

WINE News

A fruitful trip to Napa Valley.



JULY 4, 2016 FEATURES

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2 The No Big Cab Club | 6 A Storybook Tale of Zinfandel |
| 4 White Rockin' | 7 From the Peaks to the Valleys |
| 5 Historic Heitz | 8 New and Well-Aged Faves |

The Less-Traveled Road to Great Napa Valley Wine

By Bryan Brick

At some point in late 2015, I realized that in all the West Coast travels I have led with our staff members, I've never led a trip to the Napa Valley—I guess it was just too obvious for us to spend a bunch of time in this nearby, world-famous wine region! So, this past May, K&L staff members Mari Keilman, Brian Allie, Andrew Whiteley, Kirk Walker and I spent the better part of a week touring the valley. After discussion prior to the trip, we all came to the same conclusion: let's skip the dog-and-pony-show Napa and instead highlight the valley's smaller producers that we've either done business with for years or wanted to check out for the first time. Sure, we found a ton of great Cabernet, but we also found many other cool wines that we are going to feature in this just-slightly-different Napa-based newsletter.

Case in point of a wine that just floored us: the **2015 Spottswode Napa-Sonoma Counties Sauvignon Blanc (\$34.99)**. This is so intense, powerful and completely "domestic" in style that its charm overwhelmed all of us. Made mostly in stainless steel, with some new and used French oak and one concrete egg, this is full of brisk aromatics of passion fruit, wet stone and subtle, sweet vegetal qualities like fresh English peas in the pod. Oily and a touch resinous, this is a Sauvignon Blanc that sticks around for a long, long time on the palate and has plenty of intense citrus tones along with a tropical complexity that make it about as good as it gets for California Sauvignon Blanc. Gulpable does not even begin to describe just how enjoyable this wine is.



Or how about the tremendous amount of top-notch Zinfandel we tried while on the trip—from producers all over the valley, the level of quality we saw was stunning. One particular wine that we really loved was the **2013 Green & Red "Tip Top Vineyard" Napa Valley Zinfandel (\$24.99)**. From high upon their picturesque vineyards in Chiles Valley, Jay and Pam Heminway and their team have made excellent Zinfandel for decades. Somehow, our entire team had never been to their estate, and we were all completely happy to finally see this very rustic and honest operation. The Tip Top Vineyard is exactly what it sounds like—their highest elevation vines, ranging from 1,400 to 1,800 feet above sea level. Concentrated but without sugar intensity, heavily spiced but without noticeable oak, this wine was a revelation in Zinfandel, and for a completely reasonable price. Black pepper, Asian spice, dusty blackberries and a layered and open nature make this dark-toned wine something to please just about any Zin fan.



But if it is Cabernet that you really want out of Napa, we certainly found some winners for you, as well. The **2013 Amici "Reserve" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$79.99)** is a perfect example of why we have long touted the wines of this comparatively under-the-radar producer and its sister label, Olema (out of Sonoma), for years. Basically, everything they touch turns to gold, and does so for a discount. And gold, or in this case wine, at a discount is something we can all get behind. We've sold

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

past vintages of this reserve wine in small quantities, but this vintage is going to be huge for us all the way through the end of the year. It easily outperforms about 95% of the Cab coming out of Napa at this price point, which is a boatload of wine. Powerful but engaging, ripe but balanced, fruity but well sculpted, this wine has amazing complexity and tension that will serve it well over the next 6–12 years. Boysenberry, sweet tobacco, dried lavender, black olives and a touch of tar all combine for a complete wine. This is fun enough to drink with your friends at a simple dinner at home, or serious enough to take to that power dinner you have with work bigwigs.

In the following pages you'll find more hidden gems from some of the best of the “smaller” names in Napa, and a couple of big names as well. We certainly hope that you like the wines as much as we did. We couldn't have been happier with our visits, the people we met and the wines they make. It renewed my faith in Napa Valley wines and the people behind them—not to mention, it reminded us that Napa can make so many other varietals besides Cab really, really well.

Beyond Big Cab in Napa

By Diana Turk

When you think of the Napa Valley and its storied vineyards, one varietal stands out as king: Cabernet Sauvignon. And not just any Cabernet, but bold, expressive offerings bursting with big fruit and finishing with grandiose oak. While there are plenty of properties that have perfected this style, Napa is also home to Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay vines, as well as to winemakers who are sensitive to tastes for more restrained wines—balancing not-too-ripe fruit with soft tannins, higher acidity, and often, a lower alcohol content that is typical of cooler growing sites. There is something for every palate here, and at K&L, we are lucky to have options across the board.

Ehlers Estate

Ehlers Estate is a 40-acre parcel that dates back to 1886 (thus the name of its high-end offering). While they may be best known for Cabernet Sauvignon, fellow Bordeaux star varietal Merlot was the standout of their lineup for me. Merlot only accounts for four acres of the vineyard, and all the grapes that go into the **2012 Ehlers Estate St. Helena Merlot (\$49.99)** are estate-grown. The wines here have a decidedly French sensibility, more earthy balance and keen, green notes than bombastic fruit. After tasting, it's hardly surprising to learn that winemaker Kevin Morrissey has spent time working at Petrus. Plus, the vineyards are certified organic and biodynamic, so there is a lot of love going into this wine.



Frog's Leap

Another balanced Merlot on the sustainability front (they've been farming organically since 1988) is **Frog's Leap 2013 Rutherford Merlot (\$36.99)**. Making its debut in 1992 with the 1990 vintage, Merlot is a somewhat newer addition to Frog's Leap, but nonetheless crafted with care. The majority of the fruit comes from the estate directly surrounding the winery in the cooler eastern part of Rutherford. Less earthy than Ehlers, Frog's Leap shows deep plum fruit and a lush character. The winemaker considers this a restrained style, and I agree. The velvety texture is well balanced with a dusty quality, and the terroir—including rich, clay loam soil—shines through.



Hunt and Harvest

If you're still searching for Cab, but your wallet and palate are looking for something a bit lighter than the big boys of Napa, your glass need not stay empty. The **2014 Hunt and Harvest Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$24.99)**, a bargain-priced—less than \$25!—blend of 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Petite Sirah, 7% Petit Verdot and 5% Merlot, is here to offer a refreshing option (or as far as Cabs go, refreshment-wise). Fermented in 100% stainless steel and aged in 75% neutral oak and 25% new French oak, this is a leaner, lighter Cab, with tilled earth on the finish and lovely acidity. A heady but rustic wine with a deep, dark nose of blackberry, currants and cocoa, Hunt and Harvest Cab is a crowd-pleasing but sophisticated choice.



While there is no shortage of reds for your drinking pleasure, there are many white wine gems in Napa, as well.

Lewis Cellars

In terms of dream careers, race car driver and winemaker are often at the top of the list—though not usually held by the same individual. Yet former Indy car driver Randy Lewis has managed to make a living out of both passions, settling in the Napa Valley, where he's been at the wheel of his family winery since 1992. Just in time for summer, Lewis Cellars Chardonnays are expertly crafted by winemaker Josh Widaman (formerly of Pahlmeyer) to drive fans to this small family winery.

With peach and crisp pear on the nose, sparkling acidity and a toasty but balanced finish, the summer-ready **2014 Lewis Cellars “Reserve” Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$64.99)** checks all the boxes Napa Chard drinkers are looking for—brioche, spice, lift—without veering too far into the oaky, buttery lane. Dense Oak Knoll fruit shines here, all the way through to a layered, almost leesy finish line.

The Sonoma counterpart, **2014 Lewis Cellars “Barcaglia Lane” Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$64.99)**, is sourced from a trio of clones at Dutton Ranch and shows more lemon and tropical notes with a smooth, richly textured finish—almost reminiscent of creamy caramel—plus the expected vanilla and oak. This is a full-throttle California white, clocking in at 14.9% abv, but with an elegance and sophistication that would get anyone’s motor running—I’m fully aware that so many puns could crash and burn, but with wine this delicious from the champion 2014 vintage, I just can’t stop. Neither does the long finish.



True to Site at Keenan

By Mari Keilman

It’s for good reason that Cabernet Sauvignon plantings dominate Napa Valley. In a valley where land prices are twice as much as in neighboring viticultural regions, sensible producers know they need to produce wines that fetch top dollar, in order to keep the lights on—and if you peruse the aisles of any wine store, you’ll immediately notice that Cabs command the top prices. But what happens when your estate isn’t suited to producing top-notch Cabernet Sauvignon on every planted acre?

While the Keenan estate was originally planted exclusively to Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, Michael Keenan’s decision to uproot some of those vines in order to better match variety to vineyard site has resulted in some of the best Merlot and Cabernet Franc produced in the Napa Valley.

Planted above the fog line on the Spring Mountain estate, the Merlot vines see early morning sun and maintain that heat throughout the day. And while some might consider this a warm-climate Merlot, the steep hillsides and gravelly soil stress the vines just enough to produce a wine of concentration and intensity. The **2012 Keenan Napa Valley Merlot (\$35.99)** has profound notes of black cherry and blackberry, but it’s the spicy aromatics that jump out first. Savory baking spices, toasty oak and vanilla on the nose are joined by a soft, supple, full-bodied texture.

The **2012 Keenan Spring Mountain District Cabernet Franc (\$59.99)** is 100% Spring Mountain fruit from their estate vineyard that sits at 2,000 feet above sea level. Beautiful blueberry and black fruit play harmoniously with integrated herb, garrigue and tobacco. I don’t know if it’s the elevation, soil type or sun exposure, but Michael Keenan chose the ideal site for his Cabernet Franc, because the only word I can find to give it justice is: seamless.



Varietal Variety at Neyers

By Kirk Walker

We have happily supported Neyers Vineyards for years. It is a winery that has a broad and eclectic range of wines, which I love, as anyone who works in a wine shop would—because variety is the spice of life! They are always balanced, pure, expressive and classic. But when I stopped to think about their range, it made no sense to me until I learned that Bruce Neyers worked for Kermit Lynch—one of the most historically important boutique French wine importers—for years. He’s traveled across France, visiting all the various regions, drinking wine and talking with some of the most famous winemakers in that country. That has to be inspiring. So, if you had no legal varietal restrictions (as they do in France) and you had access to all of the great California fruit that Neyers does, you too would make the great variety of the wines that they make.

2014 Neyers “Evangelho Vineyard” Contra Costa County Carignane (\$34.99)

This wine pops. It is intensely colored and the fruit and spice aromatics leap out of the glass. On the palate it shows lots of sappy red fruit and berry flavors that are heavily spiced with herbs and pepper. This is a summertime in the backyard, grilling and BBQing kind of wine. Or if you cannot do that, at least it will put you in that head space.

2014 Neyers “El Novillero” Carneros Chardonnay (\$41.99)

This wine has a dramatic range of flavors, from delicate pear to caramelized pineapple, delicate mineral to butterscotch. There is the right amount of creaminess that acts as a lubricant, taking you from fresh fruit to lush, almost dessert tones. This is a classic, rich and full California Chardonnay that handles its weight as if it were a professional dancer.

2014 Neyers “Chuy’s Vineyard” Sonoma Valley Chardonnay (\$41.99)

White Burgundy from California? Well, if I were served this wine blind, I would guess that it was white Burgundy, that is! There are aromatics of Golden Delicious apple, delicate white flowers and mineral, with a soft vanilla note. The palate is broad but not heavy. It has a sneaky richness that is balanced with great acidity and a long, mouthwatering finish. Really special California Chardonnay. Let it breathe and decant for at least 30 minutes.

2014 Neyers “Placida Vineyard” Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$39.99)

Sappy, spicy, floral, wild strawberries and soft oak spice—all of which is very intense, but delicate at the same time. How can you not like that? On the palate, the wine has that same paradoxical nature: bright, delicate fruit, strawberries and rhubarb, that’s lifted and jumps right out at you. Then, slowly, the richness builds, with dark fruit and oak spice appearing from the periphery. The wine’s mouthwatering acidity gives it great length and the flavors seem to roll over and over again on the palate.





Nestled in a quieter corner of Napa, White Rock Vineyards.

Wines are Rockin' at White Rock

By Brian Allie

I have worked for K&L for a year now, and from my coworkers I have heard so many great tales of trips taken with the company to various destinations of the wine-producing world. This being my first trip with K&L, I was not sure of what I was in for. I must say, in retrospect, that our four-day romp through the Napa Valley far surpassed my expectations. Our excursion was filled with lots of education, awesome food and even better wines. Over the course of the trip, we visited many spectacular vineyards and wineries and met with many of the wonderful people who produce the wines we have come to know and love.

One of the highlights of the trip, and one of my personal favorites, was White Rock Vineyards. Nestled in the southern foothills of the Stags Leap range, White Rock is situated in a perfectly picturesque valley. This family-run vineyard and winery was established in 1977 and consists of 22 acres of terraced hillsides and 14 acres of benchland. White Rock is known for their elegant and authentic Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. All their wines are made from fruit grown on the estate. Additionally, White Rock has never used herbicides or pesticides, and their commitment to sustainable farming is very strong.

Winemaker Christopher Vandendriessche, who was raised in Napa and educated at the University of Bordeaux, clearly is a master of his trade. After greeting us, Christopher led us on a tour of the wine caves, which were bored in 1987 and were among the first to have been dug since the 1800s. In alcoves the size of double doorways, I was fascinated to see wine bottles stacked taller than myself, and three deep. Christopher explained that since the temperature and humidity in the caves is ideal, they age their red wines right there in the walls.

After the cave tour, Christopher led us through the vineyard to a picnic table under a shady tree. Along the way, he pointed out the various wines that each vine would produce and noted the health of each plant. Accompanied by the vineyard dog, Sammy, and a bowl of fresh strawberries, we sat down as Christopher began to open wine bottles. He explained that the soil of the hillsides is white volcanic ash, thus the name: White Rock. Christopher, who took over winemaking in 1999, told us that his intent is to create simple and authentic wines.

First, we tasted the **2014 White Rock Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$37.99)**, which is grown in the lowest and coldest area of the vineyard, all barrel fermented, and aged for 11 months on the lees in French oak. The result is a clean, crisp and well-balanced wine with great acid structure and a wonderful intensity—all in a lean and focused package with no extra flab whatsoever. The Chardonnay has notes of Granny Smith apple, orange peel and Meyer lemon. This is the perfect Chardonnay to take on a picnic, or for a lazy afternoon at the beach. Needless to say, I plan on doing both!

Next, we moved on to the **2012 White Rock Napa Valley Claret (\$37.99)**. This intricate wine is grown in a cooler area of the vineyard and is a marvelously balanced, rich and full-bodied blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, aged for 21 months in French oak. Flavors of Bing cherries, cassis and a bit of pepper enticed my mouth. This claret's pleasant acidity adds to the ripe and long-lasting finish. I couldn't help but think of how I would love to pair this with a grilled steak in my backyard.

Another highlight of the tasting was the **2012 White Rock Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$54.99)**. From fruit produced at the top of the vineyard's slopes, this 100% Cabernet Sauvignon is pure and focused and possesses a great mineral backbone. It's aged for 20 months in French oak. This provides wonderful structure without over-the-top intensity, and a very supple mouthfeel. Cranberries, baking spices, cocoa powder and cedar flavors give way to a soft finish with velvety tannins. According to Christopher, this vintage will age gracefully for 15–20 years, and I would definitely agree.

As I sat there, sipping the incredible wines, petting Sammy the vineyard dog, and nibbling on the strawberries, I gazed across the vineyard in this isolated bowl of the small valley. This secluded vineyard, in its little interesting nook of the Napa Valley, is perfect for winemaking, and the good people at White Rock understand exactly what they have to work with. I now have several of their wines in my collection, and look forward to opening each bottle and reminiscing of the time we spent at White Rock Vineyards.





Heitz's wine cellar, built in 1898, is used for aging their famed Cabernet Sauvignon.

Reach for New Heitz—From the Classic Napa Valley Cellar

By Mari Keilman

The famous saying, “You’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all” may apply to some things in life, but it definitely does not apply to my recent visit to Heitz Wine Cellars. While working at K&L, I’ve been afforded the luxury of visiting numerous wineries up and down the West Coast. I’ve come to expect that at most wineries, I’ll see some tanks, some open-top fermenters, and, most likely, a big cellar room stacked wall-to-wall with oak barrels or stainless steel tanks. But every now and then, I’m invited to visit a winery that takes me back to reflect upon the historical roots of California wine.

The Heitz name itself has quite a history, going back to its founding by Joseph Heitz in 1961. But when I gazed upon the massive, gray stone cellar at the middle of the property, I was reminded of how much older the history of wine in Napa Valley really is. The cellar, which has an original “Bonded Winery 967” sign attached above the door, was constructed from hand-chiseled perlite in 1898 and was purchased by Heitz in 1964. It is still used to house their giant French oak barrels and tanks. Standing inside the dark, cool cellar surrounded by towering cooperage transports me back to the beginning of the Napa legacy, to an earlier era when winemakers couldn’t rely on all the tricks of today’s technology.



The wines at Heitz are still being made that way, more than 50 years later. Still family-owned and operated, Heitz is making transcendent, handcrafted representations of the Napa Valley vineyards and the grapes that they come from.

The **2014 Heitz Cellar Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$23.99)** is a fitting example of Heitz staying true to character. Rather than tripling production and putting a mass-produced Chardonnay on the market, they source fruit from their Spring Valley estate and Oak Knoll. This sustainably and organically farmed Chardonnay, while being 25% barrel fermented, is still clean, structured and refreshing. Every Chardonnay fan will love the ripe stone fruit mid-palate and glycerol texture, yet acid junkies will rejoice in the bright, racy finish.

When I think of a classic, varietally correct California Cab, my number one go-to is the Heitz Napa Valley. There is no winemaking over-manipulation obscuring the pure expression of the vintage that is the **2012 Heitz Cellar Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$49.99)**. Quintessential aromatics of cassis, kirsch and currants are balanced beautifully with an assortment of baking spices. The stamp of perfection is the bright, crunchy, lifted finish and seamlessly integrated tannins.





The view from Storybook Mountain.

Legendary Zinfandel at Storybook Mountain

By Kirk Walker

When André Tchelistcheff tells you that your vineyards are ideally suited for Zinfandel, you'd better plant Zinfandel. While that might not have been the only reason that Storybook Mountain Vineyards founder Jerry Seps had, I like that one the best. The red volcanic soils here make for great Zinfandel. When I first started working in the wine business, Storybook was pointed out to me thus: "This is one of the best." I have never forgotten this, and the wines have always lived up to that expectation.

On our recent trip to Napa, this was the place I was most excited to visit. Driving up the mountain through the vineyards, looking at the mix of older and younger vines, different exposures and different elevations, I realized something: complex inputs, complex outputs. It is simple but easy to forget. They have not forgotten at Storybook, and that is probably why the wines are so memorable.

2012 Storybook Mountain "Mayacamas Range" Napa Valley Zinfandel (\$34.99) This is the classic, the first wine that comes to mind when thinking about the winery, and the exemplar of the structured house style. I like to describe it as Zin made like Cabernet. Brambly dark fruit with snap, lots of spice that hangs on good tannic structure. It is full and bright with a long, lingering finish.



2012 Storybook Mountain "Reserve" Estate Napa Valley Zinfandel (\$64.99) I cannot remember the last time I had a Zin that evoked such a response from me. It has very ripe fruit—think warm-from-the-sun, fresh-from-the-vine ripe. The purity of the fruit is enhanced by the spice—it is very spicy but in a pleasantly herbal, vegetal sense. It is more linear and more Cabernet-like than the Mayacamas Range. Showing good tannins and good acidity, this is a wine of structure, fruit and complexity. Drink now, but this is a Zin for the ages.



2012 Storybook Mountain "Antaeus" Napa Valley Red Blend (\$42.99) If I were asked to give one wine to someone who wanted to know what Napa Valley red wine is all about, this would be it. It is the past, present and future, and it is affordable. The past is the beautiful dark berry Zin with its accompanying spice. The present is the Cab, Merlot and Petit Verdot with their structure, lift and richness. And the future is the marriage of the two. A wine for all wine lovers, it is accessible, layered and deep, suitable for dinner or your cellar.



From the Peaks to the Valleys — It's All Good

By Andrew Whiteley

From the top of Howell Mountain to the heart of classic Napa Valley, great wine and great values abound. It can be easy to get lost in the hype of 100-point scores and triple-digit price tags in Napa, but places like Ladera and Hendry deliver the type of stunning and structured wines that made the valley famous in the first place.

Up on Howell Mountain: Ladera

Howell Mountain was Napa's first sub-AVA, and for good reason. The terroir is dramatic, unique and powerful. At between 1,600 and 1,800 feet in elevation, Ladera Vineyards sits above the Napa Valley fog, its grapes cooled instead by the high elevation. Longer, cooler but still very sunny ripening days and a deft hand in the cellar create the dynamic power found in their wine.

2014 Ladera Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$19.99) Ladera Sauvignon Blanc is an achievement in the balance of opposite elements. It can be described as supple, rich and textural, as well as bright, zesty and refreshing. There are notes of sweet melon, green pear, apples and lively citrus. Thanks to regular lees stirring, the body is rich and full for a Sauvignon Blanc, and extremely complex. A deep vein of acid gives the wine focus and a lengthy, energetic finish. The power of Howell Mountain is evident.



Follow the path to Ladera's Howell Mountain wines.

2013 Ladera Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$34.99) The 2013 is exceptionally pretty. The fruit is gorgeous. It's elegant. It's approachable. It has terrific structure. It's got everything—most noticeably, a ludicrously low price tag for its impeccable quality. The Napa Valley Cab blends some of Ladera's valley floor holdings with their extraordinary mountain fruit, leading to a wine bursting with black cherry, dark brambleberries, cocoa, hints of olive character and a backbone built to carry the weight of greatness.

2012 Ladera "Reserve" Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon (\$84.99) As terrible as California's drought has been, it has blessed us with a string of amazing wine vintages. The first to receive universal critical acclaim was 2012. If the '13 Napa Valley Cab is gorgeous, the

'12 Howell Mountain Reserve is glorious. The Reserve is always 100% Cabernet and a pure, powerful expression of Howell Mountain. It is deeply fruited with velvety cassis and blackberry, blue fruit and a touch of cool, fresh herb character. The concentration is immense. The texture is silky smooth, with a mouthcoating tannic structure leading to the impressive peacock's tail finish. It's a great achievement from winemaker Jade Barrett and the whole team at Ladera.

Down in Napa Valley: Hendry

Just to the northwest of the city of Napa lies a completely different gem of the valley. Resting on the first few hundred feet of sloping hillside is Hendry Ranch, a bastion of tempered, well-balanced and lively wines in a valley riddled with heavy-handed extractions.

2013 Hendry Napa Valley Primitivo (\$29.99) Often, I find Primitivo (basically, an Italian selection of Zinfandel) doesn't distinguish itself enough from other California Zinfandel. Not so here. Much of what you'd expect from a great Zin is here. It has loads of fresh bramble fruits and cracked peppercorn. But there's also a lovely smokiness, a cross between smoked meat and the earthy aroma of cardamom, that endows this Primitivo with depth. Prickly acidity keeps things feeling fresh. It's terrific for food pairing—grab a bottle and experiment with your barbecue.

2013 Hendry Napa Valley Merlot (\$34.99) Visually striking, this deeply colored ruby tittle is supple and fresh. Sweet and graceful, the black and blue fruits are delicious. A rich mocha character plays with an intense, savory, leather element. This is a wine worth drinking over several days to see how it slowly evolves, if you can manage to not finish the bottle on the first.

2012 Hendry "Block 7&22" Napa Valley Zinfandel (\$27.99) I often start my wine notes with a single word that jumps out, my first impression. The 7&22 is, simply, "kicking." It's my favorite kind of Zinfandel—big, ripe berries in a trim package. The tangy acid alleviates Zin's tendency to weigh down the palate. This is a tremendously balanced bottle of wine.

2012 Hendry "Block 28" Napa Valley Zinfandel (\$29.99) Deep and powerful, Block 28 is a classic. Dark blackberries, mulberries, plums and cherries abound. High-quality oak spice with a hint of sweet vanilla complements the fruit's more intense array of cooking spices—think jerk chicken. A must-have for any summer cookout.

2005 Hendry Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.99) I love aged Cabernet, especially when it still has loads of tasty fruit. The '05 is in a beautiful spot right now, showcasing intense cassis and savory development notes of leather and cedar. It's all connected by the sweet spices that show through, oddly reminiscent of a fine aged Burgundy. If you're a fan of the flavors a decade or more in the cellar can impart to your wine, don't miss Hendry's triumph.





Something New, Something Well Aged

By Bryan Brick

In this newsletter, hopefully, you've gotten a ton of new information and recommendations about some familiar and not-so-familiar wineries. We believe that we've brought you a lot of great wine from this trip, and we can't wait to hear your opinions. But what about all the other great Napa wine that we've tasted recently, some may ask? Here are some of our favorites that have shown up on our doorstep recently.

The **2014 Cave Dog Napa Valley Bordeaux Blend (\$54.99)** is something really exciting. From Michael Havens, one of my favorite winemakers and a name that should ring far and loud for our longtime customers, this new 70% Merlot and 30% Cabernet Franc blend is a recreation, of sorts, of Michael's "Havens Borriquot." Made from the same vineyard as the Borriquot, it has the same intense aromatics and spice box nature, with fresh gingerbread, Bing cherry and dry-cured olive aromatics. Soft and velvety on the palate, with the plush, cassis-driven Merlot fruit adding dimension to the delicately spiced Cabernet Franc. A rock-solid offering that should turn heads with its tension and balance.

A wine that we tasted long before we visited the winery recently was the **2013 Corison Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$89.99)**. Always one of our favorite, dare I say, "overlooked" Cabs, this wine always delivers and does so for a relative value. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that this wine is one of the best Napa Cab bottlings I can currently think of for \$90 in the store, and will be a sure-fire bet to go 15–20 years in the cellar. Textural without heft or excess, this is poised Cabernet, not bogged down by oak char, high sugar or high alcohol. Classic black fruits intertwined with sage, tobacco and sandalwood make for a classic and classy wine that I would love to see develop over time.



Although we've focused a lot in this newsletter on wines other than Cabernet Sauvignon, we haven't mentioned any sparkling wine—and what would life be without bubbles? One of the great Napa bubbly is the **2011 Domaine Carneros by Tattinger Carneros Brut Sparkling Wine (\$24.99)**. This never disappoints, and while people can be down on the 2011 vintage all they want, sparkling wine does not play by the same set of rules. This blend of 50% Pinot Noir and 50% Chardonnay is laden with brioche, dried apple, talc and orange blossom aromatics. Bright, while still holding richness and leesy weight, this resonates with lime flesh, sea foam, bread crust, alfalfa and tangerine. Talk about bang for your buck!



I couldn't think of a better wine to end on than the **1998 Dunn Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon (\$129.99)**. We get these bottles direct from Dunn Vineyards, and the wine couldn't be more fresh and alive. You can argue that 1998 was a terrible year, being the last real El Niño year in California, but to anyone that wants to throw that out there, my retort is this wine. This is Dunn. Mountainy, funky, intense, powerful and sure, with a little bit of Brettanomyces just to make things interesting. I've always maintained that this is one of the best wines of the vintage, and 18 years later it looks like I was on to something. Sure, it isn't squeaky clean, but therein lies so much of its charm. In an era where everything has to be almost clinical, it is so refreshing to find a wine that is not. With vigorous flavors of morels, green olive, sweet currant, shaved fennel and lemon thyme, I'll take this with prime rib in a second.



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