

# WINE News

Summertime wines from American vines.



## JUNE 22, 2020 FEATURES

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## California: Old Vines for Uncertain Times

By Ryan Woodhouse

So far, 2020 has been a tragic and challenging year. The Covid-19 global pandemic has affected almost everyone in one way or another. The things we have encountered in the past few months haven't been experienced for generations. Previously unheard of and unthinkable things have become all too commonplace in our lives. My inspiration for this particular article came to me while standing under a huge coastal redwood tree here in Woodside, California. I pondered how this immense tree, potentially more than 1,000 years old, must have borne witness to all kinds of dramatic events throughout its lifetime.

My thoughts then wandered to grapevines, another plant species capable of an incredibly long lifespan thanks to their immense tolerance and resilience in the face of adversity. Drought, pests, disease—not to mention Prohibition—are just a few of the threats most California old vines have had to endure to reach full maturity, and maybe even their 100th birthday, or beyond.

The really incredible thing is that old vines seem to learn from their experiences, becoming more in sync with their environment as the seasons come and go. They are typically less susceptible to extreme fluctuations in a growing season, and they often self-regulate crop levels and canopy growth more effectively than younger vines. In a word, they become "wise." What better way, then, to toast our own resilience and celebrate our common challenges that must be overcome, than with a glass of wine from some of the most historic vines in the world?



**2018 Bedrock Wine Co. "Bedrock Vineyard Heritage" Sonoma Valley Red Blend (\$49.95)** This is probably the finest modern-day example of a traditional California field blend. This iconic vineyard, planted in 1888, has long been revered by those seeking truly old vines, and a complex interplanted varietal palette from which to craft a wine. Beyond Zin, there are 26 other varieties in here, with household names such as: Mondeuse, Peloursin, Serine, Grand Noir, and Negrette. **94 RP, 94 WS, 94 VN, 94 WE**

**2018 Turley "Bechthold Vineyard" Lodi Cinsault (\$24.95)** Stylistically this wine is somewhat of an outlier in Turley's portfolio. This bright, juicy, light to medium-bodied red wine comes from a vineyard widely believed to be the oldest surviving planting of Cinsault on the planet, dating from 1886. Yes, that's 132 summers, winters, and everything in between that contribute to the vines' expression of place.



**2018 I. Brand & Family "Enz Vineyard" Lime Kiln Valley Old Vine Mourvèdre (\$39.95)** These 100-year-old, head-trained, dry-farmed Mourvèdre vines are tucked away into a remote corner of Cienega Valley. The real magic here is the soils of decomposed granite and limestone. Huge diurnal temperature swings combined with the limestone give Enz wines soaring aromatics and concentration of flavor, while retaining heft and elegance. Ian Brand has been working closely with this fruit for some time now, and knows just how to coax the best out of it.

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Cover: Unlike a rolling stone, an old vine at Bedrock Vineyard has gathered some moss over the past 130 years. But from a wine quality standpoint, that's quite OK.



A vision of the Rhône, California style. (Photo: Tablas Creek Vineyard)

## California Rosé Comes of Age

By Kaj Stromer

Now that we're well into the month of June, no matter where you find yourself, fine summer weather abounds. This time of year, we select a handful of the most glorious rosé wines from our favorite producers.

The French have long enjoyed the lion's share of rosé love, but there's hardly a respected wine growing region today that's not producing their world-class version of this customer favorite. And while some would say, "It's been a long time coming," rosé from the US has finally found its voice. The best of California rosé wines are thirst-quenching wines filled with the flavors of summer: strawberries, watermelon, rose petals, and a touch of ripe rhubarb and cranberry. Few wines are as refreshing and as versatile with a wide range of foods.

I recently paired a New England-style chilled lobster roll with the **2019 Tablas Creek "Dianthus" Paso Robles Rosé (\$27.99)**. It was simply brilliant. While our stocks are extensive, here are a few more selections that require your attention.

**2019 Alma de Cattleya Sonoma Coast Rosé of Pinot Noir (\$16.95)** Alma de Cattleya is the personal brand of Sonoma County-based winemaker Bibiana González Rave, formerly at Lynmar. Her wines are some of the most impressive "off the radar" wines out of Sonoma. This wine is a combination of saignée juice and hand-sorted Pinot Noir clusters that are pressed and carefully transferred to neutral barrels or stainless steel tanks to start a very cold fermentation. The result is a crisp, savory rosé with intense and complex aromatics.

**2019 Arnot-Roberts California Rosé of Touriga Nacional (\$24.99)**

If you're passionate about California wine you know that Arnot-Roberts is one of our top producers, and their wines are both highly sought after and allocated. We only get a few cases a year of this, which is one of the most "buzz worthy" rosés made. While the variety is more commonly associated with Port, this Touriga Nacional is light and elegant on the palate, yet intense in flavor. The fruit from two vineyard sites is crushed lightly prior to pressing to release some color, then fermented with native yeasts and aged in stainless steel.



**2019 Bedrock Wine Co. "Ode to Lulu" California Rosé (\$21.95)** Winemaker Morgan Twain-Peterson says, "2019 might be the best rendition... out of the 12 we've made." This is whole-cluster pressed and composed of 65% old vine Mataro and 35% "even older vine" Grenache from Mendocino. This rosé is classic pale salmon in color, is extremely delicious, and comes highly recommended.

**2019 Liquid Farm Happy Canyon Rosé of Mourvèdre (\$24.99)** For a slightly more serious version of rosé, our friends at Liquid Farm make this Bandol lookalike. Sourced from the renowned Central Coast Vogelzang vineyard, this rosé of Mourvèdre does not disappoint. Look for hints of apricot and orange zest, with flavors of peach skin and nectarine. I'd be more inclined to pair this with a main course — preferably seafood.

**2019 Sandhi California Pinot Noir Rosé (\$21.99)**

Founded by Raj Parr and Sashi Moorman in 2010, Sandhi has become one of the leading producers in Sta. Rita Hills and Santa Barbara County. These two are sourcing the best vineyard sites, and their wines have raised the quality bar of the region immensely. Sashi runs the "peerless" Piedrasassi winery and together they run the benchmark Domaine de la Côte. This is a serious duo of winemakers whose collaboration results in "must-have" wines.

**2019 Stolpman Ballard Canyon Grenache Rosé (\$19.99)**

No discussion of Santa Barbara wine is complete without the honorable mention of stalwart, Stolpman Vineyards. While in the highly capable hands of Peter and Jessica, Stolpman was once the launching pad for a host of now-notable winemakers. Their homage to classic Provençal rosé is a result of dry-farmed vineyards in Ballard Canyon. You get that pink hue along with a realm of strawberry and watermelon Jolly Ranchers. The wine is fermented and aged five months in predominantly stainless steel and neutral 500-liter puncheons. I'd dare say you can use this to wash down your Santa Maria tri-tip right off the grill. This is 100% lip-smacking Grenache.



# 2017 Napa Cabernet: My Takeaway

By Ryan Woodhouse

**The 2017 vintage in Napa Valley was anything but plain sailing.**

The season started with plenty of water from the very wet winter of 2016–17. The growing season was punctuated with major heat spikes, the most severe of which was over the Labor Day weekend in early September, when temperatures in excess of 105 degrees Fahrenheit were recorded. Grape growers and winemakers agonized over how to handle the heat. Some picked quickly, when the forecast predicted skyrocketing temperatures. Others chose to wait it out and hope that vines would recover afterwards. However, the worst was yet to come.

When people awoke on Monday, October 9, huge swathes of wine country were ablaze in a fiery inferno like never before seen. Fires raged for days, destroying thousands of homes and businesses, along with several wineries. Tragically, more than 40 people lost their lives. The fires were international headline news and images of wineries engulfed in flames filled our screens 24/7. Once the physical impact of the fires was brought under control, the story regarding the potential long-term effects of the fires on the wines and reputation of the vintage was far from over.

Almost three years later, having tasted the vintage very extensively, I can tell you that, in my experience, smoke-tainted wines are few and far between. In fact, I can count the number of undrinkable, heavily smoke-tainted wines I've been presented on one hand. Many folks had indeed picked before the fires. Others had to make very tough decisions to abandon tainted fruit still on the vines or dispose of exposed fermenting wines that couldn't be sealed up in time to escape the advancing flames. In summation, I would say that 2017 represents a crowd-pleasing, fruit-forward vintage with more approachable wines than produced in 2013, '14, '15, or '16. At their best, they are really quite excellent, with exotic, even exuberant fruit, and plush, soft textures. Many producers "declassified" wine from flagship bottlings, not due to a lack of quality or smoke taint issues, but instead out of the fear that consumer demand might be limited for high-end, expensive wines from such a highly scrutinized and arduous vintage. Thus, savvy buyers can find mid-range 2017 wines that seriously over-deliver. Also, many of the truly iconic producers (Dominus is a great example) made such strict qualitative and quantitative cuts that the resulting wines are simply spectacular (yet in short supply).

Here are some 2017 Napa Valley Cabs I recommend to try. They range in price from \$39.95 up to \$225.

**2017 Turnbull Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$39.99) Elsewhere \$50!** As Antonio Galloni of Vinous ponders: "Is there a better Napa Valley Cabernet made from estate fruit for \$50 a bottle? I doubt it."

We agree. Turnbull out-did themselves in 2017, from this rocking sub-\$40 bottling to their (already sold out) 100-point Black Label Cab. **93 VN, 92 JD**

**2017 Martin Ray Stags Leap Cabernet Sauvignon (\$39.95) Elsewhere \$65!** Martin Ray is consistently on my list of overachievers. Their broad range of wines is a stacked lineup from start to finish. This 95-point Stags Leap District Cab is rich and powerful, with tons of ripe red fruits and a silky texture. Our special pricing is not to be missed! **95 JS**

**2017 Caterwaul Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$49.95)** Caterwaul is Thomas Rivers-Brown, making the wine, and Matt Hardin (Barbour Vineyard Management), growing the grapes. That combo normally comes with a \$200 price tag. Jeb Dunnuck: "In the running for the best Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon under 50 bucks." **93 JD**

**2017 Teeter-Totter (Fait-Main) Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.95)** A second label of sorts from cult winemaker, Benoit Touquette, of Fait Main. This wine has a very luxurious feel and tastes *way* more expensive than it is. Inky, black and blue fruit, wonderful balance and purity. **95 JD**

**2017 Frog's Leap "Estate" Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.95)** Here's a vineyard set up to endure tough growing seasons. The mature, organic, dry-farmed vines at Frogs' Leap took 2017 in their stride. No real surprise this wine excelled in a testing vintage under the experienced guidance of the legendary John Williams. **95 VN**

*(Continued on page 5)*

*Spottswoode Estate in St. Helena, October 2017. The grapes here were already picked and safely in the winery. (Photo: Yianni Stoner, Spottswoode Estate)*





Fog, sun, repeat: Chardonnay thrives among the redwoods and Douglas fir in the extreme Sonoma Coast. (Photo: Hirsch Vineyards)

## A Bounty of Our Best Chardonnay

By Kaj Stromer

We've been aggressively ferreting out and acquiring many of this country's best Chardonnays in advance of summer. Chardonnay is undoubtedly the world's finest white wine grape—that's according to me, at least—and current interpretations, from Santa Barbara County to the Willamette Valley, are some of the finest we've ever tasted. Here's the latest in "liquid gold" from a handful of our top producers.

### 2017 00 Wines "EGW" Willamette Valley Chardonnay (\$94.95)

00 Wines burst upon the scene in what feels like an overnight sensation. These wines are turning heads whenever presented. The EGW—"Extra Good White"—is a blend of several key sub-AVAs in the Willamette Valley and makes a good case that where it comes to Chardonnay, Willamette Valley has arrived. A mere 346 cases were produced. Though a bit on the pricey side, the quality warrants the price tag. James Suckling: "A very complex and powerful Chardonnay with ripe-nectarine, lemon and grapefruit aromas, laced with cool, stony notes, as well as flint and attractively restrained oak. The palate has mouthwatering, intense fruit with such attractively concentrated, pithy-grapefruit and white-peach flavors with beautifully wound flesh that pervades the crisp, long and gently toasty finish." 97 JS, 95 WE

### 2018 Arnot-Roberts "Watson Ranch" Napa Valley Chardonnay

(\$39.95) To repeat: the wines of Arnot-Roberts are some of the most distinctive, compelling wines being made in California today. Their Watson Ranch bottling is both open-knit and expressive. Limited production and strong demand makes their wines tricky to acquire, and they're often found on the wine lists of the best restaurants across the country. 92 VN: "Creamy, open-knit and expressive, and also the most approachable of the Chardonnays in the range. Orchard fruit, chamomile, almonds and dried flowers all meld together seamlessly."

### 2018 Hirsch "Estate" Sonoma Coast Chardonnay

(\$59.95) What has long been one of the most highly regarded Pinot Noir vineyards and producers is also a fine source for Chardonnay. Their 2018 bottling reveals a cool vintage, which delayed ripening and lead to the development of amazing complexity. The domain is now in the capable hands of Jasmine Hirsch, who farms it biodynamically. With her father as mentor she manages the estate to the meticulous demands expected of a "Grand Cru" site. The resultant wine is one of both elegance and fruit concentration, with focused acidity.



### 2018 Kistler "Les Noisetiers" Sonoma Coast

Chardonnay (\$59.95) Few names are synonymous with California Chardonnay the way Kistler is. This winery almost single-handedly raised the bar to heights not seen before. The Les Noisetiers is a combination of three Sonoma Coast sites (Vine Hill Vineyard, Dutton Ranch, and Trenton Roadhouse) and emphasizes the area's sandy Gold Ridge soils. The vinification draws on techniques used in Burgundy. The result is one of the most luxurious and complex white wines made in this county, possessing a minerality rare in New World Chardonnay.



### 2017 Paul Lato "Le Souvenir - Sierra Madre

Vineyard" Santa Maria Valley (\$74.95) Paul Lato became an iconic wine producer in a very short period of time. After years working in the wine trade, he jumped the fence into production. The results have been nothing short of spectacular. It's no wonder his wines are so hard to source. Jeb Dunnuck: "A vivid gold color as well as a rocking bouquet of lemon curd, crushed rocks, white currants, spice box, and white flowers. Rich, powerful, and layered, yet also vibrant and racy, with beautiful purity and precision on the palate, it's one of the most seamless, flawlessly balanced wines in the lineup." 98 JD, 97 RP



### 2018 TOR "Beresini Vineyard Torchiana Cuvée"

Carneros Chardonnay (\$79.99) Lifelong wine industry veteran Tor Kenward leveraged his long list of vineyard contacts to found his benchmark winery. In my opinion, the Beresini Chardonnay is one of his finest. The same techniques used to make DRC's Montrachet are employed here. The wine is more on the rich and viscous side, but the results are absolutely mind-blowing. The Beresini site was planted 30 years ago and can be found in the southern section of Carneros, a cool climate zone located near San Pablo Bay, just north of San Francisco. Antonio Galloni: "Rich buttery notes, passion fruit, lemon and orange confit, almond and chamomile are all amped up in an immediate, luscious Chardonnay that will drink well right out of the gate. This is such a promising wine." 93-95 VN



## Paso Robles Proves a Force to Be Reckoned With

By Kaj Stromer

*“California’s massive Central Coast region continues to be a treasure trove of incredible Rhône variety blends (aka the Rhône Rangers), Pinot Noirs, Chardonnays, and increasingly, Bordeaux blends. While the region could be thought of as a work in progress just under a decade ago, today you have an incredible number of talented winemakers — using Grand Cru level terroirs as well as older vines — to produce an enormous number of world-class wines.” —Jeb Dunnuck*

**The Paso Robles area has simply exploded with wine growing and culture over the past 20 years.** It went from being the wild west of California’s Central Coast to the “it” place for high-quality boutique wine. The wines are typically rich, ripe reds based on warm climate varieties such as Rhône Valley stalwarts Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre, along with Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel. The greater Paso AVA was founded in 1983. After years of expansion the resultant terroirs were subdivided into specific sub-AVAs in 2014. History, along with trial and error, have combined to create a region that has secured its place as one of top wine-producing regions in California, and by extension, the world. The popularity of these wines has exploded over the past decade on account of the great wines, tremendous press, and the region’s value as a wine country destination. However, if you’re still unfamiliar with Paso, now could be the greatest time in history to try these wines. Plus, we do, indeed, have an absolute treasure trove of great wines currently in stock.

**2018 Linne Calodo “Problem Child” Paso Robles Red Blend (\$79.95)** Linne Calodo, along with Saxum, may be one of the most important local wineries for the rise of “cult wine” in Paso. There was never much wine to go around, so their mailing list filled out fast. Thus, the myth was born, as so few people were able to get their hands on them. But the quality was undeniable, and so, the legend was born. Now we have the rare opportunity to actually promote their singular Problem Child. This wine is a blend of 70% Zinfandel, 20% Syrah, 5% Carignan, and 5% Graciano. With some time in the decanter the wine’s full potential is reached. Flavors of red berries, cranberries, orange peel, and cinnamon create a melange of wild flavors. Can be enjoyed now but will benefit from a few more years in the bottle.

**2015 Epoch “Veracity-Paderewski Vineyard” Paso Robles Rhône Blend (\$59.99)** Famed winemaker Jordan Fiorentini runs the show at Epoch. Her winemaking skills have been on display for years and wine lovers have been clamoring for her wines. This GSM is a blend of 47% Grenache, 34% Mourvèdre, and 19% Syrah. The wine is raised in a mix of concrete tanks, neutral barrels, and 24% new barrels. It has deep, dark color, and is filled with a wide array of spice aromatics and flavors. There’s great purity of fruit here, with rich and ripe tannins that gently grip the palate. This is one of the more impressive Rhône-style wines I’ve tried in some time. **97 JD, 96 RP**



**2018 Herman Story “Nuts & Bolts” California Syrah (\$49.99)** Russel Fromm’s Herman Story wines have become a mainstay at K&L. We’ve been promoting these wines for years, and they have a pretty loyal following. They follow in the vein of being rather bold and assertive, but there’s plenty to like here. The wines always possess great aromatics that draw in the taster. The Nuts & Bolts cuvée is possibly the most versatile of the lineup and actually offers tremendous value for the price.



**2017 Turtle Rock “Westberg Red” Paso Robles (\$59.99)** Turtle Rock is considered by some to be one of the most exciting new wine brands in California. Blending top vineyards and making the wine at Justin Smith’s Saxum Vineyards, proprietor Don Burns is putting out wines that are getting noticed. This Zinfandel-dominant (with Tempranillo) red is a born winner. Its bold, rich flavors would be the perfect match for any backyard barbecue. Lush black fruits, plums, and spice make this a most intriguing wine. **96 JD, 95 RP**



**2017 Napa Cabernet** (Continued from page 3)

**2017 Di Costanzo “DI CO” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.95)** New to me this year, the Di Costanzo wines are phenomenal! The DI CO is just the introduction to the range, but it leaves you with no doubt that these wines are up there with the best of the valley. It all makes perfect sense when you see Ovid and Screaming Eagle on Massimo di Costanzo’s resume. **95 VN, 94 WE**

**2017 Patria “Oakville Ranch” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$89.95)** Hailing from the much-lauded Oakville Ranch (that sits in between Dalla Valle and Ovid) and crafted by the uber-talented Tony Biagi, this wine is brilliant in 2017. Jeb Dunnuck: “Might be the best Napa Valley Cabernet out there under \$100.” **96 JD, 94+ VN, 94 RP**

**2017 Dominus Napa Valley Bordeaux Blend (\$209.99)** As I alluded to in the introduction, Dominus made a phenomenal wine in 2017 that, to my mind, is no less compelling than the 2013, 2015, or 2016 releases. They did this with precise farming and ruthless fruit selection, making 50% less of the first wine than in an average year. **98+ VN, 97+ RP, 97 JS, 97 JD**

**2017 Spottswoode “Family Estate” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$224.95)** If there’s one property in the valley that I’d probably buy sight unseen, even in a difficult year like 2017, it would have to be Spottswoode. Such is their dedication to farming and crafting classically styled wines from their very special piece of land. This has all the quintessential elegance, purity, and detail I’ve come to expect from this magnificent estate. **97+ RP, 96 VN, 96 JD, 96 JS**



June, 2020 at Old Hill Ranch in Glen Ellen, California: Same old vines, same old barn—a brand new hope for another classic vintage.

**Old Vines** (Continued from page 1)

**2017 Precedent “Evangelho Vineyard” Contra Costa County Zinfandel (\$29.95)** Another one of the truly great old vine vineyards in California—in fact, considered by some in the business as the gold standard for this type of old vine, own-rooted, Zinfandel-based field blend. Planted in 1890 in 30 feet of pure sand, this place is a sight to behold. A good chunk of Carignan and cool breezes off the Delta give this wine a beautiful freshness to balance the dense, rich fruit. Precedent is made by Nathan Kandler, a talented winemaker whom people need to pay attention to.

**2018 Birichino “Besson Vineyard Old Vine” Central Coast Grenache (\$24.95)** This year Besson vineyard celebrates its 110th birthday. This incredible site in Gilroy produces one of the most distinctive and delicious expressions of Grenache I’ve come across. Made by two ex-Bonny Dooners, this wine is truly an expression of place. A small portion (plus or minus 10%) of the wine is made from fruit that is dried, or *appassimento*, boosting the wine’s structure while adding a complex alpine botanical character. The price of this wine is a steal when all things are considered.



**2018 Ridge Vineyards “Geyserville” Alexander Valley Zinfandel (\$39.95)** Geyserville contains the oldest block of vines that Ridge farms—some blocks are 130-plus years old. Ridge has made a single vineyard wine from here, every year, for the last 52 years. Ridge Geyserville is the epitome of classic, ageworthy, old vine Zinfandel. **95 JD, 93 WS**

**2017 Bucklin “Ancient Field Blend—Old Hill Ranch” Sonoma Valley Red Blend (\$34.95)** Old Hill Ranch is a historic California “Grand Cru” if ever there was one. This site has produced some of the most incredible Zinfandel-based wines ever produced. Planted in the 1885, this dry-farmed, organic vineyard is the pinnacle of old vine viticulture and farming. The Ancient Field Blend is from 12 acres of vines, 30 different varieties, co-harvested and co-fermented into one spectacular wine.



Dry-farmed grapes grow at Old Hill: No irrigation; no synthetics; no problem.

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