was by boat. (To find out more about chartered yachts in the Adriatic, contact an Andrew Harper travel specialist at (800) 375-4685.) Many visitors will still wish to spend parts of their vacations afloat, but a new crop of luxury hotels provides a fine choice of pre- or post-cruise options. A spell on land also makes it easy to take escorted tours to places such as the exquisite medieval town of Mostar in Bosnia. (We advise against attempting such trips on your own, as the roads are often narrow and driving conditions thoroughly unfamiliar.)

An ideal itinerary would contain a mixture of sight-seeing and pure relaxation. Split and Dubrovnik are

IN THIS ISSUE

1-5 Croatia: Alluring New Hotels and Resorts

The Pucić Palace *Dubrovnik*
Dubrovnik Palace Hotel *Dubrovnik*
Vestibul Palace Hotel *Split*
Le Méridien Lav *Split*
Hotel Adriana *Hvar*
The Regent Esplanade *Zagreb*

6 Tranquil Retreats in Washington's Wine Country

The Inn at Abeja *Walla Walla*
Cave B Inn at SageCliffe *Quincy*

7 Walla Walla Wineries and Restaurants

8 What's Hot, What's Not

and the triumphant refurbishment of Bordeaux's Grand Hotel

Two Havens of Rural Tranquility

Charming Inns in Washington's Thriving Wine Country

ON ONE SIDE OF A TWO-LANE ROAD near Walla Walla, a weathered barn sits at the edge of wheat fields that sprawl for miles across gently rolling hills. Directly across the road, amid 35 acres of manicured lawns, trim gardens and estate vineyards, is Abeja (Spanish for “bee”), a handsomely restored century-old farmstead. Its stately barns and outbuildings now accommodate an excellent winery, an impressive tasting room and five charming guest quarters.

Around Walla Walla in southeastern Washington, the convergence of wheat fields and vineyards illustrates the dramatic changes of the last decade as this agricultural town of 30,000 has transformed itself into an appealing and rewarding wine destination, with more than 100 wineries and a surprising number of excellent restaurants. Wine has become a very big deal in Walla Walla, as in all of Washington state, which in the United States is second only to California in production and the number of wineries. Admittedly, it is a distant second, but Washington produces some excellent wines, and a good number come from this likeable community in the foothills of the Blue Mountains, just across the border from Oregon.

The Inn at Abeja

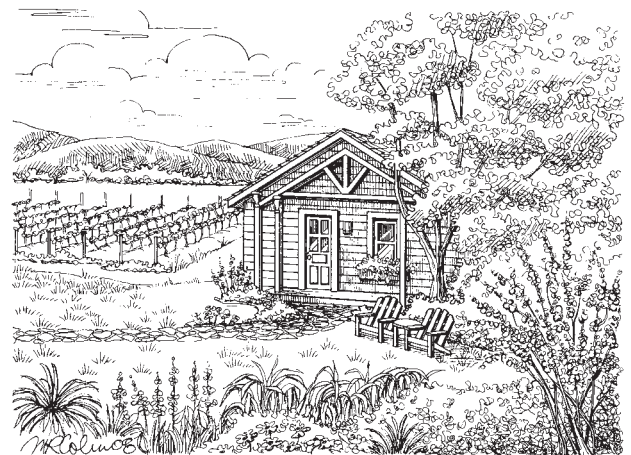
THE WINERY AND THE PICTURESQUE Inn at Abeja are the vision of Ken and Ginger Harrison, who purchased the property in 2000, founded the winery and completed the restoration work begun by a previous owner. The couple occupies the original farmhouse at the end of a gated drive that is flanked by red maples and stone walls. The guest lodgings and impressive barns are set around a broad expanse of flower-bordered lawn. The larger of two barns once stabled scores of horses and mules that pulled the early farm equipment; it has been immaculately converted into the estate's winery. The other, once the dairy barn, now contains a large, open tasting room with stone-tiled floors, rugged beams, a river-rock fireplace, leather couches and at its center, an antique Irish wake table.

The inn's five suites occupy the rest of the original outbuildings, aptly named and imaginatively appointed to preserve the farm's past. The “Carriage House Suite”

and “Locust Suite,” at opposite ends of the old carriage barn, and the “Summer Kitchen Cottage,” next to the farmhouse, are the largest, each containing a bedroom with king bed, snug bath, separate living area, modern kitchen and private terrace. The smaller “Chicken House Cottage” and “Bunk House Cottage” have queen beds and cozy charm. Individually decorated rooms retain features of the original structures, such as the Locust Suite's wood-paneled walls that reveal penciled maintenance records for the early-day machinery. Furnishings and bric-a-brac reflect farm life: an antique wicker settee and rocking chair, comfy couches, homespun lamps and tables, rag rugs, hand-tinted photographs. An old armoire conceals the satellite TV and VCR. On the sitting room table are binoculars and the *Field Guide to Western Birds*.

Behind the carriage barn, a grassy, iris-edged path slants down a lavender-covered slope to a creekside glade where you can listen to the sounds of mourning doves and hummingbirds and the breeze rustling the black locust trees. The rural setting invites leisurely walks along quiet roadsides that trace straight lines through endless wheat fields to the north, or that climb the patchwork of hills to the south and offer ever-widening panoramas.

Abeja's relaxed hospitality starts with a glass of the estate's excellent Cabernet Sauvignon, offered when you check in at the rustic reception area/office that's tucked into the carriage house, behind sliding barn doors. The small staff functions efficiently, but mostly unseen. The only activity offered on site is a leisurely wine tasting, by appointment. The inn has no restaurant, but a hearty breakfast is provided in the tasting room by amiable manager Tom Olander, who, when asked, will share his insider knowledge of the local winery/dining scene.



The “Bunk House Cottage” borders a Viognier vineyard

This haven of tranquility is usually booked far in advance, and reservations for special weekends are assigned by lottery. 🍷 87

Locust Suite or Carriage House Suite, \$285 Friday-Sunday and \$265 Monday and Thursday. Closed mid-December through February and Tuesday-Wednesday. Tel. (509) 522-1234. Email: reservations@abeja.net

Cave B Inn at SageCliffe



ABOUT THREE HOURS AWAY by car through central Washington's Columbia Valley, the Cave B Inn at SageCliffe overlooks a windswept landscape of sagebrush and rugged basalt cliffs rising from the Columbia River 900 feet below. Built along the crest of a sunbaked bluff, the resort is at the center of a 120-acre vineyard

established by Dr. Vince Bryan, a retired neurosurgeon, and his wife, Carol, who bought the property in 1980, intent on growing wine grapes. The resort took shape later, opening in June 2005.

The preferred lodgings are the 15 stand-alone "Cliffhouses," all with floor-to-ceiling windows that provide sunset panoramas across the river and the craggy ridges beyond. The décor features high, arched ceilings, exposed beams and hardwood floors. A two-way fireplace of native stone divides the sleeping area with a king bed from a living room furnished with a leather couch, club chairs, writing desk and copper-topped occasional tables. Glass doors open onto an arbor-covered private terrace. Sleek granite-and-slate baths include roomy whirlpool tubs and separate glass-enclosed showers. The resort also offers 12 smaller "Cavern Rooms," and, in the imposing main lodge, three "Inn Suites."

The lodge contains a soaring lobby with a 30-foot-high stone fireplace and a spectacular chandelier of iron and blown glass. Just off the lobby are a handsome bar and a fine restaurant, *Tendrils*, which serves delicious, simply prepared dishes inspired by local ingredients, many from the resort's own organic gardens. The wine list includes only the estate's wines, but a sensible corkage policy lets diners enjoy their own selections.

A heated outdoor pool tucked into a natural niche below the Cliffhouses offers food and beverage service, and up the hill, set among the vines, is a compact spa with four treatment rooms. 🍷 86

One-bedroom Cliffhouse, from \$295, depending on time of year. Tel. (888) 785-2283 or (509) 785-2283. Email: info@cavebinn.com

Walla Walla Wineries and Restaurants

EVEN THE LOCALS HAVE A HARD TIME keeping up with Walla Walla's fast-changing wine and dining scene. However, people here seem to enjoy the buzz and are generally eager to offer informed suggestions.

Some top-name wineries, such as Leonetti and Cayuse, are not officially open to the public, but most welcome visitors. Nearly all are within 15 miles of town. A dozen tasting rooms are tucked among old-time businesses in the attractive downtown. And at least 15 small wineries are clustered at the airport in renovated Army barracks. Among wines we enjoyed are these:

Woodward Canyon, founded in 1981, is one of the pioneering wineries in the area, and one of the most reliable, known for its full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignons and Merlots. Located 13 miles west of Walla Walla in an 1870s farmhouse. Open daily 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Nearby, in a 1915 schoolhouse, is **L'Ecole No. 41**, another established producer, offering a fine Columbia Valley Semillon.

East of town at 225 Vineyard Lane, off Mill Creek Road, **Walla Walla Vintners** produces superb Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Sangiovese. Open Saturdays 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. or by appointment.

At the airport, in a World War II-era airplane hangar, **Dunham Cellars**, 150 E. Boeing Avenue, offers elegant Syrah and Merlot. Open daily from 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Downtown, newcomer **Bergevin Lane Vineyards** is just off the beaten path at 1215 W. Poplar Street, with several worthy reds. Open 11 a.m.-4 p.m. or by appointment. **Forgeron Cellars**, 33 W. Birch Street, makes a rich Chardonnay, as well as premium reds. Open daily 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

The Walla Walla area is uncommonly blessed with fresh produce and a cadre of gifted chefs. On our visit, the brightest star was unquestionably the year-old **Saffron Mediterranean Kitchen** (125 W. Alder Street), a little gem filled with convivial diners exclaiming about the marvelous flavors created by chef/proprietor Chris Ainsworth. The gazpacho ajo blanco, served with a slowly melting ball of Tempranillo sorbet, was world-class.

Whitehouse-Crawford (55 W. Cherry Street), set in a former furniture factory, opened in 2000 and quickly established a reputation for creative use of regional products and a fine selection of Walla Walla wines.

In addition, locals favor **CreekTown Café** (1129 S. Second Avenue), with its cozy neighborhood feel, Northwest cuisine and dynamite desserts.