

WINE News

Cozy up with wines of California, Oregon, and Washington.



FEBRUARY 22, 2021 FEATURES

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Wine from Home: The Ascension of American Wine

By Kaj Stromer

Just like everyone else, our business has had to adjust and “pivot” to the challenges of the day. Fortunately for us, the strength of our decades-long relationships with many of the finest wineries in the world has helped us source an amazing selection of great wines; many at special “one time only” pricing. In this newsletter, we focus on some top selections from our *Domestic* department—wines of the US West Coast. In my 20-plus years working with wine, I can tell you that the quality and variety of wine from California, Oregon, and Washington State has never been better. From Cab to Syrah to Pinot Noir, these are the wines we’re currently drinking. Also, several new vintage reports have us really excited. We’re particularly keen on the 2018 Cabernet Sauvignons

coming to market. This looks to be a vintage that will drink well young, but will keep in your cellar for several winters to come. From what we’ve tasted so far, we can enthusiastically report that not only is the quality exceptional, we may also be witnessing an evolution of style. Many of the best wines seem to display a freshness, elegance, and balance that typically has not been associated with California Cab. Many wineries are returning to a more traditional style of making wine that reminds us of the great Napa Cabs of the ’70s and ’80s. What’s old is new again! Please read our updates from K&L buyer Ryan Woodhouse for several “not to be missed” selections. Without further ado, read on, wine fans, and you’ll be well rewarded by a trip through West Coast wine country.

2017 Emerson Brown Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$39.99) Elsewhere \$50. If you love Napa Cabernet but don’t want to spend a bundle, then you’ll want to pick up this stunning 2017 from Keith Emerson and Brian Brown. They both work at Vineyard 29, so you could say they know a thing or two about producing a world-class Cabernet. We secured a special deal that allows us to sell this wine for a price that’s nothing short of remarkable given the wine’s excellent pedigree. **92 JD**



2017 Signal Ridge Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir (\$19.99) Here’s a “best buy” at a fraction of the price it would normally command. We made a deal to buy the entire production of a grape grower’s custom bottling, and long story short, you get a stunning bottle of Pinot Noir from a top-notch vineyard, crafted by a very highly regarded winemaker, for 60% off what it originally sold for under its regular label. Happy grower, happy winemaker, happy K&L, and happy customer — it’s a win-win-win-win!



2017 Kalinda Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$29.99) We can’t tell you exactly what this wine is or who made it for us. However, we can say that the exact same wine, under a different label, sells for \$60 and received 95 points from Robert Parker Wine Advocate. We can also tell you that it comes from some of the finest parcels of Chardonnay vines in California and is made by one the most highly regarded winemakers in the business. What more do you need to know!



Cover: Yes, even the Santa Cruz Mountains AVA gets a turn, albeit briefly, as a snow-dusted “winter wonderland.” (Photo: Mary Lindsay)

A Classic Vintage: 2018 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

By Ryan Woodhouse

The 2018 vintage in Napa is a fascinating one, and one that I think will prove to be exceptional—especially for longevity, and for wine in the mid-price range, where quality is so consistent across the board. For folks who like more elegant, classically styled wines with lots of varietal typicity, this is a vintage to go deep on. Despite the fact that most of these wines don't have the big, bold, upfront power that 2013 and 2016 had, in my opinion at least, they have fantastic balance and grace like the wines of yesteryear. The growing season was long and drawn-out, without any radical weather events. This allowed the fruit to ripen slowly and be picked as and when winemakers saw fit. The moderate summer and cool conditions that prevailed into harvest lead to wines of focus, purity, and vibrancy. Though the extraction and tannin levels of the 2018s are generally lower than these recently heralded vintages, the generally low pH of the wines will almost certainly make them great bets for the cellar. The wines actually remind me of the 2001s, another vintage that enjoyed a long, moderate end to the growing season that allowed producers to pick at their own pace. Those wines have turned out as some of the finest examples of modern Napa Cab—surpassing, I believe, the more hyped-up blockbuster vintages of 1997 and 2007. The 2018s are wines you're going to want to have in your cellar a decade from now when folks start saying, "Wow, these 2018s are singing." Because, sing they will!

2018 Turnbull Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$39.95) I don't think there's a better or more consistent sub-\$50 Napa Cab in the valley right now than Turnbull's bottling. This wine packs the kind of power, concentration, and structure into a \$40 bottle that is more customary to find in the \$100–\$150 zone. The 2018 has focused blue and black fruit, new leather, graphite, unsmoked cigar, and loamy earth. **93 JD, 92 WS**



2018 Grand Napa "Reserve" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$39.99) Elsewhere \$100-plus. Grand Napa is back again. This Rutherford-based winery has been supplying us with some of the best deals in Napa Cab that we've seen in decades. Some unfortunate events in overseas markets mean we've partnered with the winery to deliver heavily discounted pricing! This deep deal also corresponded perfectly with Jeb's recent glowing write-up. As in previous vintages, these wines are very serious and hugely over-deliver on our more than 50% discounted prices! **94 JD**



2018 Chappellet "Signature" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.95) This perennial favorite at K&L is especially strong in 2018. This wine has pure pedigree and class etched into it. A big nose of smoky black fruit, graphite, and

warm stone. Macerated blackcurrant, damson preserve, cocoa powder, cigar box, and bay leaf. It's medium-bodied, and lots of fine, filigreed tannin give lovely detail on the palate. An exotic whiff of oak spice puts a bow on top. What a rocking bottle that delivers everything I have come to expect from this property. **93+ RP, 93 JS**

2018 Joseph Phelps Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$64.95) It might be the biggest down-sell of all time—but in many years I actually prefer this wine to Phelps's flagship, Insignia. Maybe I just have "cheap" taste, but I always appreciate the understated, effortless expression of Napa Cabernet this wine embodies. The flavor profile is timeless, with classic aromas and flavors of crème de cassis, ripe plum, dry tobacco, cedar, and gravelly mineral tones. The tannin profile is a little grippier than many modern, ultra-polished wines, but that's real Cabernet Sauvignon, and nothing a bone-in ribeye won't solve. **93 VN, 92+ RP, 92 JD**



2018 Di Costanzo "DI CO" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$64.95) Perhaps not a household name yet but destined to be, Massimo di Costanzo has worked at some of the most famous estates in Napa: Ovid, Atelier Melka, and two years as assistant winemaker under Andy Erickson at Screaming Eagle. DI CO is from a single vineyard in the Oak Knoll District at the base of Mount Veeder. The vines are 35 years old. This is classic, structured, focused, Napa Cabernet interwoven with a more modern fruit purity and polish. Galloni writes: "Outrageously beautiful. Vivid and aromatically intense with huge depth of fruit, the 2018 is another thrilling wine from Massimo di Costanzo." **93-95 VN**



2018 Patria "Oakville Ranch" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$89.95) Not only did Tony Biagi get showered with enormous scores from every publication for his 2018 wines, but he was also just named 2020 Winemaker of the Year by Vinous. Tony makes wine for some of the biggest names in Napa, but Patria is his personal project. This bottling from the famed Oakville Ranch is on par with some of the region's most expensive and highly allocated cult Cabs, yet the price tag is still well under \$100! **97 JD, 94-96+ RP, 93-96+ VN**





When spring arrives, this wind turbine at Joseph Phelps helps protect the next vintage from frost. (Photo courtesy of Joseph Phelps Vineyards)

2018 Far Niente Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

(\$109.95) I was thoroughly impressed with the 2018 releases from Napa stalwart Far Niente. Once again, the winemaking team managed to embrace the positive elements of modern winemaking without losing sight of what makes the Napa Valley a special place to grow grapes. Making use of five Bordeaux grape varieties, this wine has nuance and complexity lost by many of its peers. This is pure, timeless Napa Cab, from a winery that was founded in 1885 and still has a finger on the pulse. **95 JD, 95 WE, 94 RP**

2018 Hourglass “Blueline Estate” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

(\$119.95) A standout from the vintage, Hourglass’ 2018 Blueline captures everything that make this



a special vintage. With Tony Biagi making the wines, there’s little mystery in how this wine captured the purity, elegance, and vibrancy the season had to offer. Wonderful clarity in its bright blue and black fruit, exotic spice, floral tones, and refined structure. Sadly, Hourglass sustained huge damage in the devastating Glass fire. But, with wines like this, I’m confident the future is bright for them. **96 VN, 95 JD, 93-95 RP**

2018 Turnbull “Black Label” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

(\$149.95) After the 100-point score from Vinous on the 2017 Black Label, expectations were high for the next release. After tasting the 2018 at Premiere Napa Valley, I knew it was just a matter of time until more huge scores dropped. This is a massive wine destined for many decades of life, and yet also has plenty of immediate appeal. Jeb Dunnuck likened this wine to wines from the legendary 1982 vintage in Bordeaux. **98+ RP, 98 JD**



Two Best Buys in California Cabernet Sauvignon

By Kaj Stromer

Ever since our wildly successful Liparita offers of the past, we’ve been scouring Napa Valley and beyond for the next best California Cab for around \$20. Our criteria demanded that the wine taste dramatically better than the price; it had to come from a small, independent estate winery, not corporate wine; and, we needed it to be a great deal. Well, we’ve come up with several, so look no further. It’s not often one finds a premium Cab that operates at such a high level, so affordably priced. Here are a couple of our best Cab values in stock today.

2017 Silenus “Tyros” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

(\$19.99) Elsewhere \$35. I am extremely excited about this plush, robust wine. This has become one of our best-selling Cabernet Sauvignons in stock. **90 WE:** “This is an enjoyable and approachable Cabernet that is blended with 23% Merlot. Black cherry, cassis and mocha highlight a soft, supple palate. It has a hint of dried herb on the finish.”



2017 Scattered Peaks Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

(\$24.95) Ryan Woodhouse: In three short years Scattered Peaks has become a go-to Cab for us at K&L. Customers and staff alike came to understand that this was one of the finest values out there in Napa Cab. With the 2017 release, winemaker Joel Aiken’s decades of experience allowed him to craft a wine that beams quintessential Napa Cab properties of dark cassis fruit and dusty red currant, loamy earth, pipe tobacco, ripe, fine-grained tannins, with exotic barrel spice rounding out the finish. It’s rich and powerful but also has more of an old school backbone of structure than many contemporary bottlings. It’s accessible now but could also comfortably lay down for 8-10 years if you’re so inclined. Tasted blind I’m convinced this wine could hold its own with Napa Cabs two, three, even four times its price point with ease—it’s that good. **92 WS, 91 WE**



West Coast Syrah, You Have Arrived!

By Kaj Stromer

The most recent issue of *Decanter* magazine has a great feature on “must-try” California Syrah. That got me thinking about our abundance of world-class domestic Syrah currently in the store.

All along the West Coast from California (including the Sierra Foothills) to Oregon, and well into Washington State, you’ll find great examples of what talented winemakers are doing with Syrah.

While once the obsession of a group of diehard fanatics, Syrah’s growth in both popularity and availability has found it a legion of loyal followers. The wines have never been better, with a greater variety of styles to suit most palates.

So, why should you drink Syrah? There are several reasons. First, for all you Cabernet lovers, Syrah provides the same amount of big, bold red wine flavor, but Syrah tends to drink better while young. There’s plenty of fruit (savory blueberries!) but the wines are usually less tannic (astringent). There’s a plushness to the wines that I savor. Plus, Syrah is an amazing match for a wide range of hearty foods. With Syrah, you’ll see a greater swing in styles, ranging for muscular, dark and brooding wines, to more elegant, ethereal types that may remind the taster of Pinot Noir in style.

I’ve selected several wines that represent stylistic and regional differences yet still exemplify the essence of premium Syrah.

Starting our journey in the south, I recommend Peter Hunken and Amy Christine’s **2018 Holus Bolus “Presqui’le Vineyard” Santa Maria Valley Syrah (\$34.99)**. Presqui’le Vineyard is planted on a sandy ridge in the southwest of the AVA. **96 WE**: “An extreme version of cool-climate Syrah, this bottling begins with peppercorn, bay leaf, asphalt, green olive and eucalyptus on the nose as well as a pleasant black-raspberry-fruit element. It’s very lively on the palate, where the green-peppercorn and Kalamata olive flavors meet with gamy meats and tart black plum.” **95 DC, 93 JD**

Also from Peter and Amy is their newest project, The Joy Fantastic. This is true cool-climate Syrah sourced from their estate vineyard in the far western part of the Sta. Rita Hills. This is one of the most exciting new wines I’ve tasted all year. There’s very little of the **2017 The Joy Fantastic Sta. Rita Hills Syrah (\$44.99)** around, so make the effort soon to secure a bottle. **93 JD, 93 WE**

Slightly further north in the Santa Maria Valley, we land on one of the “Grand Cru” vineyards of California. The **2016 Bien Nacido “The XO Estate” Santa Maria Valley (\$79.99)** is the “top of the heap, hey number one” wine from Bien Nacido. Once again, very little was produced, and we were only blessed with several cases. It’s not cheap, but the world’s greatest wines never are.

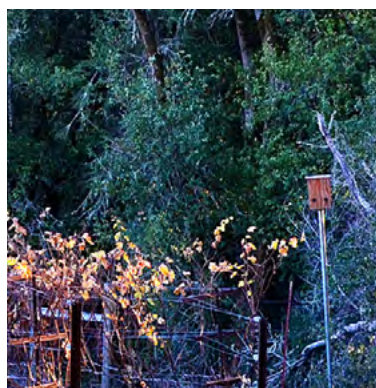
96 VN, 95 WE



Going north along the coast and into the Santa Cruz mountains, we find the **2018 Samuel Louis Smith “Sandstone Terrace” Santa Cruz Mountains Syrah (\$29.95)** from a micro-negociant producer that emphasizes organic growing, mountain vineyards, and low-intervention winemaking. This is a very distinctive and true-to-its-nature Syrah. **94 VN, 94 WE**

One of our best-selling Syrahs is Kent Humphrey’s **2016 Eric Kent “Kalen’s Big Boy” Sonoma County Syrah (\$17.99 Insider’s Advantage)**. **91 CG**: “Right from the first, the wine impresses with its generosity and fruity depth but, even more, with its layering and range, and, although not at all stinting in ripeness, it is defined above all else by its marvelously insistent mix of very deep blackberry fruit, creamy oak and earthy spice.”

An argument can be made that the **2018 Arnot-Roberts Sonoma Coast Syrah (\$39.95)** represents the peak of Sonoma Coast Syrah. Everything this winery touches turns to vinous gold. Launched in 2003, they produce beautiful, terroir-driven, varietally pure small-production wines. **93 VN**: “A rush of blueberry, black pepper, sage and mint builds in a racy, super-expressive Syrah that hits all the right notes.”



Many a Sonoma Coast Syrah vine is never too far from a bluebird box.

to Yamhill-Carlton in the north, and numerous other AVAs in between. The Hock & Deuce is a co-ferment of Syrah and Viognier in the style of Côte-Rôtie. **92 JG**: “The wine delivers fine aromatic complexity in its youthful blend of cassis, dark berries, smoked meats, pepper, lovely spice tones, a solid foundation of dark soil and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and



Perhaps the “surprise find of 2020” for me was the **2016 Day “Hock & Deuce” Applegate Valley Syrah (\$27.99)**. Where have you been all my life? Day, founded in 2012 by Brianne Day, produces boutique bottlings from Applegate Valley in Southern Oregon,



complex, with a fine core, superb soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, classy and intensely flavored finish.”

Washington State wines built their reputation on Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. But to be sure, Syrah shines in the Evergreen State.

Easily our best-seller from the Pacific Northwest is the **2018 Owen Roe “Ex Umbris” Columbia Valley Syrah (\$21.99)**. The fruit is sourced from the Columbia, Yakima, and Walla Walla Valleys.

91 JD: “A medium to full-bodied Syrah with classic aromatics (dark fruits, peppery herbs), ripe tannins, notable purity of fruit, and a clean, balanced, undeniably delicious style.”



One of the top-rated vineyards in Washington State is Ciel du Cheval.

The **2017 Januik “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard” Red Mountain Syrah (\$34.95)** is aged 19 months in a mix of new and used French oak. **95 JS:** “Wow. This is a great Syrah with lots of dried-meat, earth and black tea-leaf character, as well as dark fruit. It’s full-bodied with polished yet chewy tannins and a long, flavorful finish.”

Seriously, how much better than that do you need?



The Queen of Knights Valley

By Kaj Stromer

2016 Galerie “Latro” Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$49.99) Elsewhere \$65. If you love classic Northern California Cabs, but prefer to keep within a budget, then you’ll want to take notice of this spectacular bottling. Made by Gianna Kelly, whose résumé includes stints at Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars, Cardinale, and Lokoya, this wine hits all of its marks perfectly, holding its own against Napa Cabs that cost twice the price. Knights Valley, which separates Sonoma County from the northern Napa Valley, is one of the better appellations in California for the cultivation of Cabernet. This pedigree shows wonderfully, with the wine delivering ample black and blue fruits, a raft of spice and savory tones, as well as perfectly integrated tannins. Sourced from vineyards located in the same area as the

legendary Peter Michael reds (which sell for well north of \$100), the Galerie Cab is a wine that punches well above its price tag. I paired this with Snake River Wagyu steak. The match was pure bliss. The wine is priced elsewhere at \$65, but we secured a parcel with a one-time discount that allows us to present it here for only \$49.99. Age-worthy Cabernets of this caliber routinely break the \$100 mark, making the value here incontestable. Because the first bottle always disappears a little too quickly, we highly recommend a purchase of multiples.



The rugged beauty of Knights Valley, in Sonoma County, sets the scene for some spectacular Cabernet Sauvignon.



Arterberry Maresh: Oregon Past, Present and Future

By Ryan Woodhouse

The Oregon wine industry has a fairly short history by comparison to some other parts of the world. However, Oregon's pioneering producers are now pressing on into their sixth and seventh decades with vines in the ground. Arterberry Maresh is one such property, with their vines planted in 1970 still at the core of what they do. Winemaker Jim Arterberry Maresh is a third-generation vigneron. Having grown up among the vines, he learned the intricacies of this place, as his father and grandfather observed before him. The respect he has for this land, and his deference to its own undeniable character and sense of place, mean these are some of the most honest, authentic, and terroir-driven wines you can taste from anywhere. With Jim's careful hand on the tiller, the Arterberry Maresh wines manage to represent the past, present, and future of Oregon wine. The wines have a sensibility about them inherently tied to a long relationship with the land, yet his style is flawlessly contemporary, and at the leading edge of where the region's wines are heading as the region solidifies its place in a global context.

Arterberry Maresh's wines are focused on the Dundee Hills in the northern Willamette Valley. These hills are home to some of the most revered plantings of Pinot Noir in the country. Swathes of vines cover the predominantly south-facing slopes, their roots deep in the red volcanic Jory soils that are known for producing some of the region's most powerful yet seductive Pinot Noirs. On the advice of another Oregon pioneer, Dick Erath, Jim Maresh Sr. planted the first Pinot Noir in the Worden Hill Road sub-region of Dundee Hills in 1970, making Maresh Vineyard the fifth-oldest in Oregon. Besides some hand-watering in the first months to establish the vines, the vineyard has been dry-farmed for many decades. Organic practices were followed from the outset, with great importance placed in the microbiology of the soil.

While the Maresh Vineyard itself is certainly at the core of the wines here, the portfolio also contains some wines that incorporate fruit from neighboring vineyards with similar pedigree, ideology, and farming practices. Those wines, bottled simply under the "Dundee Hills" designation, are some of the finest values in Oregon. They typically contain good portions of Maresh fruit bolstered by top surrounding vineyards, many with old vines also. Despite a long track record of phenomenal quality and critical acclaim (the 1985 Maresh Vineyard Pinot Noir was given 98 points by Robert Parker Wine Advocate), the prices have remained very reasonable, meaning that these stunning wines are very accessible to most consumers.

Our current lineup of 2017 and 2018 wines from Arterberry Maresh are among the finest releases I've tasted from them. I hope all of you will check them out, as they come with my most resounding recommendation.



Tasting at the winery, January 2020.

2018 Arterberry Maresh Dundee Hills Pinot Noir (\$29.95) Just how I like my Pinot Noir—highly aromatic, bright, fresh, layered, with juicy berry fruits and lifted exotic Asian spice. The translucent color in the glass belies the wine's natural intensity and concentration. **93 RP, 92 VN**

2018 Arterberry Maresh Dundee Hills Chardonnay (\$24.95) The extremely limited Maresh Vineyard Chardonnay is one of the finest Chardonnays in the country, and rightfully sells at \$80. On the other hand, the Dundee Hills Chardonnay (which again combines Maresh fruit with other neighboring vineyards) is a stunning value and made in a more open-knit style. Chablis-inspired freshness and minimal oak usage mean this wine is focused but textural, showing wonderfully vibrant fruit. **93 RP**



2017 Arterberry Maresh "Maresh Vineyard" Dundee Hills Chardonnay (\$79.95) A wine I always describe as cerebral—it's a wine that engages your brain; a wine that calls for careful contemplation. The flavors are tightly wound, these 38-year-old vines not wanting to give up all their secrets in the first sip. The wine builds slowly, unfurling like the fronds of a fern. The flavors somewhat defy description as they seem to morph and shape-shift with each passing minute. This is a wine you need to taste to comprehend. **96 RP, 96 VN**

2017 Arterberry Maresh "Old Vine" Dundee Hills Pinot Noir (\$39.95) One of our most popular and best-selling Pinots of 2020, the 2017 "Old Vine" is back again. This bottling combines 70% Maresh Vineyard with 30% neighboring Weber Vineyard for a breathtaking cuvée of 40- to 50-year-old vines beautifully expressing the Dundee Hills in all their majesty. We went big on this wine, taking a winery-direct

shipment to get this in as many people's glasses as possible at the best possible cost. A little deeper fruit and more density than the Dundee Hills bottling, but shares that wonderful lift and spice. **96 VN, 93 RP**

2018 Arterberry Maresh "Maresh Vineyard" Dundee Hills Pinot Noir (\$64.95) The Maresh Vineyard bottling is typically a selection of favorite blocks. The size of this production varies greatly from one vintage to the next. For me, this wine always plays up the brooding minerality of this site. Sure, it still has lovely fruit and floral elements, but the soil-driven aspects and savory tones seem pushed to the forefront. A singular and truly special wine. **95+ RP**

Esoteric Excellence in Santa Cruz: Birichino

By Ryan Woodhouse

Few brands occupy as many spots on our shelves (or website) as **Birichino**. The reasons for this are numerous. Firstly, the wines are absolutely delicious. Secondly, few producers have such a dazzling assortment of varietals and styles, each one worthy of a placement. Third, the prices are very modest given the quality of the wines, growing critical acclaim, and remarkable vineyard sources. Last but not least, I really like working with John and Alex, the founders and winemakers at Birichino. They love what they do, and they're honest, humble, and personable—qualities that should never be overlooked.

The quirky labels, unusual names, and ever-present humor woven into John's inimitable tasting notes may lead one to believe that these wines are whimsical endeavors. However, tasting the wines will quickly convince you that these are very serious wines. While many things about Birichino are esoteric, the commitment to quality and dedication to crafting authentic wines is clearly paramount.

The Birichino wines are longtime staff favorites at K&L, and this standing was reinforced last year (pre-COVID) with a staff tasting that left many folks astounded at the sheer brilliance of the wines. If you don't know these wines yet, what are you waiting for?

2019 Birichino Malvasia Bianca Monterey County (\$15.95) The wine that started it all for Birichino—because, Monterey County Malvasia Bianca is the obvious choice for launching a new winery... This is wonderfully fresh, vibrant, and aromatic. Dry, mineral-infused, with plenty of depth from the almost 40-year-old vines.

2019 Birichino "Pétulant Naturel" Monterey County Malvasia Bianca Pétillant Naturel Sparkling Wine (\$24.95) All pét-nats are not created equal. Some downright suck. However, Birichino makes one of the most consistently delicious in the market. At pressing, a small amount of the sweet, unfermented juice is frozen and put into cryosleep. When the base wine is almost done fermenting, it's bottled, a small addition of this juice is made, and the bottle capped for secondary ferment. **91 VN**



2018 Birichino "Besson Vineyard" Old Vine Central Coast Grenache (\$24.95) A bottle I look forward to tasting each year.

A truly singular wine from an incredible vineyard in Gilroy. These vines, planted in 1910, are a sight to behold. The quality of the fruit that comes from them is spectacular. A small portion of the fruit is air-dried and given a longer maceration, adding another dimension to the final bottling. **94 WE, 92 VN**

2019 Birichino "Bechthold Vineyard Old Vine" Mokelumne River Cinsault (\$24.95) Another wine I wait in earnest for each year, from the oldest known planting of Cinsault on Earth (planted in 1886), the Bechthold Cinsault is magical. I love this varietal and Birichino's experience with this site means that this wine is often the gem in the portfolio for me. Elegant, pure, understated power and depth. **92 W&S**



2017 Birichino "Peter Martin Ray Vineyard" Santa Cruz Mountains Cabernet Sauvignon (\$74.95) When I first tasted this wine with John, I must admit the very idea of it made me chuckle. I've known John since my Bonny Doon days, and he's long been adamant about a few things: the superiority of screw cap closures; and his aversion to mainstream varietals. Here he was, bottle in hand (complete with waxed cork closure) saying, "You have to taste this Cabernet!" However, this is no ordinary Cab. It's sourced from a block planted in the 1950s at the legendary Peter Martin Ray Vineyard, just a stone's throw from Ridge's Monte Bello Vineyard. This neighborhood produces some of the most revered, longest-lived wine in the country, and Birichino's rendition lives up to the reputation. **94 VN, 94 WE**



Besson old vine Grenache vineyard near Gilroy. (Photo courtesy of Birichino)





The grapevines excepted, winter's glory is as green as spring in Napa Valley. (Photo: Bob McClenahan)

Ilaria and the New Napa Wines of Annie Monticelli

By Kaj Stromer

I'd be remiss if I didn't alert you to one of my favorite "rising stars" in Napa Valley, winemaker Annie Monticelli. The more I taste wines from Annie, the more I'm convinced that she is a force to be reckoned with. She and her husband Mario run a small estate-driven winery in Rutherford called Ilaria.

Annie's résumé is as good as they get. After graduating from UC Davis with her degree in Viticulture and Enology, she went to France to work the 2000 harvest at Cheval Blanc. Upon her return to Napa Valley, she spent two years as the assistant winemaker at Seavey Vineyard before working for five years as the assistant winemaker at Bryant Family Vineyard with famed consultant winemaker Philippe Melka.

These wines are highly compelling and made in a classically structured style. The result is wines of great balance and intensity.

2017 Ilaria Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$58.99) This critically well-reviewed darling reminds me the classic Napa Cabs of the 1970s and '80s. It's a properly structured Cab that asserts its Napa Valley heritage with just a tip of the cap to Bordeaux. It's made in the style of Left Bank Bordeaux with 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Malbec, 7% Cabernet Franc, and 7% Merlot. **94 RP:** "Deep purple-black in color, it gives up expressive notes of baked blackcurrants, blackberry pie and spice cake with hints of licorice, tobacco and forest floor. Medium to full-bodied, rich and spicy in the mouth, it has a solid backbone of ripe, grainy tannins and background freshness, finishing on a compelling black tea note."

2018 Ilaria Napa Valley Malbec (\$34.99) This wine makes the case that Malbec from Napa Valley should be a thing. This blend of 85% Malbec with 15% Cabernet Sauvignon sourced from Coombsville and Atlas Peak defies any presumption. I'm quite confident that if more Malbec had the brawn and beauty of this wine, it would be one of the most revered wines from California. It's aged in 100% French oak, of which 60% is new. **92 JD:** "Beautiful blue fruits, violets, bouquet garni, and peppered meat-like nuances emerge from the glass, and it's medium to full-bodied, with a fresh, elegant texture, terrific tannins, and a great finish. I'd happily drink bottles any time over the coming decade." Bravo to Annie and Mario for creating this one-of-a-kind wine.

2017 Tether Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$28.99) Tether is a wine project from Annie and wine broker Kimberly Jones. With their combined connections they're able to source some amazing fruit for this label. I immediately fell in love with this Chardonnay. It's sourced equal parts from famed vineyards in both the Carneros and Oak Knoll District. **94 JD:** "A big, rich, barrel-fermented Chardonnay from vines next to Carneros. It has rocking notes of stone fruits, honeyed citrus, white flowers, and classy oak. Brilliantly done, medium to full-bodied, and just a screaming deal."



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Email: customerservice@klwines.com

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