

WINE News

This winter we traveled to the rugged coast of Sonoma County and tasted through Premiere Napa Valley, and we loved what we found.



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Plenty to choose from in Napa and Sonoma!

By Trey Beffa

Things couldn't get much better for California's two most famous wine growing regions, the Napa Valley and Sonoma County. These regions account for much of California's top Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel. Last month, K&L sent out two separate groups to explore each of these areas. While they are close in proximity, the vibe of each area couldn't be more different.

The laid-back country vibe of Sonoma County is almost calming to just think about. Bryan Brick led the K&L group to winery visits that included Bedrock, Unti, Banshee and Bucklin.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Napa proved to be as busy as ever, with our group being up there during the Premiere Napa Valley

trade barrel auction. I lead our group to visits which included tastings at Far Niente, Peju, Chappellet, and even an appellation tasting at fancy Auberge du Soleil. What these areas do have in common is a string of excellent vintages with bountiful crops. The larger crop is extremely important, as this is what will hopefully prevent many of the wineries from raising prices. A great vintage plus a small crop almost always equals price increases.

From our trip to the Napa Valley, I really enjoyed the 2012 wines, which in general are open, fleshy and delicious. The 2013s may not be as giving right after bottling, but the quality is there. Many of them have a bit more structure and power. This will be a vintage for the collector.



Trey's Napa Rave

2012 Lewis Cellars "Reserve" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$129.99) Nearly black in color, this concentrated Cabernet is loaded with dark black cherry fruit, licorice, and graphite, with hints of smoke and mocha flavors that linger on the finish. Despite this wine's size and depth, it is remarkably round, supple and fresh. Tannins are big but ripe and integrated. Patience will be rewarded for those who can put this bottle away for 5-10 years, but I doubt many bottles will make it that long, as this wine shows so well even at this young age. One of the best 2012 Cabernets we have had in the store so far!



Brick's Sonoma Pick

2013 Banshee Sonoma County Pinot Noir (\$22.99) With every new release of Banshee I become more and more impressed with just how dedicated to quality these three young men are. This vintage seems to be much finer, with better delineation of fruit, more pronounced acidity and a bit more structure, all while having wonderful integration. I've loved these wines for the value they offer our customers over the years and I continue to love them for not resting on their laurels—instead, they are constantly upping their game.

Why We're Always Wailing About Banshee Wines

By Sal Rodriguez

If you haven't already heard of Banshee, I must ask; where have you been? Noah, Baron, and Steve, besides just being cool everyday guys, love making wine and only want to put the best wines in your hands. Why should they? Well, it just makes sense that if you end up with a great bottle of wine at a fantastic price, you're likely to ask for more. And that's why we keep putting their wines in your hands. We've tasted, vintage after vintage, and the quality is remarkable! Year after year their wines get exponentially better as they search high and low for even better vineyards. We got to have dinner with Noah and Baron recently, and they're just as excited as we are to bring you some of their new releases.

The **2014 Banshee Sonoma County Rosé of Pinot Noir (\$17.99)** is a meticulously well-made wine. The nose comes full of fresh fruit and crisp, lively berry aromas. It's not too sweet and has a great lifted floral character on the palate. It's a delicious, delightful number with plenty of mouthwatering acidity.

Their lovely **2013 Banshee Sonoma Coast Chardonnay (\$19.99)** is nothing to scoff at either. Much of the fruit comes from the notable Heintz Vineyards. Off the nose you get a hint of orange blossom as well as hints of vanilla brought on by the new and neutral French oak. The portion of wood is such that the wood doesn't take over the nose but rather enhances the aromas. Once the creamy goodness is on the palate, lemon meringue and spice are evident. It finishes with good weight and minerality on the palate. If it isn't quite the same as the 2012 you remember, that would be because they're using an all-new source for grapes. It's quite a noticeable step up in quality, to say the least.

The **2013 Banshee Sonoma County Pinot Noir (\$22.99)** has that bright, lifted crunchy berry fruit on the nose that I desire in a pinot. On the palate is a hint of wood but the delicious red fruits, weight and spice help bring it all together in a well-balanced way. The fine tannins go a long way to make this an elegant fruit and floral arrangement that is lovely and rich to the finish.



Will Bucklin: A Man, His Barn and a Bottle of Old Hill Ranch.

Old Hill, Old Vines at Bucklin

By Mahon Mcgrath

I used to innocently imagine that a great film would remain in circulation and be seen by virtue of its merits. Having attended just a few festivals screening rarer works disabused me of that notion—there were indeed wonderful, compelling films most people (myself included) had never seen or heard of, begging to be rescued from obscurity. The history of Old Hill Ranch is a little something like that.

Its origins go back to the 1850s, when William McPherson Hill, flush from real-estate speculation in San Francisco, purchased the ranch. The majority of the vines currently growing here were planted circa 1880-1900, so this vineyard is seriously “old vine” material, dry-farmed, and organic, to boot. The period between the acclaim the initial wines made at the property received in the 1860s, and our own day has not been one of steady primogeniture, stable fashions and tastes, staid adherence to venerable agricultural principals, or even

societal acceptance of drinking! It is a stroke of luck these vines have come down to us.

The ranch's fortune were at low ebb during the mid-20th century, with the vineyards sliding into desuetude, overgrown with brambles and weeds and littered with abandoned junk, until Otto and Anne Teller purchased the property in the 1980s. Consultants at the time advised ripping it out and starting over, but fortunately Otto Teller wasn't of that mind. Turning the vineyards back to health has been an ongoing, evolutionary project, with Will Bucklin taking the reins as winemaker from Otto in the late 1990s.

While the majority of the grapes planted here are Zinfandel, the vineyard is a field blend, with 30 other interplanted varieties ranging from obvious choices—teinturier grapes like Alicante Bouschet, Grand Noir and Lenoir to boost color, for instance—to others less so: hello, Catawba!

The **2012 Bucklin “Old Hill Ranch – Ancient Field Blend” Sonoma Valley Zinfandel (\$32.99)** packs a lot of extra character into what you might normally expect from a Zin; the additional varietals, plus the vine age, doubtless contributing markedly to this. Roasted herb, spice, and tea complement the fresh, juicy, medium-bodied fruit which has both depth and breadth, all framed by lightly rustic tannins. Friend, I wouldn't say it if I hadn't had evidence of it myself: this wine can age, and not just hold up, but blossom into a completely different, utterly beguiling maturity.

The **2012 Bucklin “Old Hill Ranch – Bambino” Sonoma Valley Zinfandel (\$19.99)** is, as its name implies, Bucklin's younger vine cuvée, an early-picked field blend based primarily on Zinfandel. Neutral French oak allows the youthful vitality of the fruit to shine through. While comparatively simple placed next to its old vine sibling, the relatively dry, dusty, fruited character holds up nicely when placed in the context of other Zins generally, evidencing a welcome restraint.



Left: A Walk Through Fort Ross Vineyard. Center: Ames Morison of Medlock Ames. Right: Morgan Twain Peterson and one of his ancient vines.

Sonoma: Spreading The Love

By Bryan Brick

The great thing about our recent trip to Sonoma is that we had nothing but amazing appointments full of fantastic wines.

Seriously, when the trip was over and we were stuck in traffic heading back home we had a hard time thinking of one single bad wine we had tried for the whole trip. So, taking into consideration the lack of room we have here in the newsletter to do a full feature on each winery, I'm going to spread some love around to try and cover as many of the awesome wines we tasted as I can here.

The **2012 Hirsch "San Andreas Fault" Sonoma County Pinot Noir (\$59.99)** was the first Pinot we tasted on the trip in a lovely bucolic setting in the far Sonoma Coast, and you can easily make an argument that it was the best Pinot of the trip. With a wowing nose of cranberry, violet and spice cake, this is very open for such a young Hirsch. Earth and more savory qualities come on the palate with lots of wild mushroom and wet, foresty tones. Long, savory and powerful, this is a Pinot for those who like to lay their wines down or enjoy the more gamey side of the varietal.

Another of the top Pinots we tasted, but at a more affordable price point, was the **2012 Fort Ross "Sea Slopes" Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir (\$31.99)**. Nicely meshed and ready to drink, this wine was full of wet asphalt and lilac on the nose with deep tones of wild berry, scrub brush, slight oak char and fresh fennel on the palate. Forward and fruit-driven, this has a powerful finish that leans towards the earthy/mineral side of the spectrum.

For a completely under-the-radar wine, I loved the **2012 Nalle "Hopkins Ranch" Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$44.99)**. Better known for their Zins, but more on that later, this Pinot knocked our socks off with its electric, almost crunchy, red fruits and sassafras spice on the nose. Energetic throughout, this zipped with blood orange flesh and zinged with cranberry and cola flavors that never became heavy or tiresome. Surely a wine that is going to be great for all the seasonal spring dishes soon to be on tables everywhere.

Speaking of the Russian River Valley, the **2007 Joseph Swan "Trenton Estate" Russian River Valley Syrah (\$25.99)** was just a knockout. Dump this in a decanter about an hour or two before dinner and it will fill a room with heady aromas of cassis, unsweetened cocoa

powder, dried meats and whole white peppercorns. A rich, dense entry of black cherry, hard licorice, jasmine and beef blood has this wine singing while the finish dovetails to show marked blueberry fruit, fresh acidity and a wealth of exotic spice. Don't miss this if you're a fan of the Swan wines.

Need a classy white for any occasion, try the **2013 Porter Creek Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$34.99)**. Pretty nuttiness and a touch of evergreen dominate the classy nose. Linear and cutting with a delicate lime zest, almond skin and white floral notes this Chardonnay is refreshing and well integrated with a persistent intensity. I thought of fresh crab but anything from shellfish to pork loin would pair well here.

We also saw some great "bigger" reds on this trip, not the least of which was the **2012 Medlock Ames "Bell Mountain Estate" Alexander Valley Red Blend (\$29.99)**. This blend of 53% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Syrah and 3% Cabernet Franc is just a tremendous workhorse red for the price. Olive, tarragon, currant, concrete and a dusty clay note add up to quite a substantial and centered nose. With its creamy core of baker's chocolate, plum, dried lavender and ink there is a whole lot to like here. Ending with plush tannins and a gamey finish that sees the return of the cured olive note in the nose, this is one charming wine.

Also what's a trip to Sonoma without Zinfandel? While we tasted many great ones we don't think any are much better than the **2012 Nalle Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel (\$37.99)**. This wine fell off our radar for a while, but we are certainly happy that it's back on. A purely "old-school" Zin with a wealth of black pepper, briary wild berry fruit and full of ripe, but never sweet, flavors, this is great right now. Classy is the word that kept popping up in my notes on this wine, with its low alcohol level, more claret-styled structure and finishing flavors of Kalamata olive, dried meats and bay leaf. Nalle hasn't missed a beat!

Thanks, Sonoma, for such a great trip and such a wealth of affordable, delicious and drinkable wines!



The Warmth of the Mediterranean at Unti Vineyards

By Jim Boyce

After a full day on the Sonoma Coast drinking plenty of fine Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, the next day we made a complete 180 with our first appointment at Unti Vineyards. Family owned and operated, George and Linda Unti began farming the vineyard in 1990 and, with Mick Unti, founded the winery in 1997. Describing themselves as “obsessive wine fanatics,” their belief is that the best grapes come from vineyards most naturally suited to their surrounding environment. Therefore, their Dry Creek vineyards are planted to Mediterranean varietals such as Barbera, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Montepulciano, Sangiovese, Syrah and Zinfandel alongside several others best suited to their vineyard’s climate.

Their Zinfandel, a longtime customer and staff favorite, shows off their philosophy of blending as a true art form in the winemaking process. The **2012 Unti Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel (\$27.99)** consists of 76% Zinfandel off the Primitivo vineyard planted in 1998, 12% Petite Sirah for color and body, 7% Barbera for acidity, and 5% Syrah. It has rich, bright red raspberry fruit, a touch of pepper spice, great acid, and a mild tannic finish. This Zin is impeccably balanced, and while drinking beautifully now, it will reward a few years in the cellar.

The **2012 Unti “Segromigno” Dry Creek Valley Red Blend (\$27.99)** is Unti’s homage to the Tuscan town where their grandfather Guisepe was born. The blend is 76% Sangiovese with 24% Montepulciano (their 2.5 acres planted is more than anyone in Sonoma County). This powerful wine has brooding black cherry, baking spices, mocha, and an earthy component from the Montepulciano. The power is beautifully balanced by fresh fruits and crisp acidity, making it approachable in the near term. This wine begs for braised meats or big pastas!

The **2012 Unti “Cuvée Foudre” Dry Creek Valley Rhône Blend (\$49.99)** stole the show for me. This wine is only made during the best Grenache and Mourvèdre vintages and the 2012 is the first bottling under the Cuvée Foudre label since 2005! Consisting of the best lots of each varietal, the blend is 40% Grenache, 30% Mourvèdre, and 30% Syrah. Beautiful aromatics of freshly ground pepper, raspberry and blackberry fruits, licorice and dried herbs abound. The palate is juicy and savory, with great mineral, firm tannins and incredible balance. Give it a couple years to really start showing off!



The motley crew at Bedrock Vineyard.

Back to Basics at Bedrock

By Illya Haase

Our trip started at the top of the rugged hillsides of the Sonoma Coast and ended among some of the oldest vines in Glen Ellen. What a truly special place we live in for amazing wines! But for me, it was really about the people who are guardians of these vineyards. This takes me back to Ohio and my grandfather’s farm, and the respect he had for the land.

Our last visit of the trip was at Bedrock Wine Company. Talk about passion and respect for the land and the fruit—these guys are on the top of the list! Bedrock was started in 2007 by Morgan Twain-Peterson in a former chicken coop. After six years, Morgan brought his best friend Chris Cottrell to join the party. The two of them make a formidable team. Just listening to both men speak of the land and the vines, you know you are in for some wonderfully made wines. Their aim is to “channel the fruit of ancient vines into powerful, elegant,

and distinctly Californian wines.” The main player is the historic Glen Ellen property. This vineyard was planted in 1854 by two Civil War generals—William T. Sherman and Joseph Hooker. It ended up in the hands of Sen. George Hearst in 1888, and some of the plantings from that era still remain. Morgan prefers to let the grapes and the land speak for themselves. This is a terroir-driven philosophy.

2014 Bedrock “Ode to Lulu” Rosé (\$20.99) First off, this is one of my favorites, year after year. This comes from 120-year-old Mourvèdre vines. Think of a great Bandol rosé. This wine starts in the glass with outstanding aromas of red berried fruit, earth and spice. Exceptional acidity, but with a freshness of a white wine and flavors that you often find in some red wines. This is one of those rosés you can drink now or hold for a couple of years. As Morgan has said, “I work harder on my rosé wine.” And it shows!

Sherman & Hooker’s Shebang “Eighth Cuvée” California Red Blend (\$11.99) As one of my coworkers said, “Illya likes fruit bombs.” This is true, but they must be *balanced* fruit bombs! The Shebang doesn’t disappoint. The 100-year-old vines give us a mix of 46% Zinfandel, 40% Grenache, 5% Alicante, 5% Petite Sirah and 4% Sangiovese. This puts a certain “prisoner” to shame. Juicy, meaty and lots of pepper spice. Red and black fruit dance in your mouth. This is the perfect BBQ wine or that Tuesday pizza night.

2013 Bedrock “Old Vine” California Zinfandel (\$24.99) All throughout my notes a certain word kept popping up, Balance. This Zinfandel is no exception. Beautiful fruit and spice that lead to a silky, smooth texture. Great acidity and a nice grip of tannins on the back end. What a great departure from the hot and heavy Zins that I have grown tired of. This is what 80 year vines will do for you. The guys can make a kick-ass Zin!

The Lighter Side of Napa Valley

By Amy Monroe

While it's true that Napa Valley produces some of the planet's best Cabernet Sauvignon, it's also home to many world-class whites that are not to be missed. Although there is far less of it planted, Chardonnay has just as stellar a reputation for quality and excellence as Cabernet with those in the know. Need convincing? One exceptional example not to be missed is the **2013 Lewis Cellars "Reserve" Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$64.99)**. At only 550 cases produced, we were lucky to get any of this outstanding bottling, and it won't last long. This wine brims with notes of ripe pear, toast, hazelnut, and Meyer lemon. Rich but by no means heavy, it has the elegance and poise worthy of even the most special of occasions.

Looking for something even lighter and brighter for spring? Check out one of Napa's first-rate Sauvignon Blancs. Although it accounts for merely 3% or so of all the grapes harvested in the valley, it happens to be one of the parents of Cabernet Sauvignon, (perhaps worth a try to dedicated Cab drinkers for that fact alone?) and it also happens to be delicious. The **2013 Cakebread Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$25.99)**, with its tropical pineapple, honeydew melon, and guava flavors is particularly easy to love. The fresh and zesty fruit profile is nicely balanced by silky texture on the palate. If you're looking for great value, try the **2013 Honig Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$14.99)**. Juicy citrus and mouthwatering acidity make for a wine that is easy to drink with or without food. Sure to please a crowd.



Showcasing the Napa Valley's "Show-stopper" Vintage of 2012

By Christie Brunick

I was really thrilled to attend this year's **Premiere Napa Valley** event. If you're unfamiliar with the annual event, it is basically a crash weekend of tasting that highlights the specific appellations of Napa Valley along with the current and upcoming vintage releases. If you haven't heard, the 2012 vintage in Napa Valley was terrific! I'm ecstatic to reveal some exceptionally awesome Napa Cabs that will absolutely knock your socks off regardless of the price!

There's a new project coming out of Napa that specializes in crafting small lots of some of the valley's finest parcels in order to craft the most classic and intriguingly styled Napa Cab you can get for an even more ridiculous price. These parcels including some in St. Helena, Oak Knoll, Oakville and Napa Valley make up **2012 Textbook Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.99)**. Bursting with aromas of dark ripe fruit in the glass, this wine is plush, full-bodied and balanced with acid and soft oak tannins that make this immediately drinkable. There is a touch of Merlot in the blend to add an extra plush, fluffy layer, and boy, does this wine deliver. If you taste this blind, you would guess it was at least twice the price!

One of my favorite wineries in the valley often gets overlooked by its showy-looking neighbors. But don't let this humble winery fool you, dollar for dollar it has consistently been one of the finest Bordeaux blends in the valley. The **2012 Flora Springs "Trilogy" Napa Valley Bordeaux Blend (\$54.99)** is comprised of 82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot, 6% Malbec, and a splash of Petit Verdot. What's even more amazing is that 100% of the fruit hails from their estate vineyards in Napa Valley that they meticulously look over. This wine is not only gorgeous, it has power and length, too. With plenty of supple, dark fruit, integrated oak and juicy acid, this is drinkable now or age-worthy over the next 5-12 years.

When I attended the Rutherford appellation tasting, the wine that stood out as having the

most "Rutherford Dust" that we all know and love the terroir for was the **2012 Round Pond "Estate" Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon (\$54.99)**. This absolutely exploded out of the glass with the rich aromas and onto my palate with its dense, firm black fruit, dark cocoa nibs and a hint of tobacco and graphite. They add a dollop of Malbec and Petit Verdot to give it that dark sheen polish, and it's superbly masculine and powerful on the palate with 70% new French oak tannins backing up all the structure on the finish.

Now for one of the lesser-known appellations of the Napa Valley, Conn Valley, located just south of Howell Mountain in a gorgeous little pocket that produces insane fruit. If you haven't tried the **2012 Anderson's Conn Valley "Right Bank" Napa Valley Bordeaux Blend (\$54.99)** then you are missing out! Since 1983 this family-owned estate of 40 acres usually blends close to equal parts Merlot and Cabernet Franc, but with 2012 giving them some extra-stellar fruit, they used 67% Cabernet Franc and 33% Merlot. This wine is just screamingly delicious! With its fragrant and perfumed bouquet, polish and suppleness on the palate, and plush fruit with quenching acidity on the finish making it oh-so food-friendly, I'm obsessed.

Now for the Grand Finale. At Premiere I had the privilege of tasting my first 100 point rated wine! Parker calls the **2012 Lail Vineyards "J. Daniel Cuvée" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$249.99)** absolutely perfect! While my pocketbook isn't feeling so flush to dive head-first into a 100 point wine after tax season, I will be enjoying the second label **2012 Lail Vineyards "Blueprint" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$64.99)**, which over-delivers for a fraction of the price. One of the greatest second labels, it is true to the style and quality of the reserve. No frills, just absolutely delectable fruit here. This wine is pure show-stopper sexy! Stunningly gorgeous on the palate, with rich purple, blue and black fruit at the core, polished aromatics of cassis and violets, and soft, feminine, sweet tannins on the finish. Wow!



The mighty Pinzgauer at Fort Ross Vineyard.

Sonoma Wines in Stock Now

2013 Flowers Sonoma Coast Chardonnay (\$39.99) This iconic wine didn't disappoint, with touches of mint, nectarine, peach and chalk all swirling together on a rich frame. There is a great interplay here between weight and energy all building to a complex finish of passion fruit, thyme, tropical citrus notes and apricot. Another great effort from Flowers!

2011 Flowers "Sea View Ridge" Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir (\$64.99) Deep and dark, this powerful wine has plenty of generous strawberry and clove aspects backed up with sappy, mouthfilling blue and black fruits and a mélange of fresh herbal notes. Hugely centered and rolling into plum and cassia notes, this is a wine that is slowly coming of age. Decant it now or hold for another 7 to 10 years.

2010 Fort Ross Fort Ross-Seaview Pinotage (\$37.99) It's not every day that I get to write about Pinotage, more less try the few coming from the States, but this certainly is the best I've ever seen. Sweet licorice, blueberry, sage and a touch of beef blood flavors come to the fore with a layered approach. Violets and pinning tannins fill the finish in this bold, intense wine that would be perfect for a bacon wrapped filet.

2012 Banshee "Coastlands Vineyard" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$69.99) One of the best Pinots on the trip, in my humble opinion, this was super expressive for being so youthful, with intertwined aromas of lilac, oolong tea, salted plum and mulberry.

Somehow this pulls off being full of pitch yet also having a ton of refinement. Sometimes you can taste things in colors and this comes off green, blue and black all at the same time. A wine that is a must-try for Pinot collectors.

2012 Nalle "Vinum Clarum" Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel (\$26.99) Boisterous is the word that came to mind when we tried this wine. With a friendly, fun set of snappy red fruits and underlying briary spice, this comes off as a juicy Zin without any hints of over-ripeness or jam. The necessary structure and pleasing acidity are nice bonuses to a wine that greatly over-delivers on its cost. This is just yummy.

2012 Joseph Swan "Trenton Estate" Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$59.99) Long a favorite with the K&L staffers, the Trenton Estate bottling has become a wine of some legend these days. All the hype about the 2012 vintage can certainly be seen here as this young estate certainly has a long life ahead with its floral, meaty, exotically fruited nature and impeccable balance. This wine can go 10-15 years in a cellar like it's no big deal.

2012 Medlock Ames "Bell Mountain Estate" Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$42.99) Are you looking for a top quality Cabernet from somewhere outside of Napa? Look no further. Black olive, red currant, fennel and fresh sage mesh wonderfully on the nose while the plush and caressing palate is full of traditional Cabernet markers like sandalwood and bay leaf. With a mouthwatering finish of boysenberry and anise seed this is a lengthy and complex wine that out-performs many Napa Cabs at twice the price.

NV Marietta "Old Vine Red - Lot #62" Red Blend (\$11.99) Pretty graphite, briary berry and a clove/nutmeg spice make this a fun wine from the onset. Pulpiness and sun-fresh, the ripe, but bone-dry, berry flavors on entry are sure to please with a persistent bright energy and an underlying pastille spice. Plum and violet combine with a rich, coating nature on the finish to round out this tremendous value for well under \$15.

2012 Porter Creek "Old Vine" Sonoma County Zinfandel (\$31.99) A round, encapsulating nose with both spicy, briary aromas and a more pure fruit sense really lets you know the level of complexity that is to follow in this wine. Black pepper, dried flowers, boysenberry and a bit of scrub brush on the palate come off as dense and sort of stratified. Slow to unravel at first but once it gets going there is plenty to like here. This leans more to the rustic side with nicely ingrained acidity to pull it along.

2013 Medlock Ames "Bell Mountain Estate" Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$32.99) Tanbark, butterscotch and egg custard combine on a richly hued nose but the wine brightens as it pulls along adding flavors of green apple, orange pith, and apricot. Wonderfully intense and confectionary at the same time as it is pulpy and vibrant, this is a Chardonnay that has a little something for everyone.

—Bryan Brick



Napa Cabernet in Stock Now

2012 Robert Craig “Affinity” Napa Valley Bordeaux Blend (\$49.99) A dense and powerful Bordeaux blend that is sure to be a huge hit with the press. It was a tad closed when we tasted it last month but I would bet this wine is already starting to blossom in the bottle. This wine has all the elements of classic mountain Cabernet from a great vintage. 92 points RP.

2012 Avalon Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$13.99) This is a value-priced Cabernet that blends fruit from across the Napa Valley, resulting in a juicy, cherry and blackberry fruited wine with layers of toasty vanilla oak.



2012 Faust Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$44.99) 90 points RP: “The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Faust is designed as a second wine so that only the top lots end up in the Quintessa. It exhibits a dense ruby/purple color, sweet crème de cassis fruit, chocolate, licorice and underbrush characteristics in a delicious, fruit-forward, open-knit style. Enjoy it over the next decade or more.”

2012 Franciscan Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.99) From the near-perfect 2012 vintage, this is a Cabernet Sauvignon-dominated blend that also includes 9% Merlot, 3% Malbec, 2% Petit Verdot and 1% Cabernet Franc.

2012 Joseph Phelps Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.99) This is made from the same vineyards as the possibly 100-point 2012 Insignia. Fans of California Cabernet will love this wine. It is rich, concentrated in the mouth with blackberry fruit, graphite and spicy oak, which lingers in the back. I love how rich the fruit is without turning sweet. There is structure and tannin, but it is balanced, seamless and silky on the finish.

2012 Philip Togni “Estate” Spring Mountain District Cabernet Sauvignon (\$109.99) 97 points AG: “The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon is stunningly beautiful, especially in the way it brings together intense, voluptuous fruit and structure. Racy and polished in the glass, the 2012 races across the palate with intense dark red stone fruit, spice, cedar, tobacco and floral notes, all in an energetic, vibrant style that suggests 25-30 years of aging will be a breeze. What a gorgeous wine this is.”

2012 Philip Togni “Tanbark Hill” Spring Mountain District Cabernet Sauvignon (\$54.99) 92 points AG: “Succulent and expressive in the glass, the 2012 is laced with red cherry pit, plum, spice, leather and mint. The pliant, expressive finish is pure 2012.”

2012 Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars “Artemis” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$45.99) 90 points RP: “Fleshy and medium-bodied but also made in the elegant style sought by this winery, it should drink well for 10-15 years.”



2012 Buehler “Estate” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$29.99) RP: “A juicy, succulent, dark ruby/purple-colored Cabernet with loads of blackcurrant and black cherry fruit offered in an uncomplicated but luscious format. If pleasure is the name of your game, this wine definitely delivers. Pure, savory, round and medium to full-bodied, it is ideal for drinking over the next 7-8 years. It may age even longer.”

2012 Ramey Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$49.99) 92 points AG: “One of the great values in Napa Valley, David Ramey’s 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon is fabulous. The flavors are bold, intense and creamy, with silky tannins, voluptuous energy and tons of pure balance. The 2012 is delicious today, but also has enough depth to drink well for another decade-plus.” 91 points RP.

2012 Anderson’s Conn Valley “Estate Reserve” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$69.99) 91-94 Points RP: “Classic crème de cassis, graphite and spice box notes as well as terrific purity, plenty of depth and ripeness, and a full-bodied mouthfeel. In the past, this cuvée has been highly successful as well as very ageworthy.”

2012 Araujo “Altigracia” Napa Valley Bordeaux Blend (\$129.99) Shows a focused core of red currant fruit intertwined with minerals and graphite flavors. Not made with a heavy hand, this wine shows a wonderful purity of fruit and balance that lingers on through to the finish. This classic Bordeaux blend from Araujo will improve with some extra bottle age and be delicious over the next 5-10 years. 91-93 points RP.

—Trey Beffa



A contrast in tasting styles. Left: Place settings at Flowers. Right: The picnic table at Hirsch Vineyards.

Affordable Napa Valley Excellence in Six Bottles

By Alex Pross

Premiere Napa Valley is a whirlwind experience. We spend 48 hours packing in as many tastings and events as possible in order to get a feel for what the coming year has to offer as far as Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon goes. We taste hundreds of samples, many barrel samples but also quite a few finished products, with a large percentage costing between \$100-\$300. While it is fun to taste these small-production, high-priced rare offerings, the real value in attending Napa Valley Premiere is tasting the everyday wines that we will have ample supply and opportunity to sell at affordable prices. Out of the hectic 48 hours 6 wines stood out as great wines but also affordable.



A winery I always look forward to visiting is Shafer and they had out the welcome mat this year with an amazing vertical of Shafer Hillside spanning numerous vintages, choosing a favorite is akin to picking your favorite SNL comedian-it is all a matter of taste and timing. What really stood out were two of their everyday offerings, the **2012 Shafer One-Point Five Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$84.99)** is a terrific wine, loaded with dark berry fruit, striking minerality, sweet oak nuances and a touch of spice this wine is the perfect Napa Cab full-bodied and loaded with fruit but retains a striking sense of terroir. 94 points RP, 93 points AG.



Three other stellar values that deserve mention include the **2012 Ghost Block Oakville Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (\$54.99 PA)** a wine that completely over-delivers, rich and full-bodied yet with a sculpted palate this wine is a stunner and made in such small amounts it will sell out quickly.

Not to be outdone the **2013 Shafer Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay (\$54.99)** is a wonderfully balanced wine with intense fruit flavors of tropical fruit, citrus, peach and pear as well as racy acidity and a crisp texture that helps to keep the wine lively on the palate. This is the best Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay I can remember tasting and if I learned anything from the tasting of older wines at Shafer even their Chardonnays improve with age! 94 points RP.



Another amazing value that should be snatched up by the case is the **2012 Honig Cabernet Sauvignon (\$35.99)** a dusty, dark fruit, olive-scented masterpiece that screams Rutherford terroir from sniff-to-sip.



The hunt for exceptional values didn't stop at Shafer, next we went to picturesque Chappellet winery located on Pritchard Hill the site of numerous Cult Cabernet producers such as Bryant, Colgin, Ovid and David Arthur but the **2012 Chappellet "Signature Series" Cabernet Sauvignon (\$49.99)** costs a fraction of it's culty neighbor's and delivers the goods in a serious Cabernet Sauvignon packed with dark berry fruit, mocha notes and subtle hints of volcanic earth and herbs. A rock star of a wine this is a perennial favorite of mine year-in-and-year-out. 93 points AG, 91 points RP.



Lastly, we have the **2012 Turnbull Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$44.99)**. A powerhouse offering packed with dark berry fruit and rich mocha and coffee notes, this is a large-scale offering that easily drinks way above its modest price. These six Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons are guaranteed to deliver and are great representations of what Napa has to offer in the outstanding 2012 vintage, and all for under \$60 a bottle!

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