

Seattle Business

INSPIRE + INNOVATE + CREATE

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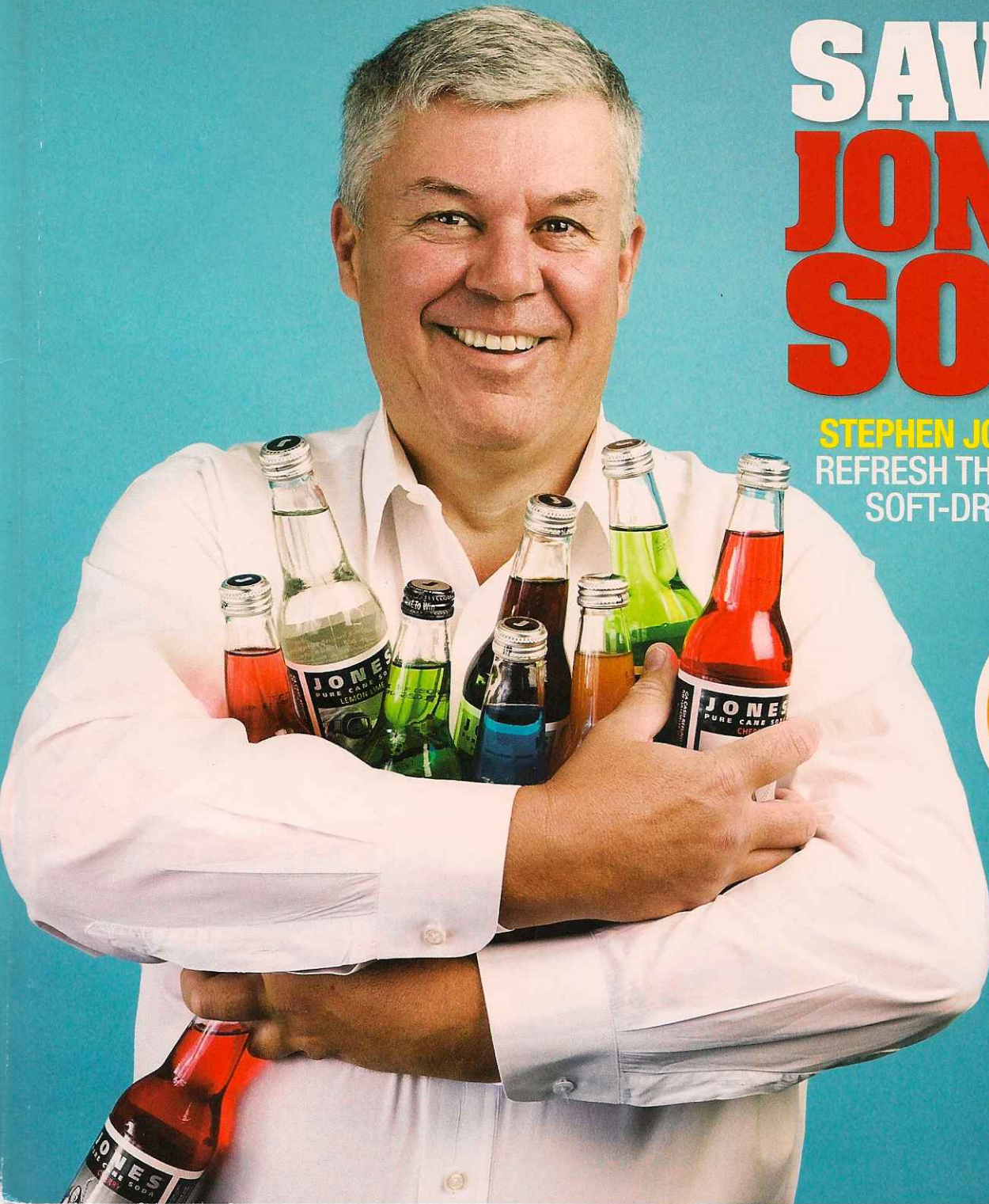
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spotlight

A Wine Lover's Best Kept Secret



DON'T BE SURPRISED if you haven't heard of **Garagiste** (garagistewine.com). The online wine retailer hasn't invested a single dime in advertising, relying solely on word-of-mouth referrals and an e-mail distribution list for marketing its handpicked selection of artisan wines.

Nevertheless, each month the company sells nearly 40,000 bottles to enthusiasts and collectors across the country, making it one of the largest wine retailers in Washington state.

Operating from an inconspicuously marked warehouse in Seattle's SoDo district, Garagiste was started in 1999 by Jon Rimmerman, a credentialed lawyer working in the food and beverage industry. His idea was to offer wines that "veer toward a road less traveled," featuring bottles from small vineyards worldwide that bring a sense of local identity to the table.

The company's name pays homage to the *garagistes*, a group of innovative winemakers in France's Bourdeaux region, who broke with tradition in the 1990s to produce unconventional *vins de garage*, or "garage wines."

Without a single pouring, customers depend on Rimmerman's acute taste buds and conversational description of each bottle offering, which occurs up to three times a day for subscribers on Garagiste's free e-mail list.

"We want [customers] to experience something different," adds Pat Malloy, store manager. "Over time, they calibrate their palette to Jon's and go along on his adventure of wine."

Competition for Garagiste's limited-quantity bottles has become so fierce that some subscribers have asked Malloy to stop adding to the e-mail distribution list. Although that's not likely to happen, Malloy jokingly considered making the warehouse sign smaller. After all, he asks, "Doesn't everyone like to know something that no one else knows about?" —*Kayvon Sharghi*