

2015 CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Recent vintages in America's sunny west coast state have been generally well received, producing many highly rated wines, and, reports **Stephen Brook**, the latest release 2015s are true to form

Both 2013 and 2014 were acclaimed, if not entirely consistent, Cabernet vintages in California, and another vintage of comparable quality turned up in 2015. However, after a cool spring in Napa Valley the flowering was patchy, leading to crop losses ranging from 10% to 60% depending on local conditions. The summer that followed was dry and hot.

This was to prove a mixed blessing. The poor set at flowering meant that berries were often small, resulting in very concentrated juice with high sugars. Moreover, in late summer and during harvest, there were heat spikes that led to raisining. This was a manageable problem if efforts were made to remove shrivelled berries and sort the bunches. Where this was not done the consequence, again, would have been very high sugars. These conditions were encountered throughout the state, not just in Napa.

It was an early harvest in 2015 and, as is so often the case, the decision on when to pick was crucial to ensure an ideal balance of sugar, acidity and tannin. Those wineries that got it right ended up with excellent wines. Dominus found the wines preferable to 2014 as they showed more depth of flavour. Yet opinions on the two vintages differed. At a subsequent tasting of prestigious Napa Cabernets, one producer told me the 2015s were more elegant than the denser 2014s, while another, from Cardinale, said the exact opposite, noting how tannic many 2015s were. Obviously local conditions and microclimates can and do vary, so both views are plausible.

Map: Maggie Nelson



‘The decision on when to pick was crucial to get ideal balance’

In demand

This tasting revealed how many new wineries have sprung up in Napa over recent years. One would imagine most suitable land for vines would have been planted by now, and of course many new wineries simply buy fruit from growers, as is common practice in California. Nonetheless, the trend towards investing a high-tech fortune in the agreeable lifestyle of a winery and tasting room in the valley has not abated.

CAL CAB: THE FACTS

Total wine grape plantings in California 257,900ha
Cabernet Sauvignon plantings in California 35,445ha
Cabernet Sauvignon plantings in Napa Valley 8,771ha (47% of plantings)

Many of these wines have little or no international distribution, so they remain obscure outside the US. Fortunately for the owners, the domestic market, fuelled by tax cuts, remains strong and vibrant, and the successful marketing devices of a mailing list and wine club, sustained by a torrent of glowing critics' scores, still thrive.

It's easy to be cynical about this continuing trend, but at least the wines remain, for the most part, of high quality.

CAL CAB: KNOW YOUR VINTAGES

2016 A cool summer was followed by a warm September that speeded up ripening. Outstanding Cabernet with concentrated and layered wines.

2014 A warm though not excessively hot summer delivered vibrant Cabernets with fine tannins.

2013 A normal growing season, but small berries and thick skins gave ripe but tannic Cabernets that need time.

2012 A year of even ripening and generous yields. A precocious vintage, resulting in supple and generous wines.

2011 A difficult flowering meant a small crop after a fairly cool summer. Rain at harvest required many producers to sort unpicked fruit. Very good but inconsistent wines.

2010 A cool and late growing season, giving wines of fresh acidity and moderate alcohols, but stylistically controversial.

Stephen Brook has been a contributing editor to *Decanter* since 1996 and is a widely published and awarded wine journalist, author and judge ➤

THE VERDICT

High scores aplenty confirmed there is very good quality in California’s 2015 Cabernets, with a consistent standard overall, though a tendency to super-ripeness persists, says **Stephen Brook**

If there was one thing the judges were in complete agreement about during this extensive tasting, it was that 2015 is an excellent vintage for Cabernet Sauvignon in California. There was, however, considerable regret that some significant regions submitted few or no samples. There were some wines from Sonoma, but far fewer than in previous years’ editions of this tasting; and Paso Robles, often a source of good-value Cabernets for relatively early drinking, was conspicuous by its complete absence.

The excellent performance of the two wines from Santa Cruz showed that tasters are by no means Napa-fixated, and it was good to see two juicy wines from Santa Barbara.

However, Terry Kandylis and Stephen Brook in particular were dismayed by the number of overripe and thus high-alcohol wines presented. Dave Allen was a bit more tolerant, saying that there was a market for this style, even though it was hard to see the appeal of wines that often tasted sweet and had Port-like alcohol levels.

Cooler Californian vintages such as 2010 have previously demonstrated that such conditions can result in beautifully focused and ageworthy red wines, even if they have been greeted with more enthusiasm in Europe than in the US.

Is it the case that steadily hot vintages (such as 2014 and 2015) inevitably result in super-ripe grapes? Or is it a question of stylistic choice?

Kandylis had little doubt that it was the latter. ‘Growers in hot climates know how to deal with torrid conditions,’ he observed. ‘Changing row orientation in the vineyard, increasing the canopies to offer the vines more protection from direct sunlight, higher yields to slow the maturation, earlier harvesting – this is all known and understood.’

But it seems that some wineries are deliberately aiming instead for a super-ripe style. The perils were obvious in the glass: jammy flavours, soupy or flabby textures, a lack of length and a burning finish were all the footprints of this approach. All three tasters were surprised by how many wines were still being presented in this style, since winemakers in the region keep insisting that they are aiming for lower alcohols and better balance. Well, it certainly wasn’t much in evidence at this tasting.

In contrast, highish alcohol levels of 14%-15% were perfectly acceptable and could result in rich but still well-balanced wines. Also on the positive side, no one complained about excessive or clumsy use of oak, although there were a few rare exceptions. Faulty wines were also minimal. Allen noted: ‘Consumers

‘Consumers should be reassured about overall quality, though value is still an issue’

Dave Allen, The Vineyard Cellars

should be reassured about overall quality, though value is still an issue, as it always has been [in California].’

Allen’s favourite Napa sub-regions in the tasting were St Helena and Oakville, and these were also mentioned by Kandylis, who added Stags Leap District and Oak Knoll. Indeed, Oak Knoll showed better than the other ‘cool’ AVA of Coombsville.

It was difficult to assess the mountain vineyards as there were relatively few wines presented, compared to a vast swathe of generic Napa Valley bottlings.

However, there were good examples from Spring Mountain. Rutherford was slightly disappointing, given its prestige, and there was little excitement here.

THE SCORES

197 wines tasted
Exceptional 0
Outstanding 10
Highly Recommended 63
Recommended 99
Commended 20
Fair 3
Poor 0
Faulty 2

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their 2015 vintage Cabernet Sauvignon (minimum 75%) reds, from any region in California

OUTSTANDING 95–97pts



Lobo, Wulff Vineyards, Oak Knoll, Napa Valley

Decanter average score: 96/100pts Individual judges’ scores: Dave Allen 96 Stephen Brook 96 Terry Kandylis 96

N/A UK www.lobowines.com

Established by husband and wife team Randy and Kryss Wulff about 15 years ago, Lobo makes wines from small-lot, sustainable fruit, sourced entirely from its estate vineyards in Oak Knoll District and Atlas Peak. Only 100 cases of the 2015 Wulff Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon were produced, crafted by winemaker Victoria Coleman, a rising star in Napa who also has experience at Château Mouton Rothschild.

Dave Allen Soft, supple and ripe; dark fruit notes, mocha, coffee and spice reveal themselves in waves. Evident but not scary oak, superbly structured with plenty of depth. Overall a lovely wine.

Stephen Brook Toasty herbal nose, stylish oak cutting through the ripe black fruits. Sleek, silky and poised. Light chocolatey tone, spicy, long.

Terry Kandylis Typical nose of blackcurrant notes and leafy complexity. Has vibrancy and acidity that makes it linger on the palate.

Drink 2022-2033 Alcohol 14.8%



Barnett Vineyards, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley 95 DA 95 SB 95 TK 95

£75 Four Corners

Sourced from Hal and Fiona Barnett’s low-yielding vineyards at 600m, production of the Barnett Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon is overseen by winemaker David Tate, who joined in 2007 following five years as assistant winemaker at Ridge Vineyards. Hand-harvested grapes are fermented separately in small batches from each vineyard block, and the wine is aged in mostly new French oak barrels before release.

DA Juicy, smoky, cedar, bramble and black fruit. Good tannins on the finish and very pleasant structure.

SB Brooding oaky blackberry and plum nose, still subdued. Velvety and luxurious, this has an irresistible opulence and grandeur. Concentrated and tight, it has a minty freshness and polished tannins. Fine length.

TK Lots of dense, ripe fruit notes, a touch sweet. Palate follows in a similar way, cherry and raspberry liqueur, ripe blueberries. Ripe and succulent, unctuous, round and juicy.

Drink 2020-2031 Alc 14.5%



Ridge, Monte Bello, Santa Cruz Mountains 96 DA 96 SB 96 TK 97

£144-£150 Berry Bros & Rudd, Farthinghoe Fine Wine, Fields Morris & Verdin, Jeroboams, Philglas & Swiggot, Quality Wines London, Turville Valley, WoodWinters One of California’s best known wines, first produced in 1962, with the original blocks of the Monte Bello vineyard being planted as far back as 1886. The 2015 vintage is composed of 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Merlot, 7% Petit Verdot and 5% Cabernet Franc, native yeasts being used for fermentation. Sourced from 22 of the 25 Monte Bello parcels, the wine is aged in 97% American and 3% French oak for 16 months.

DA Quite restrained in style, with approachable red fruits in there – hints of raspberry, a touch of mocha, light black fruits and soft tannins.

SB Smoky, toasty blackcurrant nose, stylish. Medium-bodied but intense, sleek and polished, concentrated without being massive, great intensity of flavour. Poised and elegant, harmonious and seductive.

TK Charming red and black fruit nose. Palate has flesh, backbone and bright acidity, lingering for quite a while. The oak sweetness becomes evident on the finish, but is superbly managed. Lots of character.

Drink 2019-2026 Alc 13.5%



Corley, State Lane Vineyard, Yountville, Napa Valley 95 DA 95 SB 95 TK 95

N/A UK www.corleyfamilynapavalley.com

Corley’s origins can be traced back to 1969, when founder Jay Corley travelled to Napa Valley in search of a vineyard to purchase. Today the winery is owned and operated by Jay’s sons Kevin, Chris, Stephen and Kent Corley – they also produce the Monticello Vineyards brand. Grapes from the 5ha State Lane Vineyard were first sourced by Corley in 1982, and in 1989 Corley was able to acquire the vineyard in Yountville AVA, replanting it in the 1990s due to phylloxera. Eighteen barrels of the 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon were produced.

DA Smoky, spicy nose, creamy body, fleshy tannins, good acidity and not cloying at all. A very attractive wine with a fruity, long finish.

SB Gorgeous, pure blackcurrant nose, with discreet toasty oak, elegant. Fresh and limpid, concentrated with polished tannins and a spicy mid-palate. Has verve and succulence and charm. Balanced and long.

TK Bit shy on the nose. On the palate there are ripe black fruit notes with hints of tomato. There are nice acidity levels that make the wine linger.

Drink 2019-2029 Alc 14.5% ➤

THE JUDGES

Dave Allen



Allen is director of Californian specialist wine merchant The Vineyard Cellars in Berkshire. He started at Coe Vintners before progressing through sales and managerial roles there and later at Enotria&Coe, and has spent most of his career selling premium-level wines and spirits in the on-trade across London and the southeast.

Stephen Brook



Decanter contributing editor Brook is the author of almost 40 books on travel, wine and more, and has won numerous awards for his writing on wine. His works include The Wines of California (Faber & Faber 1999), which won three awards, and his monumental survey The Complete Bordeaux is now in its third edition.

Terry Kandylis



Kandylis is head sommelier at London’s 67 Pall Mall private members’ club. He earned the title of Best Sommelier in Greece in 2015 and was the UK Sommelier of the Year in 2016. He has passed the advanced level of the Court of Master Sommeliers exam and is currently preparing for his MS diploma.

OUTSTANDING (Continued) 95–97pts**Michael Mondavi Family, Emblem, Napa Valley** 95 DA 95 SB 95 TK 95N/A UK www.michaelmondavifamilyestate.com

Founded in 1999, the Michael Mondavi Family Estate was created by one of California's great winemaking families. The focus is on small-production, artisanal wines from sustainably farmed vineyards. Sourced from the northeastern hillsides of Napa Valley, the grapes for the Emblem Cabernet Sauvignon are hand-harvested, and the wine is aged for 18 months in small French oak barrels prior to release. A wine from the fourth generation of the Mondavi family, the Emblem series is produced by siblings Rob Mondavi Jr and Dina Mondavi.

DA Ripe, full fruits, pleasant structure, quite lifted and fresh. Tannins are not overpowering at all, excellent finish, has a long way to go.

SB Reserved savoury nose, with some tarriness from the oak. But there's aromatic density and weight. Very rich and succulent, huge concentration of fruit; robust tannins that demand time but are not too extracted. An imposing wine, still youthful, but should go the distance.

TK Blue and black fruit; very fruity and juicy, with a touch of spice.

Drink 2020–2029 **Alc** 14.5%

**Nellcôte, 500 Chevaux, Napa Valley**

95 DA 96 SB 95 TK 95

N/A UK www.nellcote.com

Inspired by more than a decade of living in the south of France, proprietor Tyler Olbres founded Nellcôte after moving to California in 2012. With winemaker Phillip Corallo-Titus, Nellcôte produces two Cabernet Sauvignons and a rosé Malbec-Syrah. The 500 Chevaux 2015 is 95% Cabernet Sauvignon with 5% Petit Verdot, made using traditional fermentation and cellaring techniques to maintain Nellcôte's signature style, undergoing 22 months of ageing in new French oak barrels.

DA Cracking nose: roasted nut, spices and mocha, lots of flavour in there. Black fruit, plums, Christmas cake, very well-judged oak that is well integrated, and an extremely long finish.

SB Muted blackberry nose, forthright fruit. Fresh attack, some red fruits as well as black, lightly floral and lifted yet doesn't lack concentration. There's some cut and persistence. Very ripe but not overblown.

TK Perfumed and floral notes on the nose. More blueberry notes on the palate, with fresh acidity and soft tannins. Well-integrated alcohol.

Drink 2021–2032 **Alc** 14.8%

**Miner, Oakville, Napa Valley**

95 DA 95 SB 95 TK 95

N/A UK www.minerwines.com

Originating in 1996, the Miner Family Winery brand was born when Dave Miner, then president of Oakville Ranch Vineyards, decided to start his own label. The grapes for the Miner Cabernet Sauvignon are sourced from Schlein's Vineyard and Buselli Vineyard in Oakville, and the 2015 vintage is a blend of 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petit Verdot and 7% Merlot. Created by winemaker Stacey Vogel and overseen by Gary Brookman, the wine spent 21 months in 55% new French oak.

DA Good acidity, alcohol very nicely in check, plenty of freshness in the fruit, excellent cedar and tobacco undertones, hints of rosemary and lovely crunchy red fruit. This has real complexity and will reward time.

SB Intense and pure blackcurrant nose, with charm and lift, piquant and minty. Lean attack, has precision and clarity, concentrated but not extracted, with polished tannins and refreshing acidity. Poised, moreish.

TK Charming nose, quite appealing. Some dried fruit notes on the palate and floral hints. Bright acidity, round and juicy. Flavours linger.

Drink 2022–2040 **Alc** 14.1%

**Paradigm, Oakville, Napa Valley**

95 DA 95 SB 95 TK 95

N/A UK www.paradigmwinery.com

Owned and managed by the Harris family, Paradigm winery produced its first vintage in 1991 with winemaker Heidi Barrett. A self-contained winery estate with 21ha of vineyards, Paradigm maintains a hands-on approach to all winemaking and vineyard operations. This 2015 consists of 89% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc, and is aged in both new and used French oak for 20 months, then aged a further 20 months in bottle before release.

DA Racy tannins, strong acidity, prominent on the palate. Quite a garrigue, iron ore note to it, plenty of black fruit, minerality and a very lovely structure. Given time, this will be an excellent wine.

SB Charming blackcurrant nose, pure with elegant toasty oak. Fine attack, fresh and sleek, with polished tannins to give a firm but not rustic structure. Has grip, spice, complexity and balance. Classic Napa Cab.

TK Plummy nose, a bit sweet, and the palate has similar notes, sweet blue and black fruit. Succulent and round.

Drink 2022–2033 **Alc** 14.7% ➤

OUTSTANDING (Continued) 95–97pts



Ridge, Estate, Santa Cruz Mountains
95 DA 95 SB 95 TK 95

£57-£65 Berry Bros & Rudd, Fields Morris & Verdin, Handford, Highbury Vintners, JN Wine, Richard Granger, The Salusbury Winestore
Made with fruit sourced from Ridge's low-yielding Monte Bello vineyard, the Ridge Estate Cabernet Sauvignon offers an earlier drinking alternative to the Monte Bello itself. The vineyard is composed of green stone and clay soils, over decomposing limestone, and is located just 24km from the Pacific Ocean. A blend of 81% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot and 1% Cabernet Franc, it spends 18 months in American oak barrels, 45% of which are new.

DA Rosemary, sweet spice on the nose, good acidity, fairly European in style. Quite high tannins; the fruit needs time to come through.

SB Lean, intense nose, discreet but lifted. Sleek and understated, but doesn't lack fruit concentration. A useful corrective to overripe styles.

TK Elegant nose, a bit shy. Opens up with some sweet oaky notes and floral characters. Palate has a juicy, fresh nature. Notes of blackcurrant, tomatoes, crunchy acidity. Lots of charm here. Long and refined.

Drink 2019-2027 **Alc** 13.5%



Ulysses, Napa Valley 95 DA 95 SB 95 TK 95

£173-£199.99 Berkmann, Corney & Barrow
Ulysses vineyard was acquired in 2008 by famed French winemaker and Dominus owner Christian Moueix. On Napa Valley's Oakville bench, the vineyard sits on gravelly clay loam and benefits from the cooling influence of San Pablo Bay, mitigated by the Yountville hills. Ulysses uses dry farming to increase root depth and drought resistance. The 2015 is the fourth vintage to be released; 1,000 cases were produced.

DA Deep, rich, slightly herbal nose, very ripe but fresh on the palate, not cloying. Fine-grained tannins and good acidity, bright plum, blackberry and chocolate notes. Good use of oak and an exceptionally long finish.

SB Lightly herbaceous nose but not unpleasant, notes of coconut and blackberry fruit. Quite rich, supple, concentrated and dense, rather furry tannins but balanced by surprising acidity. There's a lot going on here; the finish is firm and chunky, quite chocolatey too, but it has personality.

TK Very attractive nose. Notes of ripe black fruit, tobacco and leather, alongside minty and herbal undertones. The palate is vibrant and has energy and definition. Long.

Drink 2019-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED 90–94pts



Groth, Oakville, Napa Valley
93 DA 94 SB 93 TK 93

N/A UK www.grothwines.com
Deep, concentrated nose bursting with ripe black fruit concentration and herbal undertones. Fresh fruit palate, with a touch of oak spice and violets. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 14.7%



Hourglass, Estate, Napa Valley
93 DA 95 SB 93 TK 90

N/A UK www.hourglasswines.com
Lovely and approachable, with oak and mocha overlaying the black fruits. Rich and juicy, this pulls out all the stops; very concentrated but not too heavy-handed. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14.8%



Revana, Terroir Series, St Helena, Napa Valley 93 DA 96 SB 93 TK 90

£92 Vineyard Cellars
Inviting nose that leaps from the glass, with forest floor, bramble and a hint of leather. Creamy and sleek, this is concentrated but polished. **Drink** 2019-2028 **Alc** 14.7%



Corley, Reserve, Napa Valley
92 DA 91 SB 94 TK 90

N/A UK www.corleyfamilynapavalley.com
Smoky, leathery nose, with notes of charred oak. Stylish black fruit on the palate, with fine concentration and ripe tannins. Textured and elegant. **Drink** 2021-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



Frog's Leap, Estate Grown, Rutherford, Napa Valley
92 DA 94 SB 89 TK 93

£45-£52 Berry Bros & Rudd, Fields Morris & Verdin, Hic, Highbury Vintners, Hedonism, Quality Wines, Selfridges, The Leamington Wine Co, Wine Raks, WoodWinters
Generous blackberry nose, forthright fruit with herbal notes. Plump and juicy, medium-weight with zesty acidity. **Drink** 2021-2034 **Alc** 13.8%



Silenus Winery, Tyros, Napa Valley 92 DA 95 SB 90 TK 90

N/A UK www.silenuswinery.com
Sweet toasty oak aromas, balanced nicely by ripe, juicy fruit. Shows layers of complexity, with well-integrated oak and a lovely long finish. **Drink** 2021-2029 **Alc** 14.5% ➤

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (Continued) 90–94pts



Smith-Madrone, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley
92 DA 91 SB 93 TK 92

£56 Roberson
Creamy start to the palate, good freshness and very drinkable. Shows some leafy and tomato characters with a bit of dried fruit and sage. Long finish. **Drink** 2022-2032 **Alc** 14.3%



V Sattui Winery, Morisoli Vineyard, Rutherford, Napa Valley 92 DA 92 SB 94 TK 90

N/A UK www.vsattui.com
Spicy blackcurrant and cherry nose with a touch of mint, leading to a warm, inviting palate, well filled with black fruit and supporting oak. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 14.7%



Whitehall Lane, Millennium MM Vineyard, Rutherford, Napa Valley 92 DA 91 SB 93 TK 92

N/A UK www.whitehalllane.com
Lots of cassis and stewed black fruit here. Dense and weighty, this has an imposing inkiness and firm, powerful tannins. Will age and evolve nicely. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 14.7%



Angwin, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley 91 DA 90 SB 89 TK 93

N/A UK www.angwinestatevineyards.com
Dense and oaky plum and blackberry nose, with a pleasant savoury aspect. A fine core of acidity that makes it linger. Complex and harmonious. **Drink** 2021-2031 **Alc** 13.6%



Barnett Vineyards, Rattlesnake, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley
91 DA 92 SB 91 TK 90

£168 Four Corners
Toasty blackcurrant with notes of oak spice, wood and subtle violet. Hefty but succulent, this is very concentrated, with fleshy tannins and a long finish. **Drink** 2021-2034 **Alc** 14.5%



Behrens Family Winery, Moulds Family Vineyard, Oak Knoll, Napa Valley
91 DA 92 SB 92 TK 90

N/A UK www.behrensfamilywinery.com
Dense black fruit core, deeply concentrated. Well structured and upfront, balancing juicy fruit characters nicely with ripe tannins and ample acidity. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14.8%



Castello di Amorosa, Morisoli-Borges Vineyard, Rutherford, Napa Valley 91 DA 90 SB 93 TK 90

N/A UK www.castellodiamorosa.com
Voluptuous black fruit nose, enhanced by seductive oak. Very concentrated, with more vibrant fruit on the palate, underpinned by firm tannins. **Drink** 2022-2034 **Alc** 14.9%



Corison, Sunbasket Vineyard, St Helena, Napa Valley
91 DA 89 SB 92 TK 93

£180 Roberson
Sumptuous blackberry nose, explosive fruit. Broad and fleshy, very concentrated, but has clarity of fruit and no tarriness. Fresh, vibrant and good length. **Drink** 2019-2031 **Alc** 13.9%



Frank Family Vineyards, Patriarch Winston Hill Vineyard, Rutherford, Napa Valley
91 DA 92 SB 92 TK 88

N/A UK www.frankfamilyvineyards.com
Generous and exuberant blackcurrant nose, stylishly oaked. Supple and rounded but not too soft, with perfectly judged concentration and acidity. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



Galerie, Pleinair, Napa Valley
91 DA 90 SB 92 TK 92

N/A UK www.galeriewines.com
Very rich, oaky nose, backed by vibrant blackcurrant fruit. Fleshy and concentrated, leading to a long, refreshing finish. Shows presence and force. **Drink** 2021-2029 **Alc** 14.5%



Markham, Napa Valley
91 DA 92 SB 92 TK 89

N/A UK www.markhamvineyards.com
Sweet ripe black cherry aromas, with black coffee and spice in the background. Juicy palate, concentrated and spicy without being overbearing. **Drink** 2022-2032 **Alc** 14.8%



Maroon, Reserve, Coombsville, Napa Valley 91 DA 88 SB 92 TK 93

N/A UK www.maroonwines.com
Solid blackcurrant and blackberry flavours, with a touch of oak sweetness and tomato vine leaf. Rich and dense, concentrated though not excessively so. **Drink** 2021-2029 **Alc** 14.4% ➤

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (Continued) 90–94pts



Merryvale, Profile, Napa Valley
91 DA 91 SB 93 TK 88
N/A UK www.merryvale.com
Vibrant nose, a bit gamey and meaty, with a Syrah-like wildness that’s appealing and distinctive. Rich and dense, with energy and weight. **Drink** 2021–2024 **Alc** 14.7%



Meteor Vineyard, Special Family Reserve, Napa Valley
91 DA 91 SB 92 TK 91
N/A UK www.meteorvineyard.com
Appealing aromas of boysenberry and plum, enhanced by some floral hints. Concentrated and weighty, with spicy oak to give some flair. Excellent finish. **Drink** 2021–2029 **Alc** 14.8%



On Q, Appassionata, Coombsville, Napa Valley
91 DA 90 SB 90 TK 92
N/A UK www.onqwines.com
Big, bold and structured, with notes of smoky blackcurrant and black cherry. Full-bodied, concentrated palate of dark fruits and forest floor. **Drink** 2020–2027 **Alc** 15.1%



O’Shaughnessy, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley
91 DA 94 SB 92 TK 88
£79 Four Corners
Powerful nose led by ripe black fruit, supported by notes of sweet oak and vanilla. Dense and full-bodied palate, very rich with velvety tannins. **Drink** 2020–2032 **Alc** 15.2%



Paulownia, Glass Mountain Vineyard, St Helena, Napa Valley
91 DA 91 SB 89 TK 92
N/A UK www.paulowniawine.com
Intense aromas of ripe blackberries and dark cherries, very inviting. Palate is fleshy and shows more the touch of oak, but is well integrated. **Drink** 2020–2030 **Alc** 14.5%



Pine Ridge Vineyards, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley
91 DA 90 SB 92 TK 90
£63.99 Fine Wines of Mayfield, Fortnum & Mason, Glug, Grape to Grain, Quality Wines, Tannin & Oak, The Guildford Wine Co, Wine Direct, Yardarm
Ripe, full and round, combining lovely jammy black fruit with floral notes and fine oak. Plenty going on, this will age and evolve nicely. **Drink** 2021–2031 **Alc** 14.8%



Sang-Froid Vineyards, St Helena, Napa Valley
91 DA 92 SB 91 TK 90
N/A UK www.sang-froidvineyards.com
Intense blackcurrant on the nose, ripe but not jammy. On the palate, juicy fruit is backed nicely by fresh acidity, leading to a lovely long finish. **Drink** 2020–2030 **Alc** 14.3%



Silverado Vineyards, Solo, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley
91 DA 91 SB 88 TK 95
£102.99 Berkmann
Blackcurrant and slighty leafy aromas, with charming hints of mint. Crunchy red fruit coming through on the palate; big and bold but well balanced. **Drink** 2019–2025 **Alc** 14.3%



Spoto, Private Reserve, Oakville, Napa Valley
91 DA 94 SB 87 TK 92
N/A UK www.spotowines.com
Inviting nose, offering ripe bramble fruit and notes of rich plum. Plenty of juicy dark fruit on the palate, wrapped in oak spice and tobacco leaves. **Drink** 2023–2037 **Alc** 14.7%



St Supéry, Dollarhide Estate Vineyard, Napa Valley
91 DA 92 SB 92 TK 89
£90 Jeroboams
Dense black fruit nose, with hints of ripe blueberry and raspberry liqueur. Shows good complexity, with acidity nicely balancing the tannins. **Drink** 2021–2033 **Alc** 14.5%



Trefethen Family Vineyards, Oak Knoll, Napa Valley
91 DA 90 SB 93 TK 89
£45 Cheers, Daniel Lambert, Grape & Grind, Latitude Wine, Love Wine, Martinez Wines, St Andrews Wine Co
Appealing tomato leaf complexity, backed by lovely undertones of coffee and nuts. Chocolatey and complex, but has a lightness of touch too. **Drink** 2021–2030 **Alc** 14.1%



V Sattui Winery, Mt Veeder, Napa Valley
91 DA 92 SB 92 TK 88
N/A UK www.vsattui.com
Inviting nose, crisp red fruits and a hint of undergrowth. Fresh and sleek, good acidity gives drive and punch. Very youthful and assertive. **Drink** 2019–2027 **Alc** 14.5%

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (Continued) 90–94pts



World’s End, Crossfire Beckstoffer Georges III Vineyard, Rutherford, Napa Valley
91 DA 93 SB 90 TK 90
N/A UK www.maltus.com
Rich, spiced black fruit, with a touch of herbal character; stylish and not overblown. Nice character and individuality, with a lingering finish. **Drink** 2021–2032 **Alc** 14.5%



Arietta, Coombsville, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 88 TK 91
N/A UK www.arietta-wine.com
Elegant nose, complex without being overpowering. Lots of blue and black fruits complemented by floral notes and charred oak. Good finish. **Drink** 2020–2028 **Alc** 14.9%



Clos Pegase, Hommage, Calistoga, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 88 TK 90
N/A UK www.clospegase.com
Powerful nose, full of ripe black fruit, toasted nuts and sweet spice. Generous dark fruit palate, rich and unctuous, but with good balance. **Drink** 2020–2026 **Alc** 14.8%



Coup de Foudre, Napa Valley
90 DA 90 SB 92 TK 89
£115 Four Corners
Stylish oak, suffused in ripe black fruits. Compact and weighty, concentrated but not too extracted, this has impressive heft without being overblown. **Drink** 2021–2030 **Alc** 14.8%



Darioush, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 89 TK 89
N/A UK www.darioush.com
Rich oak aromas, backed by an abundance of plummy red fruit. Vanilla and sweet spice notes continue on the palate, balanced nicely by fine grained tannins. **Drink** 2022–2031 **Alc** 14.8%



Farella, Coombsville, Napa Valley
90 DA 88 SB 91 TK 90
N/A UK www.farella.com
Appealing nose of floral hints and violet, over a background of both black and red fruit. The tannins are big but ripe and this has ample structure and spice. **Drink** 2020–2029 **Alc** 14.8%



Freemark Abbey, Napa Valley
90 DA 92 SB 89 TK 90
N/A UK www.freemarkabbey.com
Delicate cherry and coconut nose, showing some charm. Quite rich and supple, with light tannins but a pleasant acidity. Long, mocha-driven finish. **Drink** 2021–2030 **Alc** 14.5%



Freemark Abbey, Cabernet Bosché, Rutherford, Napa Valley
90 DA 89 SB 92 TK 90
N/A UK www.freemarkabbey.com
Burly, meaty black-fruits nose, savoury, powerful rather than refined. Broad and fleshy with good weight of fruit. A very lovely, polished wine. **Drink** 2020–2029 **Alc** 14.7%



Gibbs, Three Clones, Napa Valley
90 DA 90 SB 93 TK 88
N/A UK www.gibbsnapavalley.com
Aromatic nose, quite floral and heady, supported by a ripe fruit core. Spicy oaky finish and zingy acidity, enhanced by notes of herbs and mint. **Drink** 2022–2031 **Alc** 14.5%



Herb Lamb Vineyard, HL, Napa Valley
90 DA 93 SB 90 TK 88
£152 Vineyard Cellars
Reserved but hefty nose, with layers of dark fruit, toast and a little vanilla. Combines a good weight of fruit with ripe tannins. Very inviting. **Drink** 2019–2026 **Alc** 14.4%



Hindsight, Bella Vetta Vineyard, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley
90 DA 93 SB 90 TK 86
N/A UK www.hindsightwines.com
Sleek and rich, combining flavours of oak spice, cherries, blackberry jam and a hint of truffle. Plenty of grippy tannins but not too extracted. **Drink** 2022–2030 **Alc** 14.7%



Hoopes, Napa Valley
90 DA 89 SB 91 TK 89
£49.50 Cambridge Wine Merchants
Fruit-driven and attractive, with some smoke and herbal characters. Fairly rich and not extracted, and has some freshness and flair. Good length. **Drink** 2021–2028 **Alc** 14.5% ➤

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (Continued) 90–94pts



J Lohr, Carol's Vineyard, St Helena, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 90 TK 90
£76 Vineyard Cellars
Ripe blackberry notes, combining nicely with sweet spice and vanilla. Broad and succulent, this is a touch soft but does have density and power. **Drink** 2022–2033 **Alc** 14.9%



Larkmead, Solari, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 90 TK 89
N/A UK www.larkmead.com
Inviting, savoury nose, a medley of grilled plums and cherries with toasty, creamy oak. Succulent and juicy, charming with a long, peppery finish. **Drink** 2020–2030 **Alc** 14.7%



Louis M Martini, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County
90 DA 89 SB 90 TK 90
£55 Vineyard Cellars
Bramble and dark fruits intertwined with stylish oak and a touch of forest floor. Broad and fleshy, full-bodied and well structured without too much heat. **Drink** 2019–2027 **Alc** 15%



Luna Vineyards, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 91 TK 87
N/A UK www.lunavineyards.com
Ripe and jammy nose, offering plenty of sweet fruit and a touch of Christmas cake. Very concentrated on the palate, showing muscle and weight. **Drink** 2021–2032 **Alc** 14.8%



Malk, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley
90 DA 89 SB 92 TK 90
N/A UK www.malkfamilyvineyards.com
Very ripe nose, with plenty of oak. Palate shows more meaty nature, with plummy and dark chocolate nuances. Rich, flamboyant, unctuous. **Drink** 2022–2031 **Alc** 14.5%



Merryvale, Napa Valley
90 DA 92 SB 91 TK 88
N/A UK www.merryvale.com
Smoky, bold and toasty, with meaty notes. A luxurious style, full of serious fruit and packing a punch, leading to an excellent long finish. **Drink** 2022–2031 **Alc** 14.8%



Nellcôte, Rallye 76, Napa Valley
90 DA 90 SB 88 TK 92
N/A UK www.nellcote.com
Plenty of oak aromas, with notes of espresso. Sweet fruit and oak combine nicely on the palate, lots of concentration here. Very well made. **Drink** 2021–2031 **Alc** 14.5%



On Q, Cadence, Coombsville, Napa Valley
90 DA 90 SB 88 TK 91
N/A UK www.onqwines.com
Expressive nose with elements of chocolate, toast, violet and blueberry. Lots of density and concentration on the palate, with ripe tannins and decent acidity. **Drink** 2020–2029 **Alc** 15%



O'Shaughnessy, Mt Veeder, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 88 TK 91
£72 Four Corners
Dark roast coffee aromas, with ripe black fruit and tobacco notes. The palate shows more crunchy fruit, and there is very good acidity to give structure. **Drink** 2019–2032 **Alc** 15.2%



Paul Hobbs, CrossBarn, Napa Valley
90 DA 90 SB 90 TK 90
£49.94 Museum Wines
Bright cherry nose, has some lift and a light floral character. Rich and weighty but not too heavy or stewed. Very attractive and easy to drink. **Drink** 2019–2025 **Alc** 15%



Revana, Estate, St Helena, Napa Valley
90 DA 93 SB 89 TK 89
£161 Vineyard Cellars
Lovely structure, plenty of complexity on the palate. Bright fruit and lovely spice shines through. A fruit-forward style that will reward patience. **Drink** 2019–2033 **Alc** 14.7%



Signorello Estate, Napa Valley
90 DA 92 SB 89 TK 89
£49 Four Corners
Gentle mocha aromas on the nose, as well as stylish blackberry fruit. Rich but soft-centred, though certainly concentrated, with grippy tannins. **Drink** 2022–2031 **Alc** 14.7%

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (Continued) 90–94pts



Silverado Vineyards, Estate Grown, Napa Valley
90 DA 92 SB 91 TK 87
£48.99 Berkmann
Shy but ripe blackberry nose, supported by some herbal characters. Balanced and harmonious, a combination of jammy dark fruit and forest floor. **Drink** 2021–2029 **Alc** 14.4%



Staglin Family Vineyard, Estate, Rutherford, Napa Valley
90 DA 89 SB 91 TK 89
POA Pol Roger UK
Juicy upfront blackcurrant nose, has charm. Plump and rounded, this is fleshy and forward, though it does have a tannic backbone to give structure. **Drink** 2021–2032 **Alc** 14.6%



Sterling Vineyards, Platinum, Napa Valley
90 DA 90 SB 93 TK 88
N/A UK www.sterlingvineyards.com
Very toasty nose, ripe blackberry and black cherry fruit. Suave and rich, concentrated and succulent, this has good weight of fruit and density. **Drink** 2021–2037 **Alc** 14.8%



Stewart, Nomad Beckstoffer Las Piedras Vineyard, Napa Valley
90 DA 93 SB 88 TK 89
POA Four Corners
Quite toasty in style, with hints of blueberry pie and some herbal characters. Evident spice on the palate. Very appealing and has room to grow. **Drink** 2021–2031 **Alc** 14.5%



The Hess Collection, Mt Veeder, Napa Valley
90 DA 90 SB 91 TK 90
N/A UK www.hesscollection.com
Dense, smoky blackberry and plum nose, with a light savoury undertone. There are some floral elements on the palate; quite juicy in nature. **Drink** 2019–2031 **Alc** 14.6%



Truchard, Carneros, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 90 TK 89
£29.50–£31.99 Drinks & Co, Hay Wines
Nice structure, showing enticing plum, raisin and fruit cake hints with layers of well-balanced oak and a touch of spice. Silky and ethereal. **Drink** 2020–2036 **Alc** 14.2%



Venge Vineyards, Family Reserve, Oakville, Napa Valley
90 DA 93 SB 88 TK 88
N/A UK www.vengevineyards.com
Smoky black fruit nose with hints of menthol, coffee and roasted meats. Polished and complex, with a fantastic mineral core and superb length. **Drink** 2022–2035 **Alc** 14.9%



Vineyard {511}, Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley
90 DA 89 SB 92 TK 88
N/A UK www.vineyard511.com
Toasty aromas and savoury characters intertwined with notes of liquorice, plum and blackberry. Very rich and luxurious, full-bodied and weighty. **Drink** 2020–2030 **Alc** 14.8%



World's End, Stir It Up Stagecoach Vineyard, Napa Valley
90 DA 91 SB 92 TK 88
N/A UK www.maltus.com
Lots of jammy fruit here, with a touch of vanilla and blueberry. Medium-bodied, this is graceful and has a welcome light touch and a long finish. **Drink** 2021–2030 **Alc** 14.5%

RECOMMENDED 86–89pts

| Wine | Score | DA | SB | TK | Tasting note | Alc | Drink | Price | Stockists |
|---|-------|----|----|----|--|-------|-----------|--------|--|
| Acumen, Peak, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 88 | 91 | Plummy and succulent fruit notes on the nose. Fresh and well balanced on the palate, with well-judged oak. | 13.9% | 2020–2029 | N/A UK | www.acumenwine.com |
| Alta, Revival, Napa Valley | 89 | 91 | 88 | 87 | Full-bodied and rich, with notes of smoke, meat and light mocha. Showing some maturity but can still develop further. | 14.4% | 2020–2025 | N/A UK | www.altawinery.com |
| Artesa, Limited Release, Napa Valley | 89 | 88 | 91 | 87 | Sweet, intense, piquant nose with a trace of red fruits and menthol. Fleshy and weighty, this is concentrated and dense. | 14.8% | 2020–2027 | N/A UK | www.artesawinery.com |
| Audax, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 88 | 89 | Aromas of forest fruits, walnuts and toast. Rounded and juicy on the palate, with subtle floral hints. | 14.1% | 2020–2030 | N/A UK | www.callalitywines.com |
| Baldacci Family Vineyards, Calistoga, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 90 | 88 | Deep, dark fruits with nuances of roasted meats and vanilla. Has heft and concentration rather than freshness. | 14.5% | 2020–2031 | N/A UK | www.baldaccivineyards.com |

RECOMMENDED (Continued) 86–89pts

| Wine | Score | DA | SB | TK | Tasting note | Alc | Drink | Price | Stockists |
|--|-------|----|----|----|--|-------|-----------|--------|------------------------------------|
| Baldacci Family, Black Label, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley | 89 | 88 | 87 | 91 | Concentrated black fruit notes, with herbal undertones. Judicious use of oak, adding vanilla sweetness and milk chocolate hints. | 14.5% | 2022-2030 | N/A UK | www.baldaccivineyards.com |
| Beringer, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 83 | 85 | Very juicy blackberry and cherry pie flavours, quite a creamy texture. Well made, with grippy tannins. | 15% | 2019-2024 | N/A UK | www.beringer.com |
| Chimney Rock, Estate, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley | 89 | 88 | 92 | 88 | Lush black-cherry nose with a touch of sweet oak and vanilla. Soft and well-rounded, with a good long finish. | 14.6% | 2021-2032 | £71.95 | Corking Wines |
| Chimney Rock, Tomahawk Vyd, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 88 | 90 | Very ripe upfront blackberry nose, with a touch of oak and some spice. Polished and pleasant, big and bold. | 15.1% | 2019-2026 | N/A UK | www.chimneyrock.com |
| Clos du Val, Estate, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 90 | 88 | Opulent black-cherry and blackberry nose with a light meatiness. Soft palate, underpinned nicely by sweet oak. | 14.7% | 2020-2027 | £49 | Boutinot |
| Clos du Val, Hirondeelle Vyd, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley | 89 | 86 | 89 | 92 | Plum and mocha nose, with sumptuous fruit. Broad and lavish, but also has spice and lift on the mid-palate. | 14.5% | 2021-2033 | £95 | Boutinot |
| Darioush, Darius II, Napa Valley | 89 | 92 | 88 | 87 | Intense nose of blackcurrant and oak, with notes of coffee. More floral on the palate, with a warm finish. | 14.8% | 2021-2030 | N/A UK | www.darioush.com |
| Davies Vineyards, J Davies, Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley | 89 | 91 | 86 | 89 | Spiced red fruits, a touch jammy, with some floral notes on the palate. Juicy and upfront, with nice acidity and length. | 14.7% | 2019-2025 | N/A UK | www.daviesvineyards.com |
| Dunn Vineyards, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 88 | 91 | Complex aromas including smoky, gamey characters, with layers of black fruit. Excellent acidity provides backbone. | 13.9% | 2022-2031 | N/A UK | www.dunnvineyards.com |
| Eleven Eleven, Oak Knoll, Napa Valley | 89 | 90 | 91 | 87 | Complex nose, smoky black fruits and toasty oak. Showing good evolution already, with complex notes of forest floor. | 15.1% | 2021-2029 | N/A UK | www.elevenelevenwines.com |
| Etude, Napa Valley | 89 | 91 | 87 | 88 | Lots of dried fruits, with notes of plums, cinnamon and baker's cocoa. Well structured and held together nicely. | 14.8% | 2021-2030 | N/A UK | www.etudewines.com |
| Flora Springs, Trilogy, Napa Valley | 89 | 90 | 87 | 90 | Ripe dark fruit notes, with hints of violet, milk chocolate and charred oak. Suave and rich, juicy with good depth. | 14.5% | 2020-2027 | N/A UK | www.florasprings.com |
| Frank Family Vineyards, Reserve, Rutherford, Napa Valley | 89 | 91 | 91 | 86 | Powerful and smoky, with intense notes of menthol and toast. Decent hint of minerality and a long, structured finish. | 14.5% | 2019-2028 | N/A UK | www.frankfamilyvineyards.com |
| Grand Napa Vineyards, Reserve, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 91 | 88 | Elegant, showing hints of floral characters alongside fresh berry fruit flavours. Rather simple but very enjoyable. | 14.7% | 2020-2028 | N/A UK | www.grandnapavineyards.com |
| Groth, Reserve, Oakville, Napa Valley | 89 | 90 | 86 | 92 | Very well made wine, combining a rich blackberry nose with well-integrated oak. Lovely structure and very good length. | 15% | 2021-2034 | N/A UK | www.grothwines.com |
| Honig, Bartolucci Vineyard, St Helena, Napa Valley | 89 | 92 | 88 | 87 | Ripe red fruit aromas including raspberry compote and strawberry. Sleek and rich, will evolve nicely. | 14.9% | 2021-2032 | £98 | Vineyard Cellars |
| J Moss, Mee Lane, Rutherford, Napa Valley | 89 | 90 | 87 | 89 | Spiced nose, with layers of ripe black fruit. Fairly rich but shows restraint, with a creamy palate backed by firm tannins. | 14.4% | 2019-2027 | N/A UK | www.jmosswines.com |
| Joel Gott, Napa Valley | 89 | 89 | 93 | 86 | Lovely bright black fruit aromas, continuing on the palate, very pleasant and easy to drink. Shows good typicity. | 14.5% | 2020-2029 | N/A UK | www.gottwines.com |
| Judd's Hill, Estate, Napa Valley | 89 | 88 | 91 | 87 | Juicy and vibrant, with stylish oak. Plenty of jammy blackberry, leading into a warm, peppery finish. | 14.2% | 2019-2025 | N/A UK | www.juddshill.com |
| Juslyn Vineyards, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley | 89 | 91 | 88 | 89 | Vibrant black fruits with violet undertones, this is supple and approachable. Will soften further and improve with age. | 14.5% | 2021-2031 | N/A UK | www.juslynvineyards.com |
| Kendall-Jackson, Vintner's Reserve, Sonoma County | 89 | 88 | 87 | 91 | Juicy bramble and blackberry nose, with more crunchy fruit and ripe tannins on the palate. Light mocha finish. | 14.5% | 2019-2024 | N/A UK | www.kj.com |
| Lobo, Wulff Vineyards, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley | 89 | 88 | 87 | 91 | Tarry black fruit nose, enriched by oak. Dense and rich, with a touch of tannic grip, but well balanced and long. | 14.4% | 2021-2029 | N/A UK | www.lobowines.com |
| Michael Mondavi Family, M by Michael Mondavi, Napa Valley | 89 | 90 | 85 | 92 | Attractive Cabernet fruit nose, with some herbal, minty notes. Very approachable, leading to a lovely toasty finish. | 14.5% | 2020-2029 | N/A UK | www.michaelmondavifamilyestate.com |
| PlumpJack, Estate, Oakville, Napa Valley | 89 | 92 | 87 | 89 | Soft and juicy, combining flavours of ripe black fruit with notes of toasted almond, tobacco leaf and Christmas cake. | 15.4% | 2019-2028 | POA | Roberson |
| Rodney Strong, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County | 89 | 90 | 90 | 88 | Soft, elegant nose, very subtle. Rich and concentrated on the palate, a combination of ripe black fruit, prunes and cedar. | 14.5% | 2020-2028 | £34 | The Wine Treasury |
| Silenus, Oak Knoll, Napa Valley | 89 | 92 | 87 | 87 | Delicate and charming black-cherry nose, reticent but lifted. Complex palate, full of structure and balancing acidity. | 14.5% | 2022-2028 | N/A UK | www.silenuswinery.com |
| Star Lane Vineyard, Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara | 89 | 89 | 91 | 87 | Aromas of black fruit with notes of black pepper and some herbal hints. Good oak use and decent finish. | 14.4% | 2019-2028 | N/A UK | www.starlanevineyard.com |
| Volker Eisele Family Estate, V, Napa Valley | 89 | 92 | 86 | 88 | Deep, slightly plummy aromas, leading to a very rich palate, with well-worked tannins and fruit that doesn't overpower. | 14.8% | 2021-2031 | N/A UK | www.volkerreiselefamilyestate.com |
| Wente, Charles Wetmore, Livermore Valley, San Francisco Bay | 89 | 91 | 90 | 87 | Really lovely herbal notes on the palate, hints of rosemary and sage. Supple and easy, but with tannic backbone and fresh acidity. | 14.5% | 2019-2023 | £18.99 | The Drink Shop |
| Whitehall Lane, Leonardini Estate, Napa Valley | 89 | 92 | 87 | 87 | Warming spice on the palate, plenty of fruit, good cinnamon and cedar notes, all nicely wrapped up in the tannins. | 14.7% | 2021-2029 | N/A UK | www.whitehalllane.com |

RECOMMENDED (Continued) 86–89pts

| Wine | Score | DA | SB | TK | Tasting note | Alc | Drink | Price | Stockists |
|--|-------|----|----|----|--|-------|-----------|------------|--|
| Yao Ming, Family Reserve, Napa Valley | 89 | 90 | 92 | 85 | Evolved palate with nice gamey, smoky notes alongside powerful black fruit. Tannins are firm and the oak gives spice and verve. | 14.4% | 2022-2032 | N/A UK | www.yaofamilywines.com |
| Acumen, Mountainside, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 86 | 89 | Delicate and upfront nose, lightly herbaceous. On the palate there is a combination of blue and black fruit. Very enjoyable. | 13.9% | 2020-2027 | N/A UK | www.acumenwine.com |
| Anthem, Estate, Mt Veeder, Napa Valley | 88 | 89 | 88 | 87 | Damson and black-cherry fruit, dense and brooding. Sumptuous and supple, somewhat soft, but firm tannins support the fruit. | 15.3% | 2019-2030 | N/A UK | www.anthemwinery.com |
| Austin Reece, Heir Apparent, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley | 88 | 89 | 85 | 89 | Rich and unctuous, with clear oak characters. Palate has a juicy nature, with a sweet fruit undertone but seems quite powerful. | 14.8% | 2019-2024 | N/A UK | www.heirapparentwinery.com |
| Buccella, Napa Valley | 88 | 87 | 90 | 86 | Charred oak gives an espresso tone to the nose, followed by a riper, fruit-forward palate. Slightly savoury, with nice weight. | 14.6% | 2020-2029 | N/A UK | www.buccella.com |
| Cakebread Cellars, Dancing Bear Ranch, Howell Mountain, Napa | 88 | 90 | 88 | 86 | Blended with 8% Cabernet Franc. Jammy dark fruit, with a touch of coffee and tobacco. A well-structured wine, with plenty of room to settle and improve. | 14.9% | 2021-2035 | N/A UK | www.cakebread.com |
| Calla Lily, Ultimate Red, Napa Valley | 88 | 89 | 86 | 89 | Distinctly oaky, leafy nose, with a background of blackberries and cherries. Palate has good energy, very likeable. | 14.1% | 2021-2027 | N/A UK | www.callallywines.com |
| Castello di Amorosa, Il Barone, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 85 | 89 | Opulent blackberry and black-cherry nose, continuing on the palate with a nice lift at the end that leaves you wanting more. | 14.8% | 2020-2029 | N/A UK | www.castellodiamorosa.com |
| Duckhorn Vineyards, Napa Valley | 88 | 89 | 88 | 88 | Oak aromas, backed by touches of plums and blackberries. Medium-bodied, quite graceful and fresh, not extracted. | 14.5% | 2020-2030 | £79 | Albion Wine, General Wine Co., Jeroboams, Philiplas & Swiggot, Planet of the Grapes, The Wine Treasury |
| Guarachi Family Wines, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 87 | 87 | Ripe fruit notes, slightly confected with raspberry compote nuances. Juicy, weighty, very concentrated and tannic. | 14.8% | 2022-2034 | N/A UK | www.guarachifamilywines.com |
| Hoopes, Oakville, Napa Valley | 88 | 92 | 89 | 84 | Ripe but reticent blackberry nose, not very nuanced but has ample fruit. Plump and rounded, this is fleshy and concentrated. | 14.8% | 2020-2032 | N/A UK | www.hoopesvineyard.com |
| JAX Vineyards, Block 3, Calistoga, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 89 | 86 | Spicy and bold, with notes of cooked fruit and cherry pie. Vibrant and solid, with plenty of sweet fruit and a long finish. | 14.9% | 2020-2030 | N/A UK | www.jaxvineyards.com |
| Jericho Canyon, Reserve, Napa Valley | 88 | 88 | 82 | 85 | Complex flavours of raisin, cinnamon and fruit cake, over a layer of oak spice. Very full, yet still soft, with a warm finish. | 15.1% | 2019-2027 | N/A UK | www.jerihocanyonvineyard.com |
| Jericho Canyon, Solair, Napa Valley | 88 | 88 | 81 | 86 | Coffee and walnuts on the nose, intertwined with hefty blackberry aromas. Big, bold and ripe in style, with grippy tannins. | 15.1% | 2019-2025 | N/A UK | www.jerihocanyonvineyard.com |
| Kuleto Estate, Napa Valley | 88 | 88 | 85 | 90 | Perfumed nose, slightly floral but led by plum notes. Palate is juicy and fruit-driven with lots of plum and black cherry. | 14.8% | 2020-2034 | N/A UK | www.kuletoestate.com |
| Larkmead, Dr Olmo, Napa Valley | 88 | 91 | 87 | 87 | Very toasty nose, with black fruits and some lift. Dark fruits and forest floor on the palate, with a touch of warming alcohol. | 14.7% | 2021-2029 | N/A UK | www.larkmead.com |
| Materra, Cunat Family, 1856, Oak Knoll, Napa Valley | 88 | 91 | 87 | 87 | Oaky, but not tarry or excessive, with black fruits shining through. Juicy and fruit-driven, showing excellent potential. | 14.5% | 2021-2028 | N/A UK | www.materrawines.com |
| Materra, Cunat Family, Hidden Block, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 89 | 85 | Herbal nose leading to a very round, quite ripe palate; plenty of damson and boysenberry with subtle use of oak. | 14.8% | 2021-2031 | N/A UK | www.materrawines.com |
| Meteor Vineyard, Perseid, Napa Valley | 88 | 89 | 87 | 88 | Juicy and slightly jammy nose, with sweet blue fruit and spiced oak notes. A classic Napa and a well-made wine. | 14.8% | 2022-2035 | N/A UK | www.meteorvineyard.com |
| Miner, Stagecoach Vineyard, Napa Valley | 88 | 91 | 85 | 88 | Very appealing fruit on the nose, with some violet hints. Oak is more evident on the palate, and sweet vanilla notes. | 14.4% | 2020-2029 | N/A UK | www.minerwines.com |
| Pellet Estate, Pellet Vineyard, Napa Valley | 88 | 89 | 90 | 85 | Rich oaky black-cherry nose. Broad and generous, packed with fruit, solid but not excessively tannic, robust and spicy. | 14.7% | 2020-2028 | N/A UK | www.pelletestate.com |
| Philip Togni, Napa Valley | 88 | 91 | 85 | 88 | Really lovely nose of coffee and smoked meats, followed by a nice hint of bitter cocoa on the palate. Well structured. | 14% | 2020-2027 | N/A UK | www.philipptognivineyard.com |
| Pine Ridge Vineyards, Napa Valley | 88 | 89 | 87 | 87 | Muted blackberry nose, lightly floral but with noticeable oak characters in the background. Soft, warm and elegant. | 14.9% | 2021-2035 | £49.45 | 99 Wines |
| Raymond, Reserve Selection, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 85 | 89 | Slightly savoury nose, hints of meat and saline too. Dense black-fruit core, solid and powerful, with well-judged oak. | 14.5% | 2020-2029 | £41.58-£48 | Corking Wines, Strictly Wine |
| Scheid Vineyards, Kurt's Vineyards, San Lucas, Monterey | 88 | 88 | 88 | 88 | Smoky, tarry aromas. Palate has more fruit character, and a touch of tomato vine leaf. Enjoyable, with a good acidity. | 14.8% | 2020-2030 | £40 | North South Wines |
| Seavey Vineyard, Caravina, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 86 | 87 | Broad and rounded, with good fruit weight and concentration. Plenty of juicy cherry and plum fruit, with a herbal touch. | 14.5% | 2021-2029 | N/A UK | www.seaveyvineyard.com |
| Snowden, Los Ricos Vineyard, Napa Valley | 88 | 88 | 84 | 87 | Pungent, slightly herbal nose with distinct notes of smoke. Intense and heavy palate, with more baked fruit flavours. | 15% | 2019-2029 | N/A UK | www.snowdenvineyards.com |
| Star Lane Vineyard, Astral, Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara | 88 | 88 | 86 | 89 | Creamy front palate, with a decent bit of bramble fruit and nice acidity. Palate has a fleshy nature, with ripe black-fruit notes. | 14.5% | 2021-2029 | N/A UK | www.starlanevineyard.com |
| Sterling Vineyards, Iridium, Napa Valley | 88 | 88 | 85 | 89 | Aromas of spiced black cherries and dark chocolate, with flavours of plum and rich oak persisting on the palate. | 14.9% | 2019-2023 | N/A UK | www.sterlingvineyards.com |
| Stonestreet, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County | 88 | 85 | 88 | 90 | Discreet and elegant, with some leafy notes. Palate has a lovely freshness and silky tannins, very appealing. | 13.5% | 2020-2026 | £42 | D Byrne & Co, Highbury Vinters, WoodWinters |

RECOMMENDED (Continued) 86–89pts

| Wine | Score | DA | SB | TK | Tasting note | Alc | Drink | Price | Stockists |
|--|-------|----|----|----|--|-------|-----------|---------------|--|
| Volker Eisele Family Estate, Chiles Valley District, Napa Valley | 88 | 90 | 85 | 88 | Plenty of spiced cherry notes, light and fresh in style. An elegant palate with some hints of savoury, and fine-grained tannins. | 14.3% | 2020-2028 | N/A UK | www.volkereiselefamileystate.com |
| Waterstone, Reserve, Napa Valley | 88 | 91 | 87 | 86 | Sweet toasty nose, ripe black fruits but not overblown. A very classy wine, with understated oak and a persistent finish. | 14.7% | 2019-2025 | £64.70 | Hedonism |
| William Cole Vineyards, Smoking Gun, Napa Valley | 88 | 91 | 87 | 85 | Lightly herbaceous nose, has a tentative charm. Medium-bodied, supple, juicy and upfront, with light tannins and acidity. | 14.4% | 2020-2030 | N/A UK | www.smokinggunwines.com |
| Behrens Family Winery, Cemetery, Napa Valley | 87 | 89 | 84 | 87 | Cigar box, cedar and cinnamon on the nose, bags of black fruit, but toastiness and good complexity. Excellent potential for ageing. | 14.9% | 2021-2031 | N/A UK | www.behrensfamilywinery.com |
| Black Stallion EstateWinery, Limited Release, Napa Valley | 87 | 89 | 87 | 84 | Ripe fruit notes, with subtle hints of Christmas cake and violets, underpinned by cedar and spice. Very rich and fleshy. | 15.3% | 2020-2027 | N/A UK | www.blackstallionwinery.com |
| Cade, Estate, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley | 87 | 89 | 84 | 88 | Perfumed notes, with hints of spice. Palate has more dark fruit sweetness, round and juicy yet still elegant and polished. | 15.2% | 2020-2026 | N/A UK | www.cadewinery.com |
| Carter Cellars, Carter, Napa Valley | 87 | 90 | 86 | 84 | Smoky, toasty nose, with bold blackcurrant fruit and some vanilla. Shows good concentration on the palate and punchy tannins. | 14.9% | 2022-2038 | N/A UK | cartercellars.com |
| Gibbs, Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley | 87 | 88 | 84 | 90 | Fresh leather notes, black fruit and oak spice. Palate has ripeness and a blueberry nuanced character, with spice and milk chocolate. | 14.7% | 2019-2029 | N/A UK | www.gibbsnapavalley.com |
| Girard, Mountain Cuvee, Napa Valley | 87 | 92 | 85 | 85 | Bright palate, fresh blackcurrant and hints of raspberry. Good use of oak, the cinnamon and vanilla is there in the background. | 14.9% | 2021-2032 | N/A UK | www.girardwinery.com |
| Grgich Hills Estate, Napa Valley | 87 | 88 | 87 | 86 | Sweet juicy cherry notes, with hints of herbal notes and capsicum. Dried fruit and an attractive creaminess on the palate. | 14.6% | 2020-2029 | £80-£90 | Bottle Apostle, Field & Fawcett, The General Wine Co, The Horsham Cellar, The Wine Reserve |
| Hertelendy, Napa Valley | 87 | 89 | 85 | 88 | Bold nose, quite ripe and meaty with a touch of smoky oak. Very rich and fleshy, distinctly tannic and extracted. | 14.8% | 2021-2029 | N/A UK | www.hertelendy.com |
| Hindsight, Estate, Calistoga, Napa Valley | 87 | 87 | 88 | 87 | Charming blackberry nose, with a leafy edge to it. Luxurious palate is dominated by sweet red berry fruit and cherries. | 14.6% | 2021-2030 | N/A UK | www.hindsightwines.com |
| Honig, Napa Valley | 87 | 88 | 91 | 82 | Good attack, sleek and velvety, concentrated and succulent, with cherry pie and blackberry fruit. Firm and structured, with some complexity. | 14.5% | 2021-2030 | £51 | Vineyard Cellars |
| J Moss, Steffensen Vineyard, Coombsville, Napa Valley | 87 | 84 | 89 | 88 | Concentrated black fruit with some smoky notes. Palate shows more crunchy fruit, balanced with good acidity and firm tannins. | 14.4% | 2021-2028 | N/A UK | www.jmosswines.com |
| John Anthony, Napa Valley | 87 | 88 | 84 | 90 | Concentrated black fruit with a dark chocolate note and floral elements. Palate has lots of weight and fruit density. | 15.2% | 2021-2030 | N/A UK | www.johnanthonyvineyards.com |
| Judd's Hill, Kairos Vineyard, Napa Valley | 87 | 87 | 89 | 85 | Lean herbal nose, with plenty of black cherries, showing some charm. Medium-bodied but graceful and silky, with good length. | 14.2% | 2019-2027 | N/A UK | www.juddshill.com |
| Kenefick Ranch, Chris's Cuvée, Calistoga, Napa Valley | 87 | 86 | 89 | 87 | Very rich and very ripe, an abundance of sweet, jammy fruit on the nose and palate. Hints of oak spice come through on the finish. | 14.9% | 2020-2030 | N/A UK | www.kenefickranch.com |
| Levendi, Stagecoach Vineyard, Napa Valley | 87 | 87 | 85 | 89 | Stewed black fruit, lots of cassis and oak spice. Palate has concentration and weight. Lots of fruit here, masks the alcohol. | 15.4% | 2020-2029 | N/A UK | www.levendwinery.com |
| Michael Mondavi Family, Animo, Napa Valley | 87 | 88 | 88 | 85 | Slightly savoury in style, sour cherry and crisp black fruit, underpinned by vanilla oak sweetness. Well made and decent length. | 14.6% | 2020-2026 | N/A UK | www.michaelmondavifamilyestate.com |
| Othello, Napa Valley | 87 | 86 | 85 | 90 | Floral-driven nose, with notes of violet over a background of black cherries and oak. Very typical of the style, with a decent finish. | 14.5% | 2019-2022 | £36.95-£42.95 | Corney & Barrow, Jeroboams, Private Cellar |
| Patel, Coombsville, Napa Valley | 87 | 89 | 88 | 85 | Generous and full, a nice mix of dark fruit, wood and spice. Solid and weighty, with a long, chocolatey finish. | 15.2% | 2020-2028 | N/A UK | www.patelwinery.com |
| Patel, Rutherford, Napa Valley | 87 | 88 | 89 | 85 | Aromas of raisins and juicy dark fruits. Fleshy and rounded on the palate, with moderate tannins and rich texture. | 15.2% | 2022-2034 | N/A UK | www.patelwinery.com |
| Priest Ranch, Napa Valley | 87 | 87 | 83 | 86 | Toasty black fruits and mocha nose. Broad and fleshy, concentrated with a touch of tar, and powerful, burly tannins. | 15.1% | 2019-2024 | N/A UK | www.priestranchwines.com |
| Rocca, Collinetta Vineyard, Coombsville, Napa Valley | 87 | 86 | 88 | 88 | Very appealing nose of violets and floral elements. Lots of lively blue and black fruit, juicy and easy to approach. | 15.2% | 2020-2026 | N/A UK | www.roccawines.com |
| Rocca, Grigsby Vineyard, Yountville, Napa Valley | 87 | 89 | 86 | 86 | Soft, elegant and fruity palate, with notes of bramble fruit and forest floor. Decent acidity to balance the ripe fruit, well made. | 15.3% | 2019-2033 | N/A UK | www.roccawines.com |
| Somerston, LX, Napa Valley | 87 | 89 | 86 | 85 | Spiced red fruit aromas, with sweet raisiny notes. Sleek and intense, tannic but not too extracted. Decent finish. | 15.5% | 2019-2022 | N/A UK | www.somerstonwineco.com |
| White Rock Vineyards, Laureate, Napa Valley | 87 | 88 | 86 | 88 | Concentrated black fruit nose, with hints of roasted meats. Coarse tannins are nicely balanced by acidity and fruit concentration. | 14.7% | 2021-2031 | N/A UK | www.whiterockvineyards.com |
| Antica by Antinori, Townsend Vineyard, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley | 86 | 87 | 85 | 85 | Good ripe fruit and prominent oak characters. Grippy tannins and high acidity. | 14.8% | 2019-2025 | N/A UK | www.anticanapavalley.com |
| BV, Georges de Latour Private Reserve, Napa Valley | 86 | 82 | 88 | 88 | Sweet plummy fruit and oak notes. Juicy and spicy on the palate, with good density of fruit to support the alcohol. | 15.5% | 2019-2022 | £125 | Cru World Wines |
| Odette, Estate, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley | 86 | 89 | 85 | 85 | Lovely front palate, creamy, full and well balanced, plenty of ripe fruit there. Hints of smoke and spice at the back of the palate. | 15.2% | 2020-2032 | N/A UK | www.odetteestate.com |

RECOMMENDED (Continued) 86–89pts

| Wine | Score | DA | SB | TK | Tasting note | Alc | Drink | Price | Stockists |
|---|-------|----|----|----|--|-------|-----------|--------|----------------------|
| Pahlmeyer, Napa Valley | 86 | 87 | 84 | 86 | Soft and fruity, very lovely place to be. The oak shows well, the tannins are spicy but not excessive, and the length is good. | 15.2% | 2021-2028 | N/A UK | www.pahlmeyer.com |
| Rodney Strong, Alexander's Crown, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County | 86 | 88 | 86 | 85 | Ripe and full, with crisp black fruit notes and a little sweet spice. Opens up on the palate to reveal plums and fuller dark fruits. | 15% | 2020-2026 | N/A UK | www.rodneystrong.com |
| Somnium, Napa Valley | 86 | 86 | 83 | 88 | Lots of ripeness, and a touch of graphite. Palate has a juicy nature, slightly spicy and bit meaty. Rich and peppery finish. | 14.9% | 2019-2024 | £185 | Vineyard Cellars |
| Three Thieves, California | 86 | 86 | 87 | 85 | Lively, spicy black-fruit nose. Fresh, juicy and upfront. Sweet red fruit palate, almost like a Christmas cake, with round tannins. | 13.5% | 2019-2024 | N/A UK | www.threethieves.com |

COMMENDED 83-85pts

■ **Anthem, Beckstoffer Las Piedras Vineyard, St Helena, Napa Valley 85**, 15.8%, 2022-2031, £69 Four Corners ■ **Beringer, Private Reserve, Napa Valley 85**, 15.2%, 2019-2024, N/A UK [www.beringer.com](#) ■ **Cade, Reserve, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley 85**, 15.6%, 2021-2031, N/A UK [www.cadewinery.com](#) ■ **Canard Vineyard, Alluvia, Calistoga, Napa Valley 85**, 15.2%, 2020-2025, N/A UK [www.canardvineyard.com](#) ■ **Chappellet, Pritchard Hill, Napa Valley 85**, 14.5%, 2019-2021, N/A UK [www.chappellet.com](#) ■ **Hourglass, Blueline Estate, Napa Valley 85**, 15.2%, 2020-2026, N/A UK [www.hourglasswines.com](#) ■ **Kenefick Ranch, Doctor's Cuvée, Calistoga, Napa Valley 85**, 15.2%, 2020-2027, N/A UK [www.kenefickranch.com](#) ■ **Oakville Ranch, Oakville, Napa Valley 85**, 15.5%, 2022-2035, N/A UK [www.oakvilleranch.com](#) ■ **Parallel, Reward, Napa Valley 85**, 15.2%, 2020-2027, N/A UK [www.parallelwines.com](#) ■ **Rudd, Samantha's, Oakville, Napa Valley 85**, 15.4%, 2021-2040, £176 Berry Bros & Rudd, Fields Morris & Verdin ■ **Rutherford Hill, Limited Release, Rutherford, Napa Valley 85**, 15.5%,

2019-2025, POA [Wine Treasury](#) ■ **Alta, Oso Malo, Napa Valley 84**, 15.3%, 2020-2026, N/A UK [www.altawinery.com](#) ■ **Merus, Coombsville, Napa Valley 84**, 15%, 2020-2025, N/A UK [www.meruswines.com](#) ■ **Paul Hobbs, Napa Valley 84**, 15.5%, 2019-2022, N/A UK [www.paulhobbswinery.com](#) ■ **Switchback Ridge, Peterson Family Vineyard, Calistoga, Napa Valley 84**, 15.5%, 2019-2024, N/A UK [www.switchbackridge.com](#) ■ **Tor, Beckstoffer To Kalon, Napa Valley 84**, 15.5%, 2019-2026, £345 Vineyard Cellars ■ **Black Stallion, Transcendent, Napa Valley 83**, 15.5%, 2020-2026, N/A UK [www.blackstallionwinery.com](#) ■ **Cade, Napa Valley 83**, 15.6%, 2019, N/A UK [www.cadewinery.com](#) ■ **Roy Estate, Napa Valley 83**, 15.7%, 2019-2023, N/A UK [www.royestate.com](#) ■ **Tor, Herb Lamb Vineyard, Napa Valley 83**, 15.5%, 2019-2022, £218 Four Corners, Vineyard Cellars

FAIR 76-82pts

■ **Cakebread Cellars, Benchland Select, Napa Valley 82** ■ **Snowden, Brothers Vineyard, Napa Valley 82** ■ **Artesa, Cask Reserva Especial, Napa Valley 81**

FAULTY

■ **Oakville Ranch, Oakville, Napa Valley** (dirty/unclean) ■ **Snowden, The Ranch, Napa Valley** (suspicion of dirty barrels)

NEXT MONTH'S PANEL TASTINGS

English sparkling wine and branded Bordeaux reds

