



THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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California Wines: Availability and Price

"Look Out World, Here We Come"

With this issue we begin what promises to be the most current and extensive evaluation of Cabernet Sauvignons undertaken by any publication. Following this initial review of the 1974 vintage, we will in subsequent issues, evaluate the 1975, 1976, 1977, and 1978 vintages. Also, we will review older vintages and will have notes on many barrel samples and unreleased wines.

A question that arises is what about the availability of particular California wines outside California? The answer is that availability is increasing and rather dramatically. With many more wineries and greater production, competition is intensifying. Also, demand for the better wines is pushing prices higher. The pricing mechanism will ultimately result in more California wines finding their way to all parts of the world. After all, many Burgundies are produced

in quantities of only a few hundred cases, yet are available world-wide. You might not want to pay the price, but they are available to those that do.

So it is with California wines. Now 1974 Cabernets are not generally available, but it's surprising how many dedicated wine consumers and merchants have sought them out. As we point out in the review of the 1974's, many are still available at the winery; others may be found in the hands of retailers. Subsequent vintages have been more widely distributed. So be patient. It won't be necessary to come to California to drink its best wines any more than it's necessary to go to France to drink the best French wines. Look out world, here we come!

John Tilson
Editor

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Volume 1, Number 5

1974 CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

**"The Best of Them Are Amongst The
Best Wines California Has Yet
Produced"**

Cabernet Sauvignon produces California's greatest red wine. The 1974 vintage year was a classic, it ranks with 1968 and 1970 as the best of the 1960-70 period. From Mendocino to Monterey, conditions were almost ideal. There was a long growing season, and late in the year warm temperatures produced grapes with great sugar levels.

Cabernet Sauvignon planted in California totaled 3,583 acres in 1968. The prime North Coast counties of Napa and Sonoma had plantings of 1,663 acres and 608 acres, respectively. In 1970, this acreage had increased to 2,318 acres in Napa and 1,298 acres in Sonoma. By 1974 the totals had exploded to 5,299 acres in Napa and 4,999 acres in Sonoma. With this tremendous increase in acreage, new wineries could not be far behind.

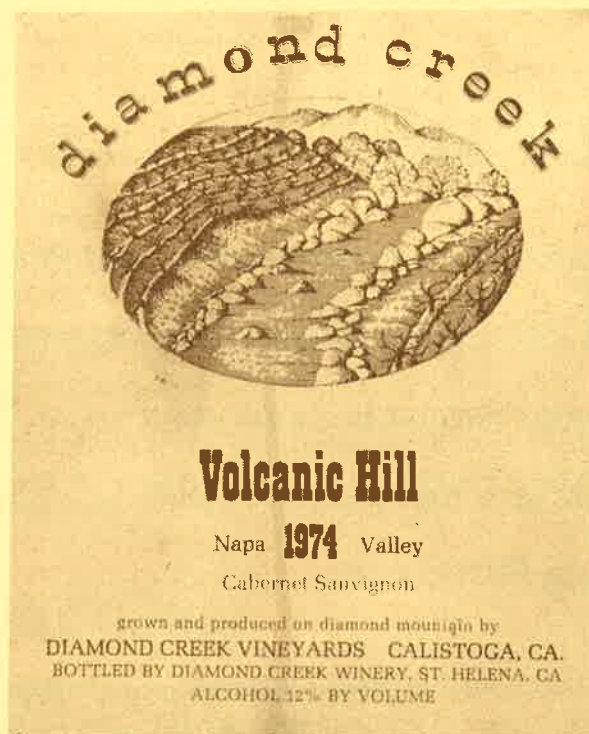
Whereas in 1970 there were perhaps two dozen producers of Cabernet Sauvignon, by 1974 this had increased nearly 300%. Some wineries had not received much recognition, but the climatic conditions of 1974 afforded an opportunity for virtuoso performances. The wines were greeted with great enthusiasm by a thirsty hoard of wine lovers. Generally possessing great intensity and fruit, they have been widely praised.

*Below is a current assessment of the 1974 Cabernet Sauvignons along with notes on price and availability (wines still available at the winery are designated with an *):*

Outstanding

*** Heitz Cellar "Martha's Vineyard."** The 1974 is another in a line of fine Cabernets dating back to the first Martha's Vineyard in 1966. Stylistically, it resembles the 1969. The color is very dark with a grapey/fruity/ripe/complex nose showing hints of mintiness. The strong, minty bouquet so characteristic and easily recognizable in previous vintages, seems more subdued in this bottling—perhaps a factor of its youth. In the mouth it is, in a word, delicious. The flavors are ripe, rich, and concentrated with just a hint of earthy quality often found in Napa Cabernets. It is loaded with fruit and beautifully balanced. This classic "Martha's Vineyard," is one to

cellar for at least 10 years, and it shows promise of improving for 15 or more. Some 4,500 cases were produced (200 magnums). The wine was released in February, 1979, at \$25.00 per bottle. It is now priced at \$45.00 per bottle. The winery's policy of holding back wine for later release will assure a continuing supply for several years, albeit at higher prices. While the price may be controversial, there's no denying the quality of the wine—a great bottle (18½).



*** Diamond Creek Vineyards "Gravelly Meadow."** This 5 acre vineyard on Diamond Mountain at the northern end of the Napa Valley is adjoined by the sister vineyards, Volcanic Hill and Red Rock Terrace. All three have distinctive characteristics; and, since the first vintage in 1972, all have been bottled separately. This "Gravelly Meadow" is the finest wine yet produced from the property. The color is very dark, almost black. The nose is intensely perfumed and very complex with fruity/cedary components and hints of nutmeg, spices, and chocolate. It is a big wine, packed with fruit and flavor, yet very firmly structured with an excellent fruit/tannin/acid balance. The taste has great depth and shows hints of chocolate. The wine promises to be a real keeper and may not peak for 10 or more years. Some 105 cases were produced and it was released at \$7.50 per bottle in September, 1976. The current price from the winery is \$125 for a 3-pack including a bottle each of the other two 1974 Cabernets (18).

Addendum

Insert Volume 1, Number 5

A printer's error resulted in an omission of several wines and mispositioning of a number of others.

On page 9, **Edmeades** through **Rutherford Vitners** are scored correctly at 11½. However, they should appear after **Beringer** in the **Below Average** category.

In addition, the following four wines should be included in the **Good** category in the positions noted:

Page 6 after **Mirassou Harvest Selection "Unfiltered"**

Silver Oak "North Coast." The grapes for this Cabernet came predominately from the Alexander Valley in Sonoma. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a prune-like nose. The flavors exhibit an over-ripe fruit character and the wine is soft, flavorful and ready to drink. Some 3,850 cases were produced and it was released in January, 1979 at \$10.00 per bottle. The winery is currently selling fifths at \$20.00 and magnums at \$40.00 (14½).

Page 8 after **Ernies "Special Selection"**

Franciscan. This Napa Valley Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/weedy nose. It has clean, thin, prune flavors that finish short. Over 5,660 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$4.50 per bottle in November, 1977. The winery is currently selling the wine for \$12.00 per bottle (13).

Insert page 8 after **Robert Mondavi Winery**

The Christian Brothers. This Napa Valley Cabernet was blended with 18% Napa Valley Merlot. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy nose. It is light with thin flavors and lacks depth and complexity. Some 6,232 cases were produced and the wine is available at \$6.00 (12½).

Insert page 9 after **Hacienda Wine Cellars**

San Martin "Limited Vintage." This Monterey County Cabernet has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/molasses-like nose. In the mouth it is flat, one-dimensional, soft and ready to drink. It lacks distinction and flavor interest. The original \$3.49 price represented a fair value (12).

Very Good

Conn Creek "Eisele Vineyard." This Cabernet was produced from grapes grown in the Eisele Vineyard at the northern end of the Napa Valley. It shows a very dark color with just a hint of amber at the edge. The nose is huge with a fruity/earthy/oaky quality, nuances of toasted coconut, and just a hint of volatile acidity—very complex. The wine has big fruit and nice structure and balance. With tannin still to lose, it should improve for 3-5 more years. Some 480 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$7.50 per bottle in November, 1977. The wine is no longer available, but a few retailers may still have limited supplies. Prices have been in the \$25-30 range (17½).

Caymus. This fine Napa Cabernet comes from one of the state's best producers. The wine has a dark color and a beautiful fruity Cabernet nose with hints of coconut. It has great fruit and lovely flavors that promise increasing complexity with a few more years bottle age. There is still tannin to lose, but the wine drinks beautifully now. Some 1200 cases were produced and the wine was released in August, 1976, at \$7.00 per bottle. It is no longer available at the winery, but may still occasionally be found commanding prices upwards of \$30 (17).

Ridge "Monte Bello." This Santa Cruz Mountain Cabernet has shown considerable improvement in the past couple of years. It has a very dark color and a lovely complex earthy/fruity bouquet with a hint of volatile acidity. The structure is firm with good fruit and balance. It is a really nice wine that should improve for several more years and be excellent for many years hence. Under 1650 cases were produced and it was originally released at \$10.00 per bottle. The winery's policy of holding back small amounts may mean it could be available from the winery at a future date at a substantially higher price. The last release price was \$20 per bottle and, when available, it now commands prices in excess of \$30 (17).

Ritchie Creek. This relatively new winery has produced a very fine wine from grapes grown on Spring Mountain in Napa. It has a very dark color and a very perfumed nose of sandalwood, spice, and fruit. There are lovely, sweet, deep flavors that show considerable cedary/oaky qualities. It is youthfully tannic and needs another 3-5 years to begin to round out and show further complexities. The wine was produced in limited quantity and released about 2 years ago at approximately \$7.50 per bottle (17).

* **Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Cask 23."** This is a special plot of Cabernet from the Stag's Leap Vineyards which is kept aside and, when vintage conditions warrant, bottled separately. The 1974 was the first Cask 23 and what a wine it is. The color is dark and the nose shows a lovely fruity quality with hints of

roses. In the mouth, it is lovely, ripe and voluptuous with charm and style. It is beautifully balanced and should improve for at least 3-5 more years. Some 458 cases were produced. It has been sold only from the winery at \$12.00 per bottle beginning in August, 1977. There is still a quantity available at the winery to be sold later at an as yet undetermined price (17).

Sterling Cellars "Reserve." This huge wine seems to be destined for a very long life. It has a very dark, almost black color. It is intensely perfumed with youthful fruity/oaky/spicy aromas. In the mouth, it is showing hints of complexity with very deep fruity/cedary flavors. The wine has good structure and good acid/ tannin balance. It surely needs at least five more years, but will likely take 10 or more, to develop fully. The wine was in relatively good supply when originally released a couple of years ago. The \$12.00 release price has climbed to \$25-30 and it is still occasionally seen for sale (17).

Chappellet Vineyard. This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and an intensely fruity nose with an herbal complexity. It is a big, substantial wine with lots of fruit balanced by ample tannin and acid. The addition of 10% Merlot gives the wine a supple texture. At least 3-4 more years of bottle age are needed for it to reach maturity. Some 4,500 cases were produced and the wine was released in September, 1977, at \$8.00 per bottle. The winery is sold out, but the wine is occasionally seen at prices of \$20.00-25.00 per bottle (16½).

* **Diamond Creek "Volanic Hill."** This 8 acre vineyard produced 485 cases of wine in 1974. Typically, the "biggest" of the Diamond Creek Cabernets, this is no exception. The color is very dark and the nose is perfumed with lots of fruit and oak with hints of chocolate. The wine has great fruit and flavor and considerable tannin. The tannin has softened a great deal in the past few years and this shows promise for the future, since there has been no loss of fruit. Another 5 years or so in the bottle should be most rewarding. About 485 cases were produced and the wine originally sold in September, 1976, at \$7.50 per bottle. The winery is now selling one bottle of each of the vineyard bottlings at \$125 per 3-pack (16½).

Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Insignia." "Insignia" is a proprietary term used by Joe Phelps each year to designate a wine of particular quality. In 1974 it was this powerful Steltzner Vineyard Cabernet which is blended with 6% Merlot. The wine has a dark color and a fruity, slightly weedy nose with hints of chocolate. It is very fruity with a bit of a late-picked raisin quality and rich flavors. Perhaps not a wine to lay away for too long, it is enjoyable now for the big flavors. Originally released at \$12 in March, 1978, it now commands prices upward of \$25 (16½).

* **Robert Mondavi "Reserve."** This is probably Mondavi's finest Cabernet to date. It has a dark color and a fruity nose with nuances of green olives and a hint of mint. There is lots of fruit and a slight prune-like quality adds flavor interest. Ample tannin and acid assure that this will be a long-lived wine. A minimum of 5 more years cellaring is required for the wine to develop softness and complexities. Mondavi's Cabernets are usually blended with a small amount of Merlot and/or Cabernet Franc and this bottling has 14% Merlot. Some 10,000 cases were produced, and the initial release was made in September, 1979, at \$30 per bottle. A large quantity of the wine is being held at the winery, and future releases, including some magnums, double magnums, etc., are expected over the next several years (16½).

Villa Mt. Eden. This Napa Valley Cabernet was made from two year old vines. The 25 acres produced only 225 cases, but the wine has amazing character. The color is very dark and the nose displays a tremendous oak/cedary, fruity character. A huge wine with lots of oak, fruit, and tannin; many more years of bottle age are required for maximum development. Originally sold at \$8.00 per bottle in April, 1977, the wine is no longer available and exceedingly difficult to find (16½).

Beaulieu Vineyards "Private Reserve." The Private Reserve Cabernets from this well-known Napa Valley winery have had a different character since 1970. This vintage shows considerable bottle variation and many bottles have a weedy character that is relatively unattractive. The better bottles exhibit a dark color and an oak/prune-like nose. There's lots of ripe fruit and good flavor with ample tannin and acid for further bottle aging. Relative to many Napa Valley wineries, BV's "Private Reserve" production is quite large, there by making it readily available during those periods when the winery elects to sell the wine. The \$12.00 bottle price is expected to increase with subsequent releases (16).

Burgess Cellars "Vintage Selection." This Cabernet was produced from Napa Mountain grapes. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a ripe, fruity, prune-like nose. There are ripe Cabernet flavors and a bit of dusty quality with good tannin and acid. A wine to lay away for 5 years or more, it should prove to show complexity and roundness. Some 1100 cases were produced, and it was sold at \$12.00 per bottle in September, 1977. Although no longer available at the winery, a few retailers have cellared the wine, and prices are now \$25.00 and up (16).

Corti Brothers. This wine was selected by Sacramento retailer, Darrell Corti, from Edmeades

Vineyards Estate Bottled Cabernet grown in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino County. It has a dark color and a lovely woody/cedary/cinnamon nose. It is fruity with a spicy, somewhat chocolate-like flavor. The wine is a lighter style with elegance and just a hint of a petillant quality. Only 56 cases were produced and the wine was sold at \$10 per bottle in November, 1976. It is now virtually impossible to find outside private cellars (16).

Mayacamas. This Napa Mountain Cabernet is typical of the huge wines from this producer since 1969. Although perhaps not up to the quality of the superlative 1970, it is still very good. The color is dark and grapey/fruity aromas predominate. The wine is locked-up with a tremendous amount of fruit seemingly underlying the big tannin overlay. This is a keeper and requires 10 or more years to develop. Approximately 2,000 cases were produced from Draper Vineyard and Mayacamas Vineyard. It is blended with 8% Merlot. Originally released at \$9.50 per bottle in October, 1978, it is not currently available at the winery, but may be released in small quantities in a few years (16).

Mt. Eden Vineyards. This small property in the Santa Cruz Mountains can produce some superlative Cabernets—the 1973 is probably the best of the vintage. This 1974 has a very dark color and a fruity/alcoholic nose. The taste is almost port-like with huge intensity of raisin-like fruit. It is never likely to be elegant, but the flavors are intriguing. Some 450 cases were released in 1977 at \$12.00 per bottle. A second release of 135 cases was made in December, 1979, at \$30.00 per bottle, and approximately 50 cases are still available at the winery (16).

* **Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.** This Napa Valley winery produces consistently good Cabernet. This wine has a dark color with a fruity/oaky nose showing a slight prune-like quality. It is a rich wine with lots of fruit, a slight herbal flavor, and very good structure with acid and tannin to lose. Still at least 3-4 years from maturity, it will make a most attractive bottle. About 5,246 cases were produced and the original release price was \$8.50 in June, 1976. There is still a small quantity of wine available at the winery for future release at an as yet undetermined price (16).

* **Arroyo Sonoma.** This Sonoma County Cabernet has a dark color and a very perfumed ripe fruit nose with considerable volatile acidity. It has very nice ripe flavors and is soft yet with sufficient tannin and acid to warrant a few years more bottle aging. It is a nice wine that, hopefully, will develop a bit more complexity. The original price was around \$8.00 and the winery has reserved a quantity for release at a later date (15½).

* **Diamond Creek "Red Rock Terrace."** This 7 acre vineyard produced 157 cases of Cabernet in 1974. The wine has a dark color and a ripe fruity/oaky nose with a "swampy" character that dissipates with air. The wine is rich with good ripe fruit flavors. Lacking the style of "Gravelly Meadow" and the sheer power and depth of "Volcanic Hill," the nose is the major detraction. Released in September, 1976, at \$7.50 per bottle, it is now sold from the winery as a part of the 1974 3-pack at \$125.00 (15½).

Beaulieu Vineyard. This "regular" Cabernet from BV is a very nice wine with a dark color, just amber at the edge, and a fruity/cherry nose with alcoholic overtones. It is fruity and firm with good structure and nice balance. The original price was around \$6.00 and the wine can still be found at prices of \$12.00 and up (15).

Burgess Cellars. This Napa Valley Cabernet is blended with 13% Merlot. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a grapey/plum-like/oaky nose. The wine has good fruit and structure with noticeable oak. It is still youthful and a bit short on the palate, but another 3-4 years bottle age should begin to uncover more complexities. Approximately 1,300 cases were produced and sold in February, 1977, at \$7.50 per bottle. Some retailers may have limited quantities which command prices of \$20.00 and up (15).

Cakebread Cellars "Lot 2." This Cabernet was made from grapes grown in the Steltzner Vineyards in Napa. It has a very dark color with an amber edge and an alcoholic, prune-like nose. In the mouth it is very rich with flavors of late-picked fruit tinged with chocolate and a slight sweetness. The alcohol is perceptible but not overpowering with good tannin on the finish. This is a good example of the really big style Cabernets. It may lack the acid balance for prolonged aging, but is good drinking for its youthful fruit and concentration. About 150 cases were produced and sold in November, 1976, at \$12.00 per bottle. There is none available at the winery and the wine is very difficult to find (15).

* **Chateau Montelena "Sonoma."** This Cabernet was produced from grapes grown on the Redwood Ranch in Sonoma. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a nice berry-like nose. There is good fruit, pleasant flavors, and acid and tannin to lose. Rather straightforward just now, 2-3 more years bottle age should begin to show more complexities. Released in June, 1978, at \$9.00 per bottle there are still 500 cases available at the winery which are scheduled for release June 1, 1980, at \$20.00 per bottle (15).

* **Clos du Val.** This Napa Valley Cabernet was blended with Merlot and produced from vineyards next to Clos du Val in the Stag's Leap area. It has a medium dark color and an amber edge with an oakly/ripe fruit nose. It has ripe fruit flavors and considerable

oak on the palate with a bit of sharpness on the finish. Still, it is a flavorful wine that could improve for several more years. Released in October, 1976, at \$7.50, there are still a few magnums for sale at the winery at \$45.00 each (15).

* **Freemark Abbey Winery "Bosche."** This Napa Valley Cabernet was made from Bosche Vineyard grapes and blended with 15% Merlot. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/earthy nose showing just a hint of mint. There is nice fruit and complexity with a softness that is quite attractive. Probably near its peak, the wine has just a bit of sharpness on the finish that detracts from the lovely, elegant style. Approximately 4,100 cases were made and the wine was originally released in April, 1978, at \$7.50 per bottle. Currently, the winery has 1,000 cases available for sale at \$10.00. At this price the wine is a good value for consumption now and over the next several years (15).

Lost Hills. This North Coast Cabernet was selected and bottled by Lost Hills. Lost Hills seems to be someone's second label. Just whose is lost information for the moment. No matter, this Cabernet is quite attractive with a medium dark color showing amber and orange tones. It has a lovely prune-like nose, and is rich and soft with the prune quality very much in evidence on the palate. In fact, it is not dissimilar from a pre-1970 BV Private Reserve—say the 1967 at a comparable age. About 750 cases were produced and the original price was about \$4.00. Recently, the wine was available in Southern California at \$4.75 and with a little searching it might turn up. It is a wine with very little aging potential, but lovely to drink now and a great bargain if it can be found (15).

Mirassou Harvest Selection. There are two lots of this Monterey Cabernet which are different from the "unfiltered" bottling. There seems to be very little difference between the two lots, but there is significant variation in different bottles. Some have a slight vegetative character. At its best this wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a minty nose with hints of cayenne pepper. It has a medium body with good flavors and nice fruit. It is ready to drink now, but should keep for many more years. Unfortunately, there seems no way to know which batch you have until you pull the cork. Some 3,153 cases were produced and the wine was released in September, 1977, at \$7.25 per bottle. There is no more available at the winery, although some retailers may still have limited supplies (15).

Mt. Veeder. This Napa Cabernet was produced from the Bernstein Vineyard in the Mayacamas mountains. It has a dark color with a slight amber edge and a youthful, grapey nose. There is a lot of substance and grapey/oaky flavors backed by substantial tannin. This wine promises to be a keeper and is locked-up awaiting at least another 5 years to begin to unfold. It

could prove to be quite extraordinary in 10-15 years. About 644 cases were produced and sold in March, 1977, at \$8.00 per bottle. Some retailers may still have small quantities which command prices of \$20.00 per bottle and up (15).

Souverain "Vintage Selection." This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium dark reddish/orange color with amber edge. It has an oaky/fruity nose showing cedary nuances. It is soft, fruity, and flavorful, with a nice complexity. Ready to drink now, the wine is not likely to show further improvement. Originally released at about \$7.00 per bottle, the wine can occasionally be found at prices ranging from \$8.00-15.00 (15).

Good

Mirassou Harvest Selection "Unfiltered." This Monterey Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge. The nose is very fruity with an intriguing hint of mint and spice. It is fruity and tannic, but is just a bit hot and out of balance. Time should smooth out some of the rough edges and it should turn out to be very nice in 3-5 years. Just under 1,000 cases were made and the wine was released in September, 1977, at \$7.25 per bottle. The winery is sold out, but now and again a bottle turns up on retailers shelves at about \$12.00-15.00 (14½).

Trefethen Vineyards. This Napa Valley Cabernet was made from Trefethen's own vineyards and blended with 13% Merlot. The wine has a very dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/earthy/coffee bean nose. In the mouth there is lots of complex ripe fruity flavor, but the wine is hot and slightly overpowering in alcohol. It is a very flavorful wine that will probably keep for many more years, although elegance is not likely to be a virtue. Approximately 800 cases were made and the wine was sold in the spring of 1978 at \$6.50 per bottle. The winery is sold out, but when available the wine now commands a price of \$15.00 or more (14½).

Callaway. This wine from Temecula in Southern California has oaky/prune flavors, but has turned out surprisingly well considering the strong oak which dominated the wine in its youth. The color is dark with an amber edge and the strong flavors are soft and a bit alcoholic. Recent prices have been in the \$10.00 per bottle range (14).

Carneros Creek Winery "Shenandoah Valley." This Amador Cabernet has a very dark color with a slightly amber edge and a perfumed nose that has a slight herbal/mint quality. It has lots of flavor and is very tannic without much varietal character. Still, it is an attractive wine that will require prolonged aging. About 300 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$7.50 per bottle in July, 1976. It is virtually unavailable now (14).

* **Chateau Montelena "Napa."** This Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely fruity/berry-like nose. It has nice fruit and medium body, but with considerable tannin and a slightly bitter finish. Several more years bottle age will be needed for the wine to develop. Originally sold in June, 1978, at \$9.00 per bottle, the winery plans to release the wine again in June, 1980, at \$20.00 per bottle—a price that bears little relationship to anything (14).

Clos du Bois "Proprietor's Reserve." This Cabernet comes from the Dry Creek area of Sonoma County. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a perfumed fruity nose. It has nice fruit and flavor, but is one-dimensional and a bit flat and short on the finish. Another 2-3 years should yield some complexity. The wine is currently available at \$12.00 per bottle (14).

La Questa. The old La Questa vineyards south of San Francisco used to produce fine Cabernet many years ago. In recent years the wine has been available in limited quantity and, while always a curiosity, it rarely ever seems outstanding. This 1974 Cabernet is true to form with a dark color and a fruity/peppery nose. It is very fruity and tart with high acid and lots of tannin. An interesting cellar curiosity to lay away for 10-15 years, the wine was recently seen at \$7.00 per bottle (14).

* **Martini "Special Selection."** This wine is a different wine than the regular bottling and will be released in the summer of 1981 (the "Private Reserve" is the same as the regular bottling, but held at the winery for additional bottle age. The 1974 "Private Reserve" will be released this summer.) It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a nice fruity/spicy nose. It has a fruity flavor and is light and clean. About 5,000 cases were made, and, following the Martini tradition, the price will undoubtedly be very fair (14).

NV Wines. This North Coast Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a prune-like nose. It is fruity with cherry-like flavors. Rather light, this wine is clean and pleasant. By no means well-known, the recent price has been about \$6.00 (14).

Oakville. This Napa Valley Cabernet has a medium dark color with amber/orange tones and a fruity/peppery nose. It has nice clean light flavors and a good deal of elegance. Not exciting, but it is a very pleasant wine. Oakville is no longer in business, but the label was purchased by Robert Mondavi. Originally priced about \$6.00, this Cabernet was around for a long time, but now seems to have virtually disappeared (14).

Parducci Winery. This Mendocino Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a grapey/fruity nose with a hint of vanilla. It has fruity/grapey flavors that are simple and straightforward. With tannin and acid still to lose this wine should improve for quite a few more years. About 8,000 cases were produced and the wine was sold in July, 1977, at \$4.75

per bottle. Although no longer available at the winery, it still can occasionally be found at about \$10.00 per bottle (14).

*** Simi Winery.** This Cabernet has a medium dark color with a herbaceous/fruity/oaky nose. The wine has good fruit and depth with considerable tannin. It has been held at the winery for additional bottle age and, along with a "Reserve" selection, will be one of the last 1974s to come to market (14).

Sonoma Vineyards "Alexander's Crown." This Alexander Valley Vineyard was planted in 1971. The 1974 is the first vintage to bear the "Alexander's Crown" designation. When first released in October, 1977, the wine received high accolades and almost always placed near the top amongst other 1974 Cabernets. Alas, the wine seems to be falling out of the race. It has a dark color and a slight amber edge with a fruity nose showing considerable oak. It has lost the round fruity lushness of its youth and now seems quite austere and tannic. Perhaps just a bad phase from which it will again blossom, but for now there's real reason to question the future aging potential. Just under 3,000 cases were produced and the wine was a great bargain at \$6.00 when it was released in October, 1977. The winery no longer has the wine available, but many retailers, aware of the potential to obtain a much higher price, kept significant quantities aside for sale in the future. The wine now sells for \$25.00 per bottle and up; at this price it's a very risky bet (14).

*** Sterling Vineyards.** This Napa Cabernet bears little resemblance to the much better "Reserve." It has a dark color with an amber edge and a ripe fruity/oaky nose with just a hint of chocolate. In the mouth the wine is flavorful, but it is alcoholic, hot, and a bit bitter. Time may help somewhat, but the wine's severe style will remain a detraction. Originally sold at approximately \$7.00 per bottle, the winery is currently selling the wine at \$12.00 per bottle (14).

Stonegate. This Napa Valley Cabernet was produced from grapes grown in Rutherford and Calistoga. It has a dark color and an amber edge with a nice berry-like nose. There is plenty of fruit with a nice flavor and good balance. A few more years bottle age could yield more complexity. Just over 1,800 cases were produced and the wine sold for \$5.00 per bottle in July, 1977. Although no longer available at the winery, recent retailer prices haven't been much higher than the original price. At \$5.00-6.00 it's a real bargain (14).

*** Trentadue Winery.** This estate bottled Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity nose with an ample dose of volatile acidity. It is a big, fruity wine with hints of chocolate. Very rich, yet with softness and nice balance, the wine is ready for current consumption and will improve for a few years. The good news is that of 2,800 cases produced, 200 cases still remain at the winery at the original release

price of around \$5.00 per bottle. At this price the wine is a great bargain (14).

*** Charles Krug "Signature Selection, Lot F1."** This special lot of Napa Valley Cabernet was released in January, 1980, at \$15.00 and is currently available at a wide range of retail outlets. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a ripe fruit nose that shows hints of volatile acidity. It has a medium body and ripe, slightly sweet, Cabernet flavors that finish a bit short on the palate. Ready for current consumption, the wine should keep for several more years (13½).

Fetzer Vineyards. This estate bottled Mendocino Cabernet has a dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/peppery nose. It has nice fruit, but is sharp and quite tannic. It is also a bit out of balance, although a few more years in the bottle should help. Originally priced at around \$5.00, current retailer prices have been around \$10.00 (13½).

Spring Mountain. This Napa Cabernet was blended with 6% Merlot and 3% Cabernet Franc. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a pruneey nose. There are dried fruit flavors with a hint of weediness. The wine is soft and ready to drink. About 3,000 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$7.50 per bottle in October, 1976. The winery is sold out, but the wine is occasionally available at prices in the \$20.00 per bottle range (13½).

Buena Vista "Cask 25." This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium dark color and a fruity/slightly minty nose. It is clean, fresh, and fruity with simple flavors that are a bit thin. The wine should improve for a few more years. Recent prices have been in the \$8.00-9.00 per bottle range (13).

Buena Vista "Cask 101." There is virtually no difference between this and the "Cask 25." If anything, this wine may be just a little less fruity. The price is comparable (13).

Carneros Creek Winery "Steltzer Vineyard." This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/musty nose. It is fruity, but there is little distinction and a slight weediness. Some 400 cases were produced and the wine was released in July, 1976, at \$6.00 per bottle. No longer available at the winery, it is very difficult to find (13).

Charles Krug. This Napa Cabernet has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a strong pungent musty nose. In the mouth the wine is fruity and soft with pleasant flavor and a short finish. The current price is around \$7.00 per bottle (13).

Edmeades "Estate Bottled." This estate bottled Cabernet from the Anderson Valley in Mendocino lacks the distinction of the Corti Brothers selection from the same vineyard. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/minty nose. It has fruity flavors, but is a bit thin and austere. Just under 300

cases were produced and the wine was sold in October, 1976, at \$6.00 per bottle. It is no longer available (13).

Ernie's "Special Section." This Napa Valley Cabernet was bottled for the large Northern California retail liquor chain. Reportedly, this was to have been a special bottling from the old Souverain in Napa. However, when Souverain began liquidating inventories, Ernie's acquired this batch of Cabernet at a very low price and retailed it for about \$25.00 per case. Yes, that's correct—per case! This is a good example of the bargains that occasionally turn up in times of oversupply, although it has been sold out long ago. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a nice fruity nose with a coffee bean-like complexity. It has fruity/weedy flavors and is rich and well-balanced. Not exciting, but it is very drinkable with good varietal character (13).

*** Freemark Abbey Winery.** This Napa Valley Cabernet is blended with 5% Merlot. It has a medium color and an amber edge. The nose has a fruity/stemmy quality which follows through in the taste. It is rather flat and undistinguished without potential for further improvement. It was originally released in September, 1978, at \$7.00 per bottle. Of the 7,800 cases produced, about 500 cases still remain available for sale at the winery for \$9.00 per bottle (13).

Gamello Winery "Santa Clara Valley." This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/alcoholic nose. In the mouth the wine is fruity, but has an alcoholic harshness that is distracting. Originally priced at about \$6.00 per bottle, current prices are about the same (13).

Inglenook Vineyards "Cask A-6." Inglenook uses several different cask numbers, but there appears to be virtually no difference. However, the cask selections differ from the regular bottling by the addition of a small amount of Merlot. This wine has a medium color and an amber edge with a lovely fruity nose. It is fruity, but a bit thin and acidic. Several more years bottle age should show some improvement. Originally released at around \$7.00 per bottle, recent prices have been around \$10.00 (13).

Kenwood Vineyards. This California Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/weedy nose. It has a pleasant flavor with a slight weediness and is soft and ready to drink. The original price was around \$5.00 per bottle and current prices are in this range (13).

Kenwood Vineyards "Lot 2." This California Cabernet shows very little difference from the regular bottling with a dark color, an amber edge, and a weedy nose. There is some fruit, but the wine is overly bitter and finishes short. Like the regular bottling, the original price was around \$5.00, and current prices are not much higher (13).

Ridge Vineyards "York Creek." In 1971 Ridge made a Cabernet from the Eisele Vineyard in Napa and in 1974 returned to make this Napa Cabernet. It has a dark color with an amber edge and fruity/oaky nose. There is lots of fruit and oak with a huge amount of tannin. Many years of bottle age will be required to see if the fruit can outlive the tannin and oak, a doubtful bet at best. Approximately 400 cases were made and the wine was originally priced around \$7.00 (13).

*** Robert Mondavi Winery.** This Napa Valley Cabernet is blended with 4% Cabernet Franc and 2% Merlot. It has a dark color with orange/amber tones and a fruity/musty nose. The soft fruity flavors show considerable weediness and the wine is a bit short on the finish. Ready to drink now, the wine will probably hold for quite a few more years. Some 50,000 cases were produced and the wine was originally sold at \$8.00 per bottle in February, 1977. Retail prices have recently been around \$15.00. The winery has held back a supply for future release (13).

Harbor Winery "Amador." Only 61 cases were made of this Cabernet from Deaver Vineyard in Amador County. It has a very dark purple color and a pungent, alcoholic nose. There are strong flavors and lots of alcohol and tannin. The wine is out of balance, but flavorful. It is probably best consumed now while there is still lots of fruit. The wine was released in May, 1976, at \$3.75 per bottle and is unavailable now (12½).

Inglenook Vineyards. This Napa Valley Cabernet has a medium red color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky nose. It is fruity in a light style. A bit thin and short on the finish, the wine should, nonetheless, improve for a few more years. Originally priced around \$5.00, currently the wine brings about \$7.00 (12½).

*** Konocti Cellars.** This Lake County Cabernet has a medium dark color and amber/orange tones. It has a slight metallic character underlying the fruity nose. The flavors are rather light and the wine is short on the palate. Some 2,800 cases were produced and the wine was originally released in November, 1976, at \$3.75. The few remaining bottles at the winery are now priced at \$20.00 (12½).

Monterey Peninsula Winery "Monterey." A year or two ago this wine was much better. With age, the Monterey vegetative quality has begun to appear. It has a dark color and a very pungent earthy/oaky nose. There is lots of ripe fruit and softness, but the wine has become a bit flabby and the bell pepper flavors seem likely to overpower the fruit given more time in the bottle. Originally priced at \$12.00 per bottle, recent prices have been around \$20.00—a chancy bet indeed (12½).

Monterey Peninsula Winery "Sonoma." This Cabernet, like its counterpart from Monterey, has taken on an herbaceous/vegetative quality. It has a

medium dark color and an amber edge with the fruity/vegetative nose. In the mouth, it is rich, but quite herbaceous. This one is not likely to improve. The original price was \$8.50, and it is no longer available (12½).

David Bruce "Estate Bottled." This Santa Cruz Mountain Cabernet bears the unmistakable stamp of David Bruce wines. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky, volatile nose. It is very fruity and flavorful, but is also hot, alcoholic and volatile. It is a wine to drink now for the flavor. Some 100 cases were produced, and the wine was originally sold in May, 1977, at \$10.00 per bottle. It is no longer available (12).

Cakebread Cellars "Lot 1." This Napa Valley Cabernet comes from the Stanton Vineyard. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a powerful fruity/alcoholic nose. The flavors show fruitiness and lots of weediness. The wine finishes hot and lacks balance. It is not likely to improve further. Approximately 225 cases were made and the wine sold for \$6.00 per bottle when originally released in November, 1976. It is no longer available (12).

Edmeades Vineyards. This Mendocino County Cabernet from McDowell Valley was cellared and bottled by Edmeades. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity, cherry-like nose marred by a trace of vegetables and a slight mustiness. The wine has fruit, but a cooked character spoils the fruity/herbaceous flavors. About 1,200 cases were produced and the wine was originally sold in September, 1976, at \$4.95 per bottle. It is no longer available at the winery, but recent prices have been in the \$5.00-6.00 per bottle range (11½).

* **Geyser Peak Winery.** This North Coast Cabernet has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/vegetative nose. It has thin, fruity, stemmy flavors. Approximately 4,400 cases were produced, and the wine was originally released in November, 1977, at \$5.00 per bottle. The current winery price is \$8.50 (11½).

* **J. Pedroncelli.** This estate bottled Sonoma County Cabernet has a medium color and an amber edge with a musty/fruity nose. In the mouth it is short on fruit and quite tannic. Time probably won't help correct the wine's flaws. Some 7,000 cases were produced, and the wine was released in June, 1977, at \$4.00 per bottle. The wine is still available in limited quantity at the winery (11½).

Joseph Phelps Vineyards. This Napa Cabernet was produced from the Stanton Vineyard in Yountville and blended with 7% Merlot. It has a medium color with amber/orange tone and a weedy/fruity nose. The fruity flavors are overly bitter for the thin structure of the wine. This wine does not appear to have further aging potential. Originally released in June, 1977, at

\$6.00 per bottle, it is no longer available at the winery. Current retail prices have been in the \$7.00-9.00 per bottle range (11½).

Raymond. This estate bottled Napa Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a skunky, off nose. It has good fruit, but a slight metallic taste is a major flaw. Recent prices have been around \$10.00 (11½).

Rutherford Vitners. This California Cabernet has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/musty nose. The fruit is likewise marred by the mustiness on the palate and the wine is thin. Originally priced at around \$5.00, the wine is occasionally seen at about that price (11½).

Chateau Chevalier. This Napa Cabernet was blended with 7% Merlot. While a big, hard wine, it seemed to have potential a few years ago. Unfortunately, something seems to have gone wrong. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky nose with a slight medicinal quality. The wine is fruity, but it is slightly petillant and has a sharp, almost sour finish as a result. Not yet unpleasant, its aging potential is doubtful. About 680 cases were produced, and the wine was released in October, 1976, at \$7.50 per bottle. There is none available at the winery (12).

Clos du Bois. This Sonoma Cabernet shows a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky nose. The wine has simple fruity flavors dominated by lots of oak. A wine for current consumption, the winery is sold out, but when available, the price is in the \$6.00-8.00 range (12).

Hacienda Wine Cellars. This North Coast Cabernet has a medium light color with an amber edge and a fruity nose. It displays thin, grapey flavors with a hint of steminess. Originally priced at around \$5.00 per bottle, the current price is closer to \$10.00 (12).

Veedercrest Vineyards "Cask YUG77." This Napa Valley Cabernet from Gamay Acres Vineyard is blended with 24% Merlot. It has a medium reddish/amber color with a fruity/vanilla nose. The wine is soft and lightly fruity without complexity. It should be consumed soon. About 500 cases were produced, and the wine was released in the spring, 1976, at \$7.00 per bottle. It is no longer available (12).

Below Average

Beringer. This Napa Cabernet has a medium reddish/orange color. The nose is skunky and the light, soft style of the wine is not exciting. This wine is ready for current consumption. The original price was around \$6.00 and it may still be acquired at a price close to this (11½).

Sonoma Vineyards. This Northern California Cabernet has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity nose marred by mustiness. It has medium body and some fruit, but is rather austere, lacking complexity, and short on the palate. About 7,500 cases were made and the wine was released at \$4.00 per bottle in July, 1977. It is no longer available at the winery, but recent retail prices have been in the \$4.00-6.00 range (11½).

Adobe Cellars "Bin 10." This Estate Bottled Napa Valley Cabernet lacks varietal character. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a berry-like nose. The wine is very grapey, straightforward and slightly sweet. It recently sold for \$4.50 per bottle (11).

Chateau St. Jean. This Sonoma County Cabernet is blended with 8% Merlot. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity nose marred by skunkiness. A big wine with lots of fruit and tannin, the skunkiness permeates and dominates the other flavors. Approximately 4,300 cases were made and the wine was priced at \$6.25 per bottle when released in November, 1976. It is no longer available at the winery, but recent prices have been in the \$10.00-15.00 per bottle range (11).

Gemello's "Carmel Valley." This Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a berry-like nose spoiled by mustiness. It has watery, thin flavors. Recent prices have been around \$6.00 per bottle (11).

Martini. This California Cabernet is blended with 19% Merlot. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a musty nose. It is fruity on the palate, but the mustiness dominates. Approximately 80,000 cases were produced and the wine was priced at \$3.75 when originally released in August, 1977. Recent retail prices have been around \$7.00. The "Private Reserve" designation consists of some 7,000 cases to be released in the summer (11).

Mirassou Vineyards "Monterey." This Cabernet is Mirassou's regular bottling. There was also a smaller lot of a Monterey/Santa Clara bottling. This Monterey bottling has a medium color and a slight amber edge with an intense bell pepper/almost green chili pepper nose. There is fruit, but the wine has austere vegetative flavors that are thin and short on the palate. About 8,500 cases of this wine were made and 1,500 of the Monterey/Santa Clara bottling. It was released in September, 1977, at \$5.00 per bottle. There is none available at the winery. Recent retail prices have been in the \$5.00-6.00 per bottle range (11).

Roudon-Smith Vineyards. This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge. The fruity nose is spoiled by mustiness which also

premeates the flavor. It has an unusual flavor and lots of tannin. Some 200 cases were produced, and the wine was released at \$6.50 per bottle in September, 1975. It is now almost impossible to find (11).

Rutherford Hill. This Napa Valley Cabernet has a medium color with amber/orange tones and a fruity nose spoiled by skunkiness. It is fruity, soft, and fully developed with an acidic finish. Recent prices have been in the \$6.00-7.00 range (11).

Stone Creek. This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color with a weedy/skunky nose. It is soft and slightly sweet with weedy flavors. Still quite tannic, the wine lacks substance. The wine has sold recently for around \$3.00-4.00 per bottle (11).

The ultimate answer to the quality of the 1974 vintage awaits maturity of the wines. As noted, the best wines are still years away. Undoubtedly, there will be more surprises—good and bad. Unlike the classified growths of Bordeaux, where quality has been evaluated for over a century, there is no such yardstick in California. Truly this remains the promise land. Wineries such as BV, Inglenook, and Charles Krug do have production histories dating back 30-40 years, but the question remains as to whether or not the wines are being made the same way today as they were years ago. Ridge's Monte Bello Cabernets go back to the early 1960's, but wine making practices changed in the late 1960's—early 1970's, so even this is complicated to a degree. Others such as Mondavi and Heitz have production histories dating back to only 1966. Most other wineries have virtually no track record. Caymus, Diamond Creek, and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars made their first Cabernets in 1972. For others, such as Villa Mt. Eden, 1974 was the first year.

This lack of history is a strong reason for not leaving California Cabernets too long without either tasting them or keeping informed as to how they are aging. It is also reason to be cautious when laying out increasingly high prices for 1974 Cabernets. However, the best of them are amongst the best wines California has yet produced.



CURRENTLY AVAILABLE ZINFANDELS

Zinfandel is unique to California. The grape is grown nowhere else in the world. Its heritage remains a mystery, although Italy is the most often cited origin. Recent research also suggests that the grape may

have first been brought from Europe to New England where it was a popular table grape as early as 1830. In the 1850's the grape seems to have first been introduced into California. By the 1880's, Zinfandel was widely planted and accepted as the primary grape for producing the popular California Claret. From the period of prohibition to the late 1950's, interest in California's orphan varietal languished. Attention was turned to other higher status European varietals such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. However, the 1960's witnessed a resurgence in the popularity of Zinfandel, and by 1976 it had again become the most widely planted grape varietal with over 30,000 acres standing as compared with less than 15,000 acres in 1959. The largest plantings of Zinfandel are in the San Joaquin Valley where it is used primarily for blending in jug wines. However, the grape thrives in nearly all areas of the state; and, wherever wine grapes are grown, chances are there will be some Zinfandel.

As varied as the growing area, so are the types of Zinfandel. Red, white, rose, sweet, dry, beaujolais to high alcohol late harvest wine, there's a Zinfandel made to suit almost every taste. Listed below is a review of currently available Zinfandels (excluding the white and rose varieties):

Very Good



1976 HMR San Luis Obispo "Sauret Vineyards." Don't let the price scare you. Although no denying \$10.00 is a lot for a bottle of Zinfandel, this one is worth it. It has a dark color and a complex oaky/fruity nose with very rich flavors. There is lots of fruit and

complexity with hints of cassis and chocolate. The wine has great structure and balance with a lingering aftertaste. Although delicious to drink now, it should age well for five or more years (17).

1976 Burgess Sonoma County. This Sonoma Zinfandel has a very dark color and an intensely perfumed nose with a hint of chocolate. It is rich and concentrated with complex flavors, but yet has a roundness that makes it attractive to drink now, although it will certainly improve for many more years (16). \$6.50

1977 Mastantuono "Dusi Vineyard." This unfiltered and unfiltered wine from Templeton in San Luis Obispo County is a very good example of a lighter style Zinfandel. It has a medium dark color and a lovely perfumed fruity/cassis-like nose. It is clean, fruity, elegant, and delicious. While very good to drink now, it will undoubtedly improve for a few years (16). \$6.75

1977 Montevina "Special Selection." If power and concentration are favored, it usually can be found in the Zinfandels from Amador County. Since 1973, Montevina has made some of the best. Occasionally, as in 1975 and 1977, there is also a "Special Selection" which combines the power and concentration with a rich softness and flavor complexity that makes the wine indeed special. This 1977 has a dark color and a complex oaky/fruity/spicy nose. There are concentrated fruity flavors backed by a chocolate-like richness; the wine is big in style, yet it is soft. Just a hint of alcohol peeks through, but not enough to be objectionable. This wine should improve for another couple of years and should hold for several more (16). \$6.25

1976 Ridge "Lytton Springs, Late Bottled." This is a good example of Ridge's success with grapes from the Lytton Springs Vineyard in Napa. The vineyard also has some plantings of Petite Sirah which resulted in a wine with a 90% Zinfandel/10% Petite Sirah blend. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a perfumed fruity/oaky nose with a hint of spiciness. There is good fruit and nice flavors. A nice, full wine, with good acid/tannin balance, it should continue to improve for at least 2-3 more years (16). \$7.50

1977 Ridge "Monte Bello." It is rare indeed when the Picchetti and Jimsomare Vineyards, just below the winery on Monte Bello Ridge, don't produce some of the best Zinfandel of the vintage. In some years, they are bottled separately (the 1976 Picchetti is an all-time classic Zinfandel), and in other years, such as 1977, they are blended together. However, there is never a large quantity. In 1977, when the vines yielded less than 3/4 ton per acre, only 9 1/2 barrels were made and most is sold direct from the winery. This Zinfandel explodes with varietal character. It has a dark color and a fruity/spicy nose with a hint of volatile acidity. There are fruity, spicy flavors as well, and the wine is

rich with a fine structure and good acid/tannin balance. The wine needs at least five years more bottle age to develop (16). \$7.50

1976 Wine and the People "Sonoma." Here is a Zinfandel that is packed with ripe fruit flavors. It has a dark color and a cedary/berry/spicy/fruity nose with hints of chocolate. The wine is concentrated, yet beautifully balanced, and the ripe flavors have a plum-like quality. This well-made wine should improve for five or more years (16). \$7.50

1977 Burgess Napa Valley. This Zinfandel has a dark color and a complex fruity nose. There is lots of fruit and flavor with good acid balance. Not a big wine, but it is delicious and flavorful. It drinks well now, but should improve for a few years and will likely keep for an extended period (15½). \$7.00

1976 Caymus Vineyards "California." This Zinfandel has a dark color and a fruity/oaky nose. It is a fruity wine with considerable oak in evidence, but with nice flavors and a good structure (15). \$5.50 The 1977 is very similar, except perhaps a bit lighter and fruitier (15). \$6.00

1976 Chateau St. Jean "Glen Ellen Vineyard." This Sonoma Valley Zinfandel has 16% alcohol, but the balance of the wine makes it barely noticeable. It has a dark color with a slight amber edge and an intense berry-like nose with a very woody quality. It is fruity and rich with youthful tannin giving the wine a little bitterness. This wine needs at least 3-5 years more in the bottle to round out and develop complexity (15). \$8.00

1976 J. W. M. "Amador County." This is a very good example of a medium bodied Amador Zinfandel. The wine has a medium dark color with a slight amber edge and an intriguing nose showing oak, fruit and spice. It is complex with good flavors and a nice structure and balance. The wine is enjoyable to drink now, but another year or two should enhance its complexity (15). \$6.95

1976 Kenwood. This Sonoma Zinfandel has a dark color and a perfumed spicy/berry-like aroma. It is a big wine with lots of fruit and rich flavors. There is some bitter tannin in the finish, but a few years should round the wine out nicely. At \$5.50 it's a good value (15).

1977 Lytton Springs. Ridge has always made nice Zinfandel from this Napa Vineyard (the 1974 is probably the best). Beginning around 1975 the vineyard owners established their own winery and this 1977 represents the best effort to date. Unfortunately, as in past vintages, there are some bottles that are spoiled by sulphur. Those bottles that do not have excessive sulphur are very good, possessing a medium dark color, fruity nose, and rich fruity/spicy flavors (15). \$7.00

1976 Mondavi. This Napa Valley Zinfandel is a good example of the Mondavi style. It has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/oaky nose and a hint of volatile acidity. There is good fruit and nice clean flavors with a soft, round texture. The wine is pleasant to drink now and should keep for many years (15). \$6.50 The identically priced 1975 is not as well structured or as flavorful (13½).

1976 Ravenswood "Vogensen Vineyard." This Sonoma Zinfandel was made at Joe Swan's winery and bears a family resemblance to Joe's wines. Alas, not as good as the 1976 Swan Zinfandel, which is outstanding and one of the finest ever (no longer available), it is still very good. The wine has a dark color and a complex spicy/fruity nose with slight volatile acidity and mouth-puckering flavors. It will need many, many more years to resolve the high acid and tannin. If the fruit can last, the wine should be quite nice (15). \$9.00 The identically priced "Polser Vineyard" bottling, although even bigger, is hot, alcoholic, and out of balance—a wine to drink now while there's still fruit (13).

1977 Ridge "Langtry Road." A Zinfandel in name, this wine has 35% Petite Sirah and 12% Carignane in the blend. Nonetheless, it has Zinfandel character with a very dark color and a closed-in nose offering only hints of oak and grapiness. It is a big rich wine with lots of flavor that needs considerable bottle age to develop (15). \$7.50 The identically priced "York Creek," while 100% Zinfandel, shows a similar locked-in character with tremendous intensity of fruit, oak, and tannin. It too needs lots of time to develop (15).

Good

Space limitations necessitate describing only a few of the Zinfandels in this category. Others are listed by name only, in order of ranking.

1977 Richard Carey Winery "San Luis Obispo County." This Zinfandel was perfected and bottled by Richard Carey. Only 801 cases were produced and each bottle is hand numbered. At the \$4.25 price it's a great bargain. The wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a huge oaky/berry nose. It is a big mouthful of very ripe fruit and oak with a soft texture and a hint of sweetness. If most Zinfandel is Claret-like, this is Burgundian—a wine for current consumption (14½).

1977 Clos du Val. This Napa Valley Zinfandel is a good example of a big Napa style. It has a dark color and a subdued fruity nose with just a hint of spice. It is a very rich, full wine with lots of tannin and a bitter finish. The wine should be given five or more years bottle age (14½). \$7.50

1976 Conn Creek "Chateau Maja Vineyards." This is a fine example of a flavorful Napa Valley

Zinfandel. At \$6.00 it's a good value. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a huge fruity/oaky/chocolate nose. It has lots of fruit and is clean and nicely balanced with good richness. Another 2-3 years bottle age should give the wine more complexity (14½).

1977 Boeger. This El Dorado County Zinfandel is a good buy at \$4.75. It has a medium color and an unusual almost floral nose. It is fruity, soft, and the vanilla tinged flavors leave a whisper of sweetness (14).

1976 David Bruce "Morgan Hill." This is a good example of a lighter style Bruce Zinfandel. It has a medium color and a fruity, very volatile nose. It is fruity and spicy with a nice flavor and a slightly hot and volatile finish (14). \$7.50

1977 Cakebread "Domingas Ranch." This wine is a good example of the biggest, most forceful style Zinfandel produced in the Napa Valley. It has a very dark color and an alcoholic/fruity/spicy nose. There is loads of big raisiny fruit and lots of flavor with a chocolate-like roundness. It is very tannic on the finish. For concentration, fruit, and flavor the wine can be consumed now. Whether or not it will improve with extended aging is questionable (14). \$10.00

1976 Calera "Essence." Surely this San Luis Obispo County Zinfandel is one of the most unusual ever produced. Made from botrytised grapes, if it were served chilled to blindfolded tasters, few, if any, would perceive it to be a red wine. It has a medium orange/red color and an apricot-like nose with soft, sweet prune/apricot-like flavors. It tastes best with a slight chill and is definitely for dessert or after dinner sipping (14). \$7.50/tenth

1977 Fetzer "Lolonis." This Mendocino producer usually has several different Zinfandels each year. This is one of the better ones, with a dark color and a perfumed fruity/oaky nose. In the mouth, there is fruit and flavor, but a huge tannic overlay is predominant. If the fruit can outlive the tannin over the five or more years it will take the wine to develop, it should be very attractive (14). \$7.00

1977 Monterey Peninsula Winery "Hilltop, Late Harvest." This San Luis Obispo Zinfandel is a good example of a less sweet (3% residual sugar) late harvest style. It has a dark color and a grapy/alcoholic nose. It is packed with fruit and is clean, grapy, and tannic. Drink it now for the fruit as an after dinner dessert wine (14). \$9.00

1977 Montevina. This regular bottling is not as good as the "special selection," but at \$5.00 it's a fair value. The wine has a medium dark color and a grapy nose with a hint of walnuts. In the mouth it is grapy, fruity, and rich with just a bit of sharpness. A few more years in the bottle should prove beneficial (14).

1977 Montevina "Montino." This is Montevina's designation for a lighter style Zinfandel. The 1977 is very good and a great bargain at \$3.75. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a lovely perfumed spicy/berry nose. The flavors are nice and there is good fruit and balance. Not intense, but another 1-2 years in the bottle should produce a nice soft wine of style and complexity (14).

1979 Montevina "Nuevo." This Amador Zinfandel is made in a Beaujolais style, meant for consumption as soon after bottling as possible. This vintage has a medium purple/red color and a raspberry nose. It is fruity with just a hint of bitterness. Montevina regularly makes the best Nuevo style Zinfandel and this is a good example. Best served chilled, this is an ideal picnic wine. The price is a bargain (14). \$2.95

1977 Joseph Phelps "Black Mountain Vineyard." This Sonoma Zinfandel has a black color to match its name. It is a huge, mouthfilling wine. There is loads of fruit that is clean and fresh without any raisin quality. The tannic overlay makes the wine suitable for those who value flavor and intensity. Time should round out the wine, but elegance is not likely to be a virtue (14). \$7.00

1978 Ridge "Late Harvest Dusi Ranch." This Paso Robles Zinfandel has 10.5% residual sugar and was bottled only in Tenth. A little goes a long way. It has a medium color and a fruity/berry-like nose with grapy, fruity, sweet flavors. The wine is probably best to drink now as most late harvest Zinfandels seem to have limited aging potential (14). \$9.00/tenth

1977 Ridge "San Luis." This Zinfandel is blended with 35% Petite Sirah and 5% Carignane. At \$4.75 it's a good buy. It has a medium color and a lovely, fruity nose with nice, soft, fruity flavors (14).

1976 Roudon Smith Vineyards "Chauvet Vineyard." This is another of the late harvest Zinfandels and shows a typical late-picked, raisiny style. The color is dark and it is rich, sweet, and concentrated. Again, it is probably best for current consumption as an after dinner sipper (14). \$12.00

1973 Sebastiani "Proprietor's Reserve." At \$4.95 this wine is a good value for a mature, ready to drink Zinfandel. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a complex, perfumed nose. The wine has a medium body and soft, fruity/oaky flavors that are pleasant. Just a bit short on the finish, it's still a nice wine (14). \$4.95

1978 Sycamore Creek. This Estate Bottled Zinfandel from Sonoma is a good example of a softer style wine with an overripe, prune character. It has a medium color, and an oaky, fruity nose, with a spicy varietal flavor behind the overripe fruit. It is rich and has very nice, well-balanced flavors that make the wine ideal for present consumption (14). \$7.00

Bargain Zinfandels

The following Zinfandels, while not particularly distinctive, are representative of sound wines that offer good value for present drinking.

1977
**CALERA
ZIN**

Zinfandel Table Wine
CALIFORNIA



PRODUCED & BOTTLED BY
CALERA WINE COMPANY
HOLLISTER CALIFORNIA

1977 Calera "California." This Zinfandel has a medium color and a deep, fruity nose. It has a light body and a fruity, fresh, clean taste (13). \$3.75

1976 Carneros Creek "California." This wine has a medium color and a fruity/oaky nose with a slight degree of mustiness. The wine has grapy/fruity/oaky flavors and good substance (13). \$4.00

NV Gemello "Shenandoah Valley, 73-A Reminiscence." This Zinfandel has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a complex woody/fruity nose. It has good fruit and is relatively soft with woody flavors (13). \$4.50

1976 Los Hermanos "California." This is one of the least expensive Zinfandels, but it does not have major faults. The color is medium with an amber edge, and the nose shows a fruity characteristic with just a hint of stemminess. The wine has grapy, simple flavors that are clean and pleasant (13). \$2.49

1976 Martini "California Mountain." The Martini Zinfandels are usually sound wines. This 1976 has a medium dark color and an amber edge with an unusual almost floral nose and a bit of stemminess. It is fruity with clean, one-dimensional flavors (13). \$3.49

1974 Stone Creek "North Coast." This Zinfandel has a medium dark color and a light fruity nose. It is clean and pleasant with light body and a subdued fruitiness (13). \$3.00

1976 Grand Cru Vineyards "Estate Bottled, Late Picked." (14½) \$5.50

1976 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Napa Valley." (14½) \$6.25

1977 Ridge "Fiddletown." (14½) \$6.50

1976 Calera "Central Coast." (14) \$5.00

1977 Carneros Creek "Eschen Vineyard." (14) \$4.50

1977 Cassayre-Forni Cellars "Sonoma." (14) \$5.50

1976 Grgich Hills "Sonoma." (14) \$7.00

1977 Gundlach-Bundschu "Sonoma." (14) \$7.25

1977 Harbor Winery "Deaver Vineyard." (14) \$4.50

1977 HMR "Hoffman Vineyards." (14) \$5.00

1976 MEV "Sonoma, Late Harvest, Old Hill Ranch." (14) \$9.00

1978 Mastantuono "Templeton." (14) \$8.50

1977 Mirassou "Anniversary Selection." (14) \$7.00

1977 Preston Vineyards "Sonoma." (14) \$6.00

1976 David Bruce "Templeton." (13½) \$7.50

1977 Edmeades Vineyards "Mendocino" (13½) \$4.95

1977 Hacienda "Sonoma." (13½) \$5.50

1977 Johnson's "Alexander Valley." (13½) \$6.99

1976 Monterey Peninsula "California." (13½) \$5.50

1977 Ridge "Shenandoah." (13½) \$6.75

NV Boeger "Sierra Foothills." (13) \$2.99

1975 Calera "Cienega District." (13) \$5.00

1977 Calera "Templeton." (13) \$6.00

1977 Estrella River Winery "San Luis Obispo." (13) \$5.00

1977 Fetzer "Ricetti." (13) \$7.50

1976 Harbor "Deaver Vineyard." (13) \$4.50

1973 Inglenook "Napa Valley." (13) \$4.00

1977 J. W. Morris "Sonoma." (13) \$6.00

1976 Joseph Phelps "Alexander Valley." (13) \$6.50

1977 Roudon-Smith "Central Coast." (13) \$5.00

1977 Shenandoah Vineyards "Amador County." (13) \$4.95

1976 Simi "Alexander Valley." (13) \$5.50

1976 Sonoma Vineyards "River West Old Vines." (13) \$10.00

1976 Sutter Home "Amador County." (13) \$5.00

1976 Tulocay "California." (13) \$4.25

1978 Boeger "El Dorado." (12½) \$4.75

1977 Raymond "Napa Valley." (12½) \$5.50

1977 Ridge "Paso Robles." (12½) \$5.00

NV Adobe Cellars "Black's Vineyards." (12) \$2.29

1977 Callaway "Estate Bottled." (12) \$5.25

1977 Dehlinger Winery "Sonoma." (12) \$5.50

1978 Dry Creek "Late Harvest Style." (12) \$6.00

1977 Dry Creek "Sonoma." (12) \$7.50

1975 Grand Cru "Sonoma." (12) \$4.15

1976 Gundlach-Bundschu "Special Selection." (12) \$4.69

1978 Parducci "Mendocino." (12) \$3.60
 1974 Round Hill "Napa Valley." (12) \$3.00
 1975 Rutherford Hill "Mead Ranch—Atlas Peak." (12) \$5.50
 1977 Sebastiani "North Coast Counties." (12) \$3.59
 1977 Sterling Vineyards "Estate Bottled." (12) \$6.50
 1978 Sutter Home "Twin Rivers Ranch." (12) \$3.75

Below Average

Again, because of space limitations, commentary is offered on only a few Zinfandels in this category. Others are listed in order of relative merit.

NV Cresta Blanca "Mendocino." This Zinfandel has a light color with amber tones and a pungent, caramelized/grassy nose. The flavors are simple, sweet, and insipid. The winery still uses the replica of a medal won in 1899, but wines like this are not likely to win much of anything (10). \$3.45

1975 The Monterey Vineyard "December Harvest, Special Selection." This wine has the dubious honor of being the most expensive of any full sized bottle reviewed. It is a good example of why price often has little to do with quality; and, at \$11.00 per bottle the price is even more offensive than the wine. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a pungent skunky/rubbery/cabbage-like nose. There are fruity, vegetative, black pepper flavors that are harsh on the finish (10).

NV Paul Masson. This California Zinfandel is well past its time. It is neither particularly varietal or rare with a light color showing amber/brown tones and a slightly fruity/tar-like nose. The wine is thin, watery, and lacks fruit and flavor (10). \$3.00

NV Almaden "California." (11) \$3.49
1976 Beringer "Napa Valley." (11) \$3.50
1977 Fetzer "Mattern." (11) \$5.00
1975 Inglenook "Napa." (11) \$3.65
1976 Charles Krug "Sonoma." (11) \$4.00
1973 Mountainside Vineyards "Napa Valley." (11) \$3.50
1975 San Martin "Limited Vintage." (11) \$4.50
1974 Buena Vista "Sonoma." (10) \$4.25
NV Gallo (10) \$2.29
1977 Mirassou "Monterey, Unfiltered." (10) \$4.00
1976 J. Pedroncelli "Sonoma." (10) \$3.00
1975 Roudon-Smith "North Coast." (10) \$5.00
1978 Stevenot Vineyards "Calaveras County." (10) \$4.25
Yeedercrest Vineyards "California, Cask 73-76." (10) \$4.90
NV Christian Brothers "Select Napa Valley." (9) \$3.50

1976 The Monterey Vineyard "Monterey County." (9) \$4.39
NV Guimarra "California." (8) \$2.89

The Zinfandels currently available are mostly from the drought years of 1976 and 1977 which produced many fine Zinfandels. Generally, the 1976s are bigger wines. The many differing styles make it difficult to generalize, but Zinfandels tend to be very fruity and straightforward and many are big, robust wines with hearty flavors. Usually they benefit from several years bottle age. If properly balanced, they can keep and improve for many years. The aging potential of the high alcohol "late harvest" wines is questionable despite the considerable tannin many possess. Those that are harsh, hot, and alcoholic when young are even less attractive when older. Save your cellar space. However, the best Zinfandels are acceptable substitutes for a lot of Cabernets. The price of these is similar to the mid-range for cabernets, i.e. generally \$6.00-8.00 per bottle. As such, they are no longer cheap and selectivity is important. Some priced under \$5.00 per bottle can be pleasant drinking, although, with rare exceptions, they tend to be rather simple wines without much complexity. So, generally speaking, Zinfandel is a wine for simple, hearty foods—barbeques and the like. Served in the proper context, they can be very good indeed.



Some may find Zinfandels primitive, but they're great for picnics!



WINELOVERS NEED A SCREWPULL

**"It's As Close to Perfect
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You probably have known you needed this for some time. You may have anguished, even despaired, but all you really needed was a **SCREWPULL**.

No kidding. A very fundamental part of enjoying a great bottle of wine is the process of removing the cork. Herbert Allen, a fellow winelover and the retired president of a Houston-based oil and tool company, has reinvented the cork screw, which is somewhat similar to reinventing the mouse trap (he may have done this too, since he reportedly has more than 150 patents to his credit). The ingenious **SCREWPULL**, as it is called, is designed to improve the process of removing a cork. Simply turn the teflon-coated high tensile stainless steel screw into the cork. Keep turning and the **SCREWPULL** pulls the cork out. Hence, the name **SCREWPULL**.

The unique design of the **SCREWPULL** reduces entry force on the cork to 3-5 pounds and the removal

force to 6-10 pounds. Conventional corkscrews can require as much as 50 pounds pressure to penetrate the cork and 100 pounds pressure to remove it.

The **SCREWPULL** is ideal for old, fragile corks and corks in Riesling bottles which often sink down into the bottle if too much pressure is exerted. For the corks in most young wines, the Ah-so corkscrew is probably easier and faster, once the technique of using it is mastered. (The prongs must be placed on the outside of the cork and the Ah-so rocked back and forth until it slips all the way down over the cork. Then with a slight twisting motion, the cork is pulled out intact.) However, this does require considerable strength and it requires some getting used to. The **SCREWPULL** has no such disadvantages and, therefore, has to be rated the best all-around corkscrew available.

The suggested retail price is \$12.00. Distribution is still limited, so you may need to write direct to the company for the store in your area. (Hallen Company, P.O. Box 1392, Houston, Texas 77001.) Within a short period of time we're sure all wine buffs will have to have one. It's as close to perfect as we can imagine. We'll rank it a 19.5, leaving just a little room for some imaginative soul to try to improve on this essential implement.

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1975, 1976, and 1977 Cabernet Sauvignons plus a look at the 1978 vintage and older vintages such as 1968, 1970, and 1973. Vintage Port, 1975 Sauternes, 1928 and 1929 Bordeauxs, more Chardonnay, comprehensive information on Burgundies and Bordeaux, world-wide price trends, and wine bargains.

About Our Rating Scale & Quoted Prices

18-20 Outstanding

15-17 Very Good

12-14 Good

Under 12 Below Average

Wines are ranked on a 20 point system on the basis of relative merit. Wines with identical rankings are listed in alphabetical order. Rankings are usually made only after several tastings of any particular wine. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are the approximate California suggested retail prices.

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