



# THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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## ONE WINEDRINKER'S OPINION

### 1980 is NOT "The Vintage of the Century"

How often is heard "Nineteen blankity blank is 'The Vintage of the Century'!" This phrase as applied to Red Bordeaux has been much misused and has to be the greatest wine advertising jingle of all times. Just mention it, and a frenzy of panic buying, speculation and buying of futures will be launched that is reminiscent of sharks being drawn to blood. Stocks will dwindle at a frightening pace, while the aficionados extol the vintage, most often before even having a sniff of the legendary juice. Well no such hype will apply to the mediocre 1980 vintage, but looking through newspaper and magazine clippings, the phrase has been used frequently in the past two decades. The 1959 vintage was the first of modern vintages to receive this title. Although it is an excellent vintage with some superb wines produced, it is, nonetheless, flawed from the extreme summer heat which produced many wines that lack acidity and

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backbone. With very hot weather during the summer months the media had proclaimed in August of that year that this was "The Vintage of the Century" long before the grapes were even harvested. This was obviously a premature judgement. The 1961 was a superb vintage and was given the same accolade. It was a vintage of distinction: miniscule production, minimum rainfall, excellent weather, etc. Unquestionably the 1961 vintage is the best since 1945, and it is now starting to come into its own. It may be a legitimate contender along with 1928 and 1929. The 1964 was the next in the series to be named "The Vintage of the Century." M. Edgard Pisani, the French Minister of Agriculture, so proclaimed it in August of that year. However, he had little control over the weather which was superb until the seventh of October, when it rained for a fortnight. This left many chateaux that were waiting for extra ripening with the

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task of picking during the rains. The result was a vintage of mixed quality varying from vineyard to vineyard according to the time of harvest. Surprisingly, the 1966 vintage apparently was never called "The Vintage of the Century." It was the second best vintage of the decade, but reference to it has been more modest. The 1969 vintage prematurely wore the mantle before the harvest, perhaps as a bit of wishful thinking after a miserable 1968 and only a fair 1967. The 1970 was a much needed vintage after another disappointing vintage. As it turned out it was an excellent year with rather large quantity. It, too, was dubbed "The Vintage of the Century." Although excellent, it does not measure up to a 1945, or a 1961. The 1973 was next proclaimed "The Vintage of the Century" in September of that year, but again this was a premature announcement. On September 15th it rained for over a week. However, the weather did turn better, but the wines are generally thin and lack depth. The 1975 has also been proclaimed "The Vintage of the Century" and now it has been stated by some that even the 1978 vintage is another in the long series. And so it goes.

With two more decades left, it will be curious to hear how many more "Vintages of the Century" will be proclaimed. So far we've had eight in just the last twenty years, but "The Vintage of the Century" could, by definition, happen only once in a hundred years. Maybe if one stretches the term a little, there might be two or more tied for such honors, but it certainly cannot happen regularly. Ask yourself who is kidding whom? The propaganda is probably here to stay simply because so very much extra profit can ride upon a highly touted vintage. Commercial hyperbole is hardly new to wine or anything else. For now, take the phrase with a grain of salt the next time you hear it. By the time the century is over, and allowing for time for potential great vintages of the 1990's to develop, it's a long, long way from deciding on "The Vintage of the Century." By that time some of the current front runners, such as 1929, may be only a faint memory. One thing is for sure—no one will be crowing about the 1980's. Or will they?

Geoffrey Troy  
East Coast Associate Editor



## 1978 RED BURGUNDIES

**"At their best, the wines are deep-colored and complete, possessing the depth, concentration, and body of classic Burgundies as from decades long past."**

*The 1978 growing season in Burgundy was discussed in some detail in our first report on the 1978 White Burgundies (Volume II, Number 1). Basically, a cold, wet spring impeded the flowering of the vines, resulting in a substantially decreased quantity of Pinot Noir available for harvesting. A long, sunny autumn created healthy fruit of generally outstanding quality, especially from the growers who picked quite late. Our first assessment of 1978 Red Burgundies follows:*

### Outstanding

**Richebourg (Jayer).** Simply put, this is one of the

finest Burgundies produced in the last two decades. With a dark color and an opulent, intensely perfumed, fruity/oriental spice nose, the wine is a textbook example of the finest Richebourg. Already showing the silkiness that will evolve, there is a firm structure and substantial tannin underlying the delicious, unending flavors—an absolutely classic Richebourg. Surely, this will be one of the treasures of any Burgundy lover in 10-20 years. The great Burgundies of the 1940's could not have been better at this early stage. This is a Burgundy triumph; a wine that puts the lie to the thin, watery, sugary wines that have so often characterized modern Burgundy—Bravo, Monsieur Mayer, winemaker par excellence (19)! \$87.50



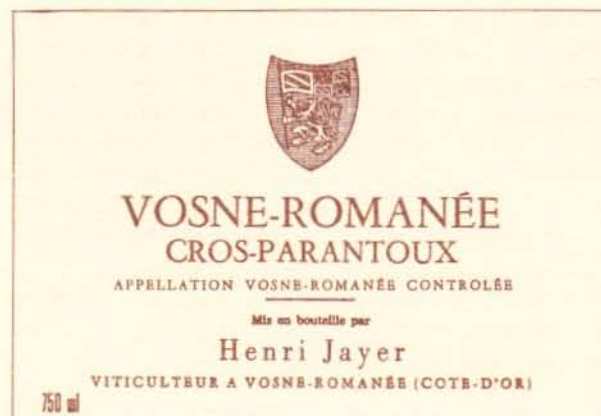
**Echezeaux (Jayer).** Another classic example of Burgundy at its best. This Echezeaux has the depth of flavor and style for which these wines are so justly recognized. Made from 55 year old vines, the color is dark and the nose is intensely perfumed with a plum-like fruit. Youthfully firm with tannin and acid underlying the delicious fruit, this is destined to be great, long-lived Burgundy (18½). \$40



**Volnay "Champans" (de Montille).** It's hard to believe that this is a Volnay. If you're accustomed to light wines from this area—forget it. This is a huge wine of great depth and style. The color is very dark and the nose deeply perfumed. Literally room filling, the spicy, plum-like, slightly volatile aromas offer a great promise of things to come. A promise fulfilled, the wine has fantastic fruit with spicy nuances, great depth, and layers of flavor. It is chewy, intense, and long on the palate. A great Burgundy from a superb producer. This is one to keep for at least 10 years (18½). \$20



**Vosne-Romanée "Cros-Parantoux" (Jayer).** From a tiny 2½ acre vineyard, this is another of the superb Mayer Burgundies. It has a dark color and an intensely fruity/spicy nose. With great fruit, depth, and length on the palate, the wine already shows a soft texture backed by firm tannin and acid. Oh, what a wine this will be in 5-7 years (18½)! \$38



**Vosne-Romanée "Les Brulées" (Jayer).** This is one of the hardest Burgundies to come along in a long, long time; but to the patient Burgundy lover willing to wait a decade or more, what an elegant, silky, delicious wine it should be. With a dark color and an intensely perfumed, spicy/fruity nose, the wine has great fruit and depth, but is very tannic and firm with good acid—another triumph (18½). \$41.50



**Chambertin "Cuvée Héritiers Latour" (Latour).** This is a lovely Burgundy in a big style with a big price. It has a dark color and a perfumed, fruity/spicy nose that really develops with air. A wine of finesse, breed, and style, there is lots of fruit, tannin, and acid. A keeper, this wine should develop well over a long period of time (18). \$96





**Romanee-Saint-Vivant "Les Quatre Journaux" (Latour).** This is an excellent Burgundy at a very dear price. It has a great, perfumed, spicy/fruity nose, and good structure and body with layers of fruit and flavor backed by a lovely, lingering finish (18). \$96



**Vosne-Romanee "Beaumonts" (Jayer).** Made from 47 year old vines this is the biggest of the Mayer Burgundies. It has a dark color and an intensely fruity/spicy nose with a hint of green olives. A big, rich, chewy, powerful wine with great flavor and length on the palate, it is youthfully tannic and will require many, many years to develop (18). \$31



## Very Good

**Mazis-Chambertin (Dupont-Tisserandot).** This wine has a dark color and a deeply perfumed, ripe/spicy/currant-like nose. Intensely fruity and very rich, there is a spicy complexity and nice structure. This should be really delicious in 5-8 years (17½). \$38

**Nuits-Saint-Georges "Meurgers" (Jayer).** This premier cru vineyard is on the Vosne-Romanee side on the hill on the same level with Richebourg. To say that the wine has breed and style is an understatement. The color is medium dark and the nose is lovely and deep with a spicy/fruity/vanilla quality. A delicious wine with good fruit, depth, and balance; this

will be a keeper (17½). \$41

**Pommard "Rugiens" (de Montille).** This is another very nice wine from a producer who makes honest, true-to-form wines extracting the maximum the Pinot Noir grape has to offer. With a dark color and a lovely, deep fruity nose offering just a hint of green olives, it has gorgeous fruit, nice flavor, and depth. Still with tannin to lose, this Burgundy should develop for at least 5-7 years (17½). \$30

**Bonnes Mares (J.M. Roumier).** This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a spicy/fruity/plum-like nose. It is a nice wine with good style and flavor. With some tannin to lose, this should make nice drinking in about 5-6 years (17). \$42.50

**Charmes-Chambertin (Dupont-Tisserandot).** More backward than the Mazis-Chambertin from this producer, this wine has a medium dark color and a lovely, berry-like/spicy nose. The wine has good fruit and deep flavors, but it is presently rather severe, harsh, and tannic. This could take 10 or more years to develop, but there seems to be enough fruit to warrant long cellaring (17). \$38

**Clos de la Roche (Latour).** This is a nice Burgundy with a dark color and a lovely, deep perfumed nose. The wine has good fruit and flavors, but just now it is a little backward and harsh. Keep this for 3-5 years to soften and develop (17). \$45

**Clos de Vougeot (J.M. Roumier).** This Burgundy has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity nose showing a slightly toasted vanilla quality. It is soft with nice fruit and flavors—very attractive, but not likely to be long-lived (17). \$30

**Corton (Tollot-Beaut).** This is also a really nice Burgundy. With a dark color and a perfumed, fruity/spicy/berry-like nose that is really magnificent, the wine delivers good fruit and flavor on the palate. A firm wine with a noticeable degree of tannin and acid, this will take 5-7 years to develop. Just now the wine seems just a little short on the palate, otherwise it is first-rate (17). \$30

**Corton "Bressandes" (Latour).** This is a very nice wine with a medium dark color and a lovely, perfumed, ripe fruit nose. There is good structure and depth with a nice fruit/acid balance. This should develop well over 4-6 years (17). \$39

**Corton "Clos Vigne Au Saint" (Latour).** This is a lovely Burgundy. The nose is complex showing fruit/spice and a hint of tobacco. It has good fruit and body with a nice finish. Still with acid and tannin to lose, this is one to lay away for a few years (17). \$39

**Gevrey-Chambertin (Dupont-Tisserandot).** This



surely will be one of the best township wines of the vintage. It has a dark color and a deep, fruity/spicy/earthy nose. A big wine with loads of fruit, it is youthfully tannic and very palatable. Perhaps just a little short in the finish, it will develop well for at least 5-8 years (17). \$24

**Musigny (Coron).** This aristocratic wine has a dark color and a deep fruity nose with a bacon-like quality. Already silky and elegant with nice flavors, the wine has a good, firm backbone for keeping many years (17). \$55

**Musigny (J.M. Roumier).** Quite different from the Musigny of Coron, but equally as good, this wine has a medium dark color and a nice fruity/plum-like/vanilla nose. It has good fruit, balance, and style and a very ripe quality. Again, the wine will likely develop for many years (17). \$42.50

**Vosne-Romanee (Jayer).** Another of the very best township wines of the vintage and, given the success of this producer, no wonder. This wine has a medium dark color and a deep fruity nose with fruity, ripe flavors in a big style. Still with tannin to lose, it should develop for at least 7 years (17). \$29

**Beaune-Greves (Tollot-Beaut).** This is also a very nice Burgundy. The wine has a dark color and a lovely, complex, fruity/cassis/vanilla nose. It has nice fruit, good balance, and a fruity/earthy complexity. Lovely to drink now, but another 3-5 years age should be well rewarded (16½). \$25

**Chambertin (Coron).** With a dark color and a complex, perfumed, fruity/earthy/spicy nose, this Burgundy has good fruit, texture, and stuffing. Already showing the style and class of its exalted pedigree, another 3-5 years age should yield a lovely wine (16½). \$55

**Clos de Vougeot (Coron).** This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy/somewhat earthy nose. With good fruit and flavor, the wine has acid and tannin to lose. Keep this one for 5-6 years (16½). \$42.50

**Echezeaux (Latour).** This is a nice Burgundy with a dark color and a subdued/closed-in nose showing hints of fruit. It has good balance with fruity/spicy flavors, but finishes just a little short (16½). \$45

**Chambolle-Musigny (Guyon).** This is a lighter style Burgundy with lovely fruit in an elegant style. There is a spicy complexity in the nose and flavor that renders it quite attractive (16). \$20

**Chassagne-Montrachet (Coron).** With a medium dark color and a lovely fruity/spicy nose, this is a clean, firm, fresh, fruity, lighter style Burgundy that is

lovely to drink now and for the next 3-4 years at least (16). \$16.50

**Corton (Vienot).** This is a nice Burgundy with a dark color and a lovely, fruity/vanilla/cassis-like nose. The wine has fruit and depth, but is a little flat on the palate and lacking structure. Still it is lovely to drink and should develop for quite a few years (16). \$23

**Musigny (Latour).** This wine has a dark color and a rather closed-in nose with good flavors. It may lack a bit in depth and intensity, but not in price (16). \$96

**Richebourg (Latour).** This wine bears little resemblance to the superb Richebourg from Mayer. It has a good color and a fruity, rather subdued nose. The wine is quite smooth with a noticeable sweetness and is pleasant to drink, but lacks structure (16). \$78

**Vosne-Romanee (Coron).** What a nose! A gorgeous, fresh, raspberry, candy aroma leads into a clean, fresh, fruity, lighter style Burgundy that is quite delicious (16). \$25

**Vosne-Romanee (Jean Grivot).** Like Coron's Vosne Romanee, the aroma of this wine is worth the price—incredible raspberry/candy-like quality. It has a medium dark color and a fresh, clean, berry-like flavor. A very nice wine that is just a little thin, but oh what a nose (16)! \$25

**Beaune (Hospices de Beaune "Cuvee Dames-Hospitalieres").** This is a nice wine, but for \$46 forget it. It has a medium dark color and a fruity, slightly volatile nose. In a medium style, the wine is clean, and fruity with structure to develop for at least 3-5 years (15½).

**Chambolle-Musigny (Coron).** This wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/spicy, slightly volatile nose. It has good fruit and depth rendered in a medium-bodied style (15½). \$28

**Corton "Clos du Roi" (Latour).** This Burgundy has a medium dark color with a rather subdued, fruity nose. It has good body and nice fruit/acid balance, but lacks a bit in complexity and finish (15½). \$39

**Meursault "Cote de Beaune" (August Morey-Genelot).** A rarity of sorts, this Red Burgundy from the area world-renowned for its whites, has a medium color with an amber edge and a ripe, fruity nose. It has fruity/grapy flavors in a full style (15½). \$19

**Morey-Saint-Denis "Clos de la Bussiere" (J.M. Roumier).** This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/vanilla nose. A nice wine with clean, fruity flavors; it should develop early (15½). \$17

**Beaune "Clos du Roi" (Tollot-Beaut).** This wine



has a medium dark color and a very attractive fruity/spicy nose. The wine has good fruit and flavor in a medium-bodied style. It should develop well for 3-5 years (15). \$20

**Corton-Grancey (Latour).** With a medium color and fresh, clean flavors, the wine is attractive, but lacks depth and complexity. In years past this has been wonderful wine; not so in 1978, although the raspberry-like quality is pleasant (15). \$35

**Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Boudots" (Jean Grivot).** This wine has a medium dark color and a lovely, spicy/fruity/vanilla/toasty nose. A lighter style, it is clean with nice fruit and good balance. Expect it to develop for 3-5 years (15). \$30

**Volnay "Clos Des Ducs" (D'Angerville).** This is a monopole vineyard and usually it produces a very fine wine. Considering the vintage, this is disappointing. The wine is over-chapalized. It has a dark color and a fruity/vanilla nose, with soft, sweet, pleasant flavors. Already ready to drink, this is not one to keep too long (15). \$30

## Good

**Aloxe-Corton "Les Chaillots" (Latour).** This is a nice, lighter style Burgundy with a spicy/fruity nose and nice fruit and structure. Perhaps a touch low in acid and rather short on the palate, it still should drink well for quite a few years (14½). \$20

**Chambolle-Musigny (G. Roumier).** If a little sweet, this Burgundy has good fruit and flavor in a light, simple style (14½). \$20

**Clos de Vougeot (Grivot).** This wine is marred by an oxidized nose. Otherwise, it has a medium dark color and grapy/currant-like flavors (14½). \$36.50

**Corton-Bressandes (Tollot-Beaut).** This wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/toasty nose. The wine has fruit, but it is rather flat and lacks depth and aftertaste (14½). \$38

**Gevrey-Chambertin (Coron).** This wine is pleasant with a medium dark color showing just a bit of amber at the edge. It is fruity and straightforward (14½). \$25

**Morey-Saint-Denis (Dujac).** Hopefully, Dujac's other 1978's will be better than this. Actually, in 1969 and 1971, the Morey-Saint-Denis was very nearly as good as the more exalted Echezeaux, Bonnes-Mares, Clos La Roche, etc., while in 1976 it was not. This 1978 has a medium color and a ripe, fruity/spicy nose that is uniquely Dujac. The wine has ripe, bacon-like flavors that are balanced, but lack depth and intensity (14½). \$35

**Pommard "Epenots" (Latour).** This Burgundy has a subdued nose with a hint of sulphur. It has clean flavors, but lacks body and fruit (14½). \$43

**Aloxe-Corton (Tollot-Beaut).** This wine has a medium dark color, an alcoholic/fruity nose, and nice fruit with good tannin and acid. However, the wine finishes short and lacks depth (14). \$20

**Beaune "Le Clos des Mouches" (Coron).** Although lacking depth and a little short on the palate, this wine otherwise is quite pleasant with a medium dark color and clean, berry-like flavors followed by fresh, fruity flavors (14). \$29

**Beaune "Vignes Franches" (Latour).** This wine has a medium color and a perfumed, fruity nose, but it lacks fruit, is high in acid, and has a short finish (14). \$28

**Corton-Bressandes (Guyon).** This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy nose. Otherwise it is fruity, tart, and rather thin. Not objectionable, but not much to it either (14). \$36

**Fixin "Clos De La Perriere" (Dufouleur).** This wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/butterscotch/brown sugar nose. It has a sweet, ripe, fruity flavor and a slightly flabby texture (14). \$12.25

**Ile de Vergelesses (Latour).** This Burgundy has a medium color and a subdued, fruity nose. The wine has a nice fruit/acid balance, but is tart and rather austere (14). \$19

**Nuits-Saint-Georges "Clos de L'Arlot" (Belin).** This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/musty/earthy nose. The flavors, likewise, have a musty character and the wine finishes short (14). \$29

**Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Chaillots" (Dubois).** This is a hard wine with a slightly metallic flavor. Is there enough fruit to carry it? Time will tell. It has a medium dark color and a grapy/currant-like nose and harsh flavors that lack fruit (14). \$27

**Pommard-Epenots (Morey).** This wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/peppery nose. It is a bit thin with fruity, tart flavors (14). \$33

**Volnay "Champans" (D'Angerville).** This wine misses the mark. It has a medium dark color and a nice fruity, raspberry nose, but fruit is lacking and the wine is tart and high in acid (14). \$28

**Vosne-Romanee (Latour).** This Burgundy has a medium dark color with an amber edge. It is fruity, tart, slightly spicy, and rather thin (14). \$36



**Beaune (Latour).** This Burgundy has a medium color and a fruity/slightly vegetative nose. The wine is thin, tart, and lacking in fruit (13½). \$28

**Beaune "Perrieres" (Latour).** Similar to the "Vignes Franches," but even lighter—almost a light Beaujolais (13½). \$28

**Gevrey-Chambertin (Latour).** With a medium dark color this wine suffers from a mustiness in the nose and flavor. Otherwise it is thin, fruity, and simple with a short aftertaste (13½). \$35

**Cote de Beaune-Villages (Latour).** This is a thin, watery wine stretched over a thin frame with a subdued, fruity/berry-like nose (13). \$18

**Cotes de Nuits-Villages (Latour).** This Burgundy has a dark color, but is already showing signs of age with a toasty/oxidized nose. Otherwise this wine has fruit and good depth of flavor (13). \$22.50

**Volnay "Mittants" (Latour).** This is a thin Burgundy with a medium color, a ripe, fruity nose, and thin flavors that finish short (13). \$28

**Nuits-Saint-Georges (Latour).** This wine is tart and thin with a curious metallic quality in the nose. At the \$36 price, it is easy to forget (12½). \$32

**Pommard (Coron).** This is a dull wine that seems to be made for a gullible public willing to pay high prices for a "Pommard." It has a medium dark color with an amber edge, and a fruity/vanilla nose. The wine has fruit, but is flat, slightly sweet, and lacking in depth and flavor interest (12½). \$32

**Beaune "Le Clos du Roi" (Coron).** This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a musty/off nose. The wine is flat, simple, tart, and fruity (12). \$27.50

**Chambolle-Musigny (Latour).** Can you believe \$40 for this? The wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a musty/berry-like nose. It is slightly sweet with thin, fruity, stale flavors (12).

**Vosne-Romanee (Grivot).** This is a poor example of Burgundy much less a Vosne-Romanee. The wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/grassy nose. It is thin, watery, and dull (12). \$23

## Below Average

**Beaune (Thevenin-Monthelie).** This wine is not attractive. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/musty nose. It is thin with herbaceous, metallic flavors (11). \$17

**Beaune "Les Greves" (Coron).** This wine is already over the hill. It has a medium reddish orange color and an oxidized/brown sugar/anise nose. It is thin, caramelized, and slightly sweet (11). \$25.50

*The picture which comes into focus of the 1978 Red Burgundy vintage is one of short supply, very high prices, and quality varying from fairly good to spectacular. At their best, the wines are deep-colored and complete, possessing the depth, concentration, and body of classic Burgundies as from decades long past. Unfortunately, however, many of the wines, despite their lofty price tags, are not terribly big, interesting, or extraordinary. Staying with the "big name" shippers and growers is no answer, as many of their bottlings can simply in no way justify their prices.*

*Selectivity cannot be overly stressed with regard to the acquisition of 1978 Red Burgundies. The best are very expensive, but very few are cheap—good or bad. Those who buy indiscriminately are likely to be disappointed and a lot poorer!*





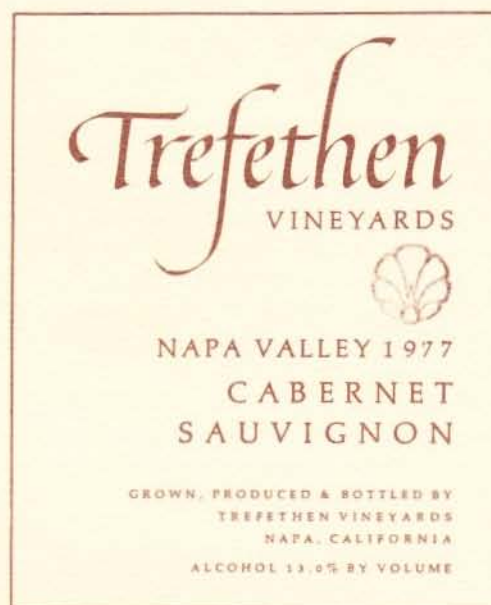
## 1977 CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

**"A very good vintage that is likely to be overshadowed by the 1978's"**

Weather conditions in 1977 were very similar to those of 1976. In the second year of the drought, a mild winter followed by a relatively dry, cool, and practically frost-free spring resulted in early budding and leafing. The crop was not nearly as affected by the drought as in 1976. In 1976, 20,345 acres of bearing vines produced a total crush of 33,667 tons of grapes. In 1977, as the majority of the over 10,000 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon planted in 1973-74 came into production, bearing acreage increased by about 30% to over 26,000 acres, but production increased by nearly 70% to 56,557 tons. By major areas of production, Napa's production increased 87% to 14,784 tons, Sonoma's 44% to 9,967 tons, and production in the Southern Central coast (encompassing Monterey, San Benito, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties) increased 105% to 16,493 tons. While these production figures are larger compared with the severely reduced production of 1976, with virtually no increase in bearing acreage, the nearly ideal growing conditions of the 1978 vintage resulted in another 43% increase in production. The 1979 and 1980 crops were also large resulting in a lot of Cabernet Sauvignon juice. While certain wineries may have small production, the combined effect of dramatic increases in the grape production and number of wineries making Cabernet Sauvignon virtually assures that wine drinkers everywhere will be able to experience some of California's finest. And, as an added bonus, this should serve to moderate the price escalation so prevalent in recent years.

### Outstanding

**Trefethen.** This is a classic example of a medium-bodied Napa Valley Cabernet. Produced from 100% estate grown Cabernet grapes, the color is dark and the nose shows an intense perfume of cassis, cherries, and sandalwood with spicy overtones. Not heavy and thick, nonetheless the wine is loaded with fruit and is nicely balanced with moderate tannin and acid. Very ripe, fruity flavors show a spicy complexity that should show further development with age. While pleasant to drink now, this wine will be better with 3-4 years additional bottle age—a great buy at the \$8.50 suggested retail price. Some 3500 cases were produced and released in October. Don't miss this one! (18).



### Very Good

**Caymus Vineyards.** This estate bottled Napa Valley Cabernet assumes its place amongst the top wines of the vintage. Very familiar territory, since the Caymus Cabernets have ranked at or near the top in every vintage since the winery's first in 1972. Some might find this "light." Others will proclaim it "ready to drink." Nonsense. It is a lighter style, but make no mistake about it, this wine will improve for at least 5 years and provide many, many years of beautiful drinking thereafter. The wine has a dark color and a lovely, fruity/cedary/cherry-like nose. It has ripe, fruity flavors and nice balance with medium body and nice depth. Some 1500 cases were produced and released in June at \$10 per bottle (17).

**Mount Eden Vineyards.** This 100% Cabernet from dry farmed Santa Cruz Mountain grapes is a real mouthful. Nowhere near ready to drink, the wine will require at least a decade of bottle age. The color is very dark and the nose has a perfumed, fruity, slightly raisin-like character with vanilla nuances. It is fruity, rich, and concentrated with masses of fruit showing a chocolate quality and loads of tannin balanced by good acidity and structure. Only 179 cases were produced and at \$25 per bottle it is hardly a best buy, but this wine holds the promise of being really special in 10-15 years (17).

**St. Clement "Napa Valley."** This is St. Clement's second Cabernet. The first, a 1975-76 blend, is an excellent wine. This wine is even better. It has a dark



color and a deep nose of cedar and blackberries—very attractive. It is very fruity, concentrated, and rich with a chocolate complexity. With good acid/tannin balance, this wine should be kept for at least 5 years to develop. Originally released at \$10 per bottle last fall, the wine is now difficult to find, but worth a diligent search (17).

**Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Stag's Leap Vineyard."** This is one of four 1977 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cabernets. There is also a "Lot 2", a "Napa Valley", and a yet to be released "Cask 23." This wine was released in October of last year at \$9 per bottle and is now priced at \$11. Blended with Merlot this continues the trend of top-notch Stag's Leap Cabernets in each year since 1972. Characteristic of the vintage, the wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, perfumed, berry-like nose. There is good fruit and flavor rendered in a medium-bodied style with excellent balance and depth. Keep for a few more years, but the wine should drink well for at least a decade (17).

**Villa Mt. Eden.** The Cabernet vines on Villa Mt. Eden's property produced 2300 cases of this wine vs. only about 850 cases in 1976. If less intense than the 1976, there is a very nice balance to the wine. It has a dark color, a fruity, berry-like nose with lots of fruit and flavor, and a youthfully, tannic finish. This is one to keep for 4-5 years. It should make a lovely bottle (17). \$11

**Conn Creek "Napa Valley."** As is so characteristic of the vintage, this wine is not as concentrated as its 1976 predecessor. However, with 3-5 years more bottle age it should be elegant and lovely to drink. With a dark color showing just a bit of amber at the edge, the nose is very attractive with a fruity/cherry-like quality and chocolate nuances. The wine is fresh, clean, and quite delicious with the cherry-like flavor (16½). \$10

**Diamond Creek Vineyards "Red Rock Terrace-First Pick."** Only 296 cases of this wine were produced and it is much more intense than the lighter "Second Pick" which was affected by the rain. It has a dark color and a fruity/cedary nose with an attractive hint of volatile acidity. There are lots of berry-like flavors and good structure with a fullness balanced by tannin and acid. Needing 3-5 years to develop, this should be very nice (16½). \$10

**Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Napa Valley."** This attractive Cabernet is made from Phelps Vineyards own Cabernet and Cabernet from another Napa Valley vineyard. It is blended with 5% Merlot. The wine has a dark color and a fruity/eucalyptus nose. With good fruit and nice balance the wine should improve for at least 5-7 years. Just now the youthful tannin

predominates the aftertaste (16½). \$10.75

**Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Stag's Leap Vineyard, Lot 2."** This wine is just a bit harder than the very similar "Stag's Leap Vineyard" bottling. It has a dark color, a fruity nose showing hints of oak, and nice fruit and flavor (16½). \$10

**Burgess Cellars "Vintage Selection."** Just released, there were 2962 cases of this wine produced from Napa Mountain grapes. It has a dark color and a lovely, perfumed, oaky/fruity nose. The wine has good flavor and fruit with much tannin to lose. It will require at least 4-5 years to develop and should drink well a decade hence (16). \$12

**Carneros Creek Winery "Truchard Vineyards."** Only a small amount of this wine was produced from this Southern Napa Valley property. It has a dark color, a fruity/pruney nose with nice, rich flavors, and an intriguing "dusty" quality on the palate. It should develop well for 3-5 years and make a delicious bottle (16). \$8.50

**Chateau St. Jean "Glen Ellen."** This is a very nice Cabernet in a big, fruity style. The color is dark with an amber edge and the nose shows a fruity/vanilla quality. Lush and rich with lots of fruit, it is youthfully tannic and needs several more years to develop (16). \$13.50

**Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Napa Valley."** Grapes for this Cabernet came primarily from the Disney Vineyards. It has a dark color and a fruity/slightly briary Cabernet nose with good fruit and structure. Nicely balanced, the wine has richness and just a hint of weediness in the flavor (16). \$7.75

**Sterling Vineyards.** The estate bottled Napa Cabernet is one of the winery's best regular bottlings. Stylistically it is lighter and has more elegance than the 1976. Blended with 25% Merlot, the wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity, berry-like nose with oak nuances. With nice fruit, it has a cedary/cherry-like fruit flavor that is most appealing. Still some tannin to lose, this will be a lovely bottle in 2-3 years (16). \$10

**Clos Du Val "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet has a dark color and a fruity/oaky nose. It has a fruity/grapy/oaky flavor in a fleshy, straightforward style. Still quite tannic, the wine needs another 3-5 years to develop (15½). \$9.50

**Diamond Creek Vineyards "Volcanic Hill."** Typically the biggest of the Diamond Creek Cabernets, so it is again. The wine has a dark color, a berry jam-like nose, and oaky/fruity, straightforward flavors. Quite tannic, the wine needs at least 5 years to develop (15½). \$10



**Estrella River Winery.** This estate bottled Cabernet from San Luis Obispo shows the regional characteristic of intense fruit without the herbaceousness that is often present. It has a dark color and a fruity/oaky nose with rich, concentrated, grapy flavors that finish slightly bitter. It will be interesting to watch this wine develop. There seems to be potential and if the wine will soften and develop complexity it will be very fine indeed (15½). \$8.50

**Monterey Peninsula Winery "Monterey."** How will this wine age? Will it develop the bell pepper quality of the 1974 or will it retain the intense fruitiness of the 1976? Typical of the Cabernets from this vineyard in Monterey, it has a very dark color and an intensely fruity nose with hints of black pepper. Heavy, rich, thick, concentrated, and grapy, the wine has good tannin/acid balance to seemingly develop. If the bell pepper quality doesn't show up this could be very, very good in 3-5 years (15½). \$10

**Ridge "York Creek."** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color and a fruity/oaky/spicy nose. Very grapy with lots of straightforward flavors, the wine needs 3-5 years to soften and develop complexity (15½). \$12

**Sonoma Vineyards "Alexander's Crown."** Although less concentrated than the 1974 or 1975, this is probably the best "Alexander's Crown" to date. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a stunning nose—currants, roses, violets. The wine has a nice style and good balance with a tannic finish that should soften in 1-2 years. Probably not a keeper, and a little short on the palate, this is, nonetheless, a fine wine for consumption in the next few years (15½). \$12

**Wilson Daniels "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet has a medium dark color and a lovely, fruity/raspberry nose with just a trace of mint. The wine is clean with fresh, fruity flavors in a nice style. With tannin to lose, this wine should be quite elegant with 2-3 more years bottle age (15½). \$10

**BV "Rutherford."** Not a great wine, but this wine is an excellent value and one of BV's better recent efforts. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a ripe, fruity nose. It is clean with berry-like flavors in a nice style. Ready to drink, but the wine should develop for a year or two (15). \$6

**Cakebread Cellars "Napa Valley."** This is a typical Cakebread Cabernet in a huge, fruity, late-picked style. The wine has a dark color and a fruity nose with considerable volatile acidity in evidence. It is rich and concentrated with a slightly pickled quality in the aftertaste. Wines like this should probably be consumed for the youthful fruit, but it should keep for

keep for a few years (15). \$9

**Cassayre-Forni Cellars "Napa Valley."** Only 650 cases of this wine were produced from 80% Yountville Cabernet and 20% Rutherford Cabernet. It has a very dark color and an oaky/fruity, slightly weedy nose. A concentrated wine with good fruit and flavor, it finishes just a little bitter. Another year or two should be allowed for the wine to develop (15). \$8

**Chappellet Winery.** Chappellet usually blends a small amount of Merlot with the Cabernet. This wine is 100% Cabernet but it is still a very typical Chappellet style. It has a dark color and an over-ripe, fruity/oaky nose. A big, tannic wine with a slightly over-ripe, oaky flavor, it needs 3-5 years to develop (15). \$12

**Chateau St. Jean "Jack London Vineyards."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a berry-like nose showing a hint of volatile acidity. The wine has a ripe, fruity flavor with a bit of tannin that should soften with another year or two of bottle age (15). \$11

**Clos Du Val "Granval."** Clos Du Val's second label is a very good value and very similar to the regular bottling. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/cedary nose. There is good fruit, structure, and tannin and acid to lose. Not quite as full as the regular bottling, but this should develop nicely for several years (15). \$6

**Diamond Creek Vineyards "Gravelly Meadow."** Curiously, the 1977 Gravelly Meadow is probably the most austere wine produced from this vineyard. It has a dark color and a fruity/cedary nose. The wine has fruit and a cedary/spicy complexity, but presently is rather harsh and astringent. Many years are needed for this wine to develop and only time will tell if there's enough fruit to carry the wine (15). \$10

**Keenan "Napa Valley."** This is a curious Cabernet. It has a dark color and a blackberry nose with grapy/spicy/fruity/olallieberry flavors. Straightforward with the intense, almost fruit wine character, it is, nonetheless, quite tannic. Needing a few years to develop, it will be interesting to see if the wine will develop complexity as it matures (15). \$10

**Le Fleuron "Napa Valley."** This is Joseph Phelps's second label and a very nice wine at an attractive price. Lighter in style than the regular bottling, but otherwise similar, with a medium dark color and a fruity/minty nose. The wine has good fruit and flavor with a nice balance and a cedary complexity (15). \$6.75

**Robert Mondavi Winery "Napa Valley."** This is one of Mondavi's better regular Cabernets with a characteristic herbaceous quality that seems more



pronounced in some bottles than others. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and nice fruit. An elegant style, the wine is very nearly ready to drink and should hold nicely for quite a few years (15). \$10

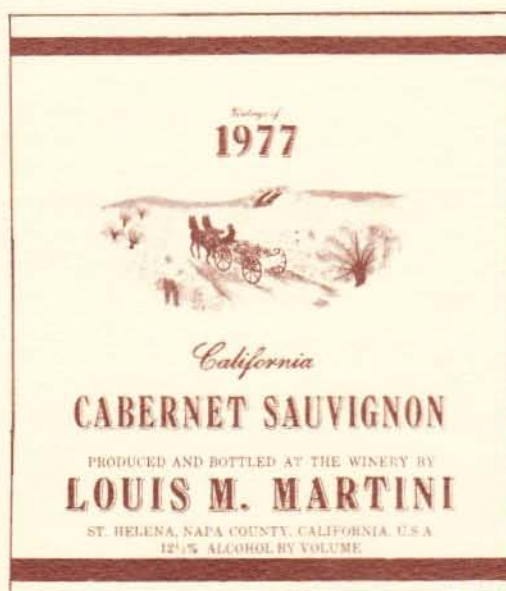
**Mt. Veeder Winery "Bernstein Vineyards."** This Cabernet has a dark color and a fruity/minty nose with good fruit and flavor. There is just a trace of stemminess and a little bitterness. Quite tannic, the wine will need many years to develop (15). \$12

**Tulocay Winery "Napa Valley."** Only 265 cases of this wine were produced. It has a dark color and a grapy/woody nose with alcoholic overtones and a hint of volatile acidity. The wine is oaky with lots of fruit and flavor with a tannic, astringent finish. This wine needs a few years to develop (15). \$7.50

### Good

**Clos Du Bois "Sonoma County."** This Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge, and a fruity/oaky/cedary nose with light, round, fruity flavors—a pleasant wine to drink now and for the next year or two (14½). \$8

**Gundlach-Bundschu Winery "Batto Ranch."** There seems to be considerable bottle variation in this wine. Some seem overly tannic with a stemmy quality. The better bottles exhibit a dark color, a fruity/cedary/slightly musty nose with a hint of mint, lots of fruit flavor with chocolate nuances, and a tannic finish (14½). \$10



### Best Buy

**Louis M. Martini "California."** Want a Cabernet to drink tonight for \$5? This is your wine. It is a light style, but it is clean and fresh with good fruit and nice balance. Not a wine for extended aging, although it will undoubtedly keep nicely for several years; this is a great buy and even better than the 1976 for only a few cents more (14½).



**Veedercrest "Mt. Veeder District, Napa County."** This is Veedercrest's first estate bottled Cabernet. Only about 100 cases were produced from the North Ranch Vineyards. The Cabernet was blended with 9% Merlot, 8% Malbec, and 6% Cabernet Franc. While the blend of grapes may be distinctly Bordeaux-like, the wine has a distinct California style, albeit in an easy, ready-to-drink style. A very pleasant wine with a medium color, a fruity/cherry-like nose and nice fruit. This style of wine could be really superb made with more depth and structure (14½). \$9

**Burgess Cellars "Napa Valley."** This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/creosote nose. It has fruit and a slight mustiness in a big style with substantial tannin. At least 3-5 years are needed for the wine to develop (14). \$8

**Carneros Creek Winery "Fay Vineyards."** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/molasses-like nose. It has grapy/somewhat raisiny flavors and a medium body with a tannic finish. Another 2-3 years bottle age should prove beneficial (14). \$7.75

**Clos Du Bois "Unfiltered and Unfined."** This wine is very similar to the "Sonoma County" bottling. It has



a medium dark color with an amber edge and a clean, somewhat subdued, fruity nose. With nice, light, straightforward, fruity flavors it is nice to drink now, although the wine finishes just a little short (14). \$7.50

**Felton-Empire "Hallcrest-Beauregard Ranch."**

This Santa Cruz Cabernet has a dark color and a fruity/chocolate-like nose with considerable volatile acidity. It is soft with fruity flavors, but a strange sweet/sour sensation results, no doubt, from the volatility. Unlikely to age well, this should be consumed relatively soon (14). \$12

**Field Stone "Alexander Valley."** This wine has a dark color and a fruity/blackberry jam nose with just a hint of bell pepper. The wine has good body and a fruity flavor with just a hint of weediness. Still with tannin to lose, the wine is, nonetheless, probably most attractive now for the fruit (14). \$9

**Charles Krug "Napa Valley."** A lighter style to be sure, but this Cabernet is one of Krug's better recent efforts. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky/cherry-like nose. There is nice texture, fruit, and balance with slightly weedy flavors. A wine pleasant to drink now, but it should develop for several years—good value (14). \$5.50

**Mill Creek Vineyards "Sonoma County."** This estate bottled Cabernet was blended with 10% Merlot. It has a medium dark color and a fruity/oaky nose with a slight hint of mint. It is medium-bodied with straightforward, fruity/oaky flavors that finish just a bit short. With tannin and acid to lose, another 2-3 years bottle age should round this out nicely (14). \$7.50

**Mirassou "Home Vineyard, Lot 1."** This unfiltered Cabernet from the vineyards surrounding the winery in Santa Clara offers a distinct comparison with the herbaceous/vegetative/bell pepper Cabernets from Mirassou's Monterey Vineyards. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/black pepper nose. With medium body and fruity/earthy flavors the wine is very nearly ready to drink (14). \$6

**Monterey Peninsula Winery "Shell Creek Vineyards."** This San Luis Obispo Cabernet has a dark color and a fruity/oaky/vanilla nose. With nice fruit, the wine is clean with tart, grapy, berry-like flavors and a tannic finish. This wine should age well for 3-5 years (14). \$9.50

**Mt. Veeder Winery "Side Hill Vineyard."** This Napa Valley Cabernet has not yet been released for sale in California, but is currently available in New York at \$13.95. It is a big, tannic Cabernet with a dark color, a fruity/oaky nose, and fruit masked by the massive tannin. Time will tell if this wine will come into balance (14).

**Page Mill Winery "Volker Eisele's Chiles Valley Vineyard."** This Napa Cabernet has a medium dark color and an oaky/fruity/berry nose. It has an oaky/berry-like flavor, good body, and the structure to develop for a few years (14). \$8.75

**Pope Valley "Spring Lane Vineyards."** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color and an oaky/berry-like nose with fruity/oaky flavors. It is straightforward and clean with a short finish (14). \$6.95

**Rutherford Vintners "Napa Valley."** This wine has a medium color, a berry-like nose and clean, fruity flavors with a tannic finish. It should develop for 2-3 years (14). \$7.50

**San Martin "Limited Vintage."** This is another excellent value at the \$5 price. Blended from San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Santa Clara Cabernet it retains varietal character in a smooth, fruity style. With a medium dark color, the wine has a berry/plum-like nose and grapy/plum-like flavors. It is clean and fresh; a very nice wine for current consumption (14).

**Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard "Hecker Pass."**

This is owner/winemaker Ken Burnap's first Cabernet. Not really the house style of intense fruit and flavor, this wine reflects the character of these particular grapes. It has a medium color, a berry-like/oaky nose and soft, ripe, fruity flavors in a medium-bodied style ready for current consumption (14). \$7.50

**Zaca Mesa "American Oak."** This Santa Ynez Valley Cabernet shows more oak than the same wine which was aged in French oak. It also seems to have a softer texture. The wine has a dark color and a fruity, oaky nose with hints of vanilla. It has good fruit and texture and a noticeable oaky quality showing a little herbaceousness. With tannin and acid to lose, it should be given a few years to develop. If the herbaceous quality doesn't overwhelm the fruit, it could be quite nice (14).

**BV "Beau Tour."** This Cabernet is blended with 14% Merlot. At the \$5 price it's a good value with a medium dark color, an amber edge and a clean, berry-like nose. It has light, pleasant, clean flavors that finish a little short. This is a wine to drink now and for the next year or two (13½).

**Cakebread Cellars "Napa Valley, Lot 2."** This is a bigger wine than the regular "Napa Valley" bottling, but bigger isn't always better. It has a dark color and an alcoholic, fruity/oaky/briary nose. There is good fruit and lots of oak. The wine is quite tannic and should benefit from several years bottle age (13½). \$12

**Dehlinger Winery "Sonoma County."** This is one



of the lighter Dehlinger Cabernets and the wine is short and lacks depth. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy/oaky nose with clean, tart, fruity flavors (13½). \$6.50

**Durney Vineyard "Carmel Valley."** This estate bottled Cabernet from Monterey County has a dark color and a fruity/oaky nose. Packed with fruit, the wine shows considerable oak and grapiness without complexity. Presently very tannic, only time will tell whether this wine will retain fruit or pick up a strong herbaceous quality that just now shows through only faintly (13½). \$8

**Fetzer Vineyards "Lake County."** At \$4 this is a good buy. The wine has a medium dark color with a fruity, slightly musty nose. The grapy flavors are clean and straightforward. With some tannin and acid in evidence, the wine should develop for another year or two (13½).

**The Firestone Vineyard "Santa Ynez Valley."** This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a woody/fruity/herbaceous nose. The wine has good fruit, depth, and structure, but there is a strong herbaceous quality showing through. This is a substantial wine that will require 3-5 years to develop, but the herbaceous quality is likely to become stronger (13½). \$7.50

**Hacienda "Sonoma Valley."** This Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and an oaky nose. It has a fruity/oaky flavor with a slight stemminess and good texture (13½). \$9

**Mirassou "Harvest Selection."** This Monterey Cabernet is a big wine with a dark color and a fruity/minty nose. The wine has lots of fruit with a vegetative/bell pepper quality. The wine is quite tannic and finishes bitter. Drink now for the fruit or wait a few years for the wine to soften which will also likely intensify the vegetative/bell pepper character (13½). \$8

**Raymond "Napa Valley."** This estate bottled wine has a dark color and a fruity/herbaceous nose. There is nice fruit and nice balance marred by a slightly bitter aftertaste. Youthfully tannic, a few years should soften the wine, but the bitterness is likely to remain (13½). \$8.50

**Rutherford Ranch Brand "Napa Valley."** This wine has a dark color and a pungent, grapy/woody/herbaceous nose. It has nice fruit and structure with a slight weediness and a bitter finish (13½). \$6.50

**St. Helena Jazz Band Heritage Fund "Napa Valley."** You've got the name right. This was produced by Joseph Phelps Vineyards and exhibits a dark color and an oaky/berry nose. The wine has

good flavor and structure with lots of oak and a short finish (13½). \$5.50

**Stony Ridge Winery "Bell Hill Vineyards."** This Lake County Cabernet is most unusual. It has a medium dark color and a fruity nose with hints of licorice and chocolate. The flavors are grapy and spicy and nicely balanced. Lacking depth, there is tannin to lose, but there may not be enough fruit to carry the wine (13½). \$7

**Veedercrest "North Coast Counties."** Made from grapes grown in three Napa and Sonoma vineyards and blended with 10% Merlot, this wine has a light medium color and an amber edge. It exhibits a lovely, perfumed, fruity, berry-like nose with complexity. It's not as good in the mouth with a simple fruity flavor marred by a slightly weedy quality and a little bitterness—a wine to drink now while there's still fruit (13½). \$6.25

**Zaca Mesa "French Oak."** No doubt much difference of opinion will be evoked from the use of American oak for one batch of Cabernet and French oak for another. However, given the cost of French oak it seems more necessary for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay than Cabernet. This wine exhibits less oak than the "American Oak" bottling and has a more straightforward, fruity flavor with the same hint of herbaceousness. Showing considerable tannin, like its "American Oak" counterpart, this Cabernet needs a few years to develop. Again, if the herbaceous quality doesn't intensify greatly this could be quite nice (13½). \$7

**Ahlgren Vineyards "Shell Creek Vineyard."** This San Luis Obispo Cabernet is overpowered with oak. It is a nice wine with an oaky nose and intense fruity/oaky flavors. Perhaps a bit low in acid, this wine should be consumed relatively soon (13). \$6

**Alatera "Napa Valley."** This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a musty/medicinal nose. There is lots of fruit and flavor in a rich, round, prune style. Fortunately the wine tastes much better than it smells (13). \$8

**Ballard Canyon "Santa Ynez Valley."** This wine has a dark color and a grapy/fruity flavor of great intensity marred by a strong grassiness in the nose (13). \$6.50

**Beringer "Napa."** This is a nice, pleasant Cabernet marred by a bitter flavor component that overpowers the light structure of the wine. Otherwise, it has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a perfumed, oaky/cherry-like nose. With a taste to match the smell, the aforementioned bitterness is a major flaw (13). \$6.50



**Boeger "El Dorado County."** This wine is blended with 10% Merlot. At the \$6 price it's a good value. It reflects the character of the region with a toasted/earthy/slightly caramelized flavor behind the fruit. The color is medium dark and the nose is fruity and perfumed. This combined with the softness and early drinkability have given this wine a following amongst "value buyers." It has also "won" some low-priced Cabernet tastings. However, in addition to the particular taste components which disguise the varietal character, there is a noticeable bitterness in the aftertaste which time won't help. This is a wine to drink now (13). \$9

**Callaway Vineyard and Winery "Temecula."** Seems there is some dispute over what wine should be able to use the "Temecula" designation. Insofar as Cabernet might be concerned, it seems to be much ado about nothing. Cabernets from this area just don't show varietal character. Callaway's are strongly oaked and show a pungent quality in the nose and taste. With time this dissipates and the soft, underlying fruit shows through. So it is for this 1977—dark color, pungent, oaky/fruity nose, soft oaky/grapy flavor, short finish (13). \$7.50

**Dry Creek Vineyard "Sonoma County."** This wine was made from very ripe grapes and exhibits a strong over-ripe character in the nose and taste. It has a nice texture marred by a bitter finish (13). \$6.75

**Edmeades Vineyards "Mendocino."** This is a pleasant wine for current consumption with a medium color, a fruity nose, and clean, fresh, straightforward, grapy flavors (13). \$6.50

**Fetzer Vineyards "Mendocino."** This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a berry-like nose with a hint of volatile acidity. It has a medium body, a briary/berry flavor, and a bitter aftertaste. Lacking the structure for aging, this wine should be consumed now (13). \$5

**HMR "San Luis Obispo."** This wine has a dark color and a fruity/dusty/spicy/slightly herbaceous nose. The wine is very grapy and astringent with a short finish (13). \$6.50

**Milano "Sanel Valley Vineyards."** This Mendocino Cabernet had a total production of only 250 cases. It has a dark color and an oaky nose with oaky/berry-like flavors. It is tannic and bitter and will need time to develop, but the wine seems to lack the structure to carry it (13). \$10

**Monterey Peninsula Winery "Arroyo Seco Vineyard."** This wine has the weedy/herbaceous aromas most often associated with Monterey Cabernets. It is less pronounced in the taste with

fruity/tart flavors—a wine for near term consumption (13). \$9

**Montevina "Special Selection."** This Amador County Cabernet has a dark color with a ripe, fruity nose showing alcoholic overtones. In the mouth it is rich, fat, and round with lots of flavor. Not particularly varietal and marred by a bitter finish some will find this appealing for the big style and intense fruit (13). \$7.25

**Roudon-Smith Vineyards "San Luis Obispo County."** This Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity/spicy/slightly herbaceous, volatile nose. There is lots of fruit, but the wine has an oaky, flat, one-dimensional character with a slight vegetative character that suggest it should be consumed now for the fruit (13). \$5.50

**Spring Mountain.** With the exception of the 1968-69 blend which now seems to be drying out and a very nice wine from the mediocre 1972 vintage, Spring Mountain Cabernets have been a disappointment. The 1977, unfortunately, follows the trend. Blended with 4% Cabernet Franc and 7½% Merlot, the wine is still raw, harsh, bitter, weedy, and herbaceous. On the plus side, it has a dark color and fruit. This is unlikely to help the flavor defects. Drink it now while there's fruit (13). \$9.50

**Stonegate "Vail Vista."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium dark color and a fruity/minty nose with fruity flavors. A little thin, and lacking depth, the wine is pleasant to drink now (13). \$6

**Veedercrest "Steltzner Vineyard."** This is the least attractive of Veedercrest's three 1977 Cabernets. Cabernets from this vineyard have generally been disappointing. This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/weedy nose matched by fruity/weedy flavors and a slightly hot finish (13). \$7.50

**Vose Vineyards "Napa Valley."** This wine has a dark color and a volatile, almost shellac-like nose. With 1-2 hours air the nose dissipates a bit, but is still very volatile. A huge Cabernet with grapy/oaky flavors and lots of tannin, given the degree of volatility, it is likely to be sour by the time the 5-8 years pass that it will take for this wine to develop (13). \$12

**Almaden "Monterey."** Just think—this is the wine that won a widely publicized "expert tasting" awhile back. The price is attractive and the wine reasonably so in a ready-to-drink style, otherwise so much for that tasting! With a medium dark color and an amber edge, the wine shows a fruity/oaky nose and grapy, tart, simple, thin, slightly herbaceous flavors (12½).

**Felta Springs "Sonoma County."** This wine was grown, produced, and bottled by Mill Creek



Vineyards. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity, slightly vegetative nose. It is tart and fruity with a herbaceous flavor and short finish (12½). \$5

**Harbor Winery "Deaver Vineyard."** This unfiltered Amador County Cabernet shows the intense, pruneey, hot, alcoholic, briary quality so often associated with the region. It also has a petroleum distillant-like nose and not much varietal character (12½). \$6.50

**Pendleton "California."** This Cabernet is marred by free sulphur in the nose. It dissipates with air, but unfortunately there's not much to follow. The wine has a grapy/oaky, one-dimensional flavor and a tannic finish (12½). \$7.75

**Smothers "Robert Young Vineyards."** This wine has a medium color and a fruity/oaky/raisiny nose with considerable volatile acidity. The wine is one-dimensional and slightly sweet with a soft texture. This wine should be consumed now (12½). \$6

**Arroyo Sonoma "California."** This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky, slightly musty nose with a hint of herbaceousness. The wine is a bit austere with a slightly metallic taste. Already losing fruit, the wine should be consumed now (12). \$6.50

**Franciscan "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/slightly herbaceous nose. It has soft, weedy flavors and a short finish (12). \$5

**Landmark.** Made from 75% Sonoma County Cabernet and 25% Napa County Cabernet, this wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a musty/fruity/spicy nose. The wine is thin and flat without much structure, and lacking in flavor (12). \$7.75

**Montevina "Amador County."** This wine lacks the full, rich intensity of the "Special Selection." It also has more of the hot flavor component and bitterness overlayed with lots of fruit (12). \$5

**Mountainside Vineyards "Napa Valley."** This is Chateau Chevalier's second label. This year it could be the first. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a berry-like nose with noticeable oak. Grapy and slightly petillant in the mouth, the wine is drinkable but hardly one to lay away (12). \$6

**Parducci "Mendocino County."** This wine has a stemmy quality not found in the 1976. Otherwise it has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/cherry-like nose. The wine has fruit, but is quite tannic. Another year or two bottle age will help, but the

stemmy quality is a major detraction (12). \$5

**V. Sattui "Preston Vineyards."** This Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity nose. However, the wine is dry, austere, and lacking in fruit, depth, and flavor (12). \$8.25

**Shenandoah Vineyards "Deaver Vineyards."** This Amador County Cabernet exhibits the regional character in spades. It has a dark color, a pungent oaky/briary nose with a hint of volatile acidity, and a grapy, slightly sweet, hot, tannic flavor with a harsh finish. Can a wine like this improve with bottle age? Probably not (12). \$7.50

**Zaca Mesa "Early Release."** This is a youthful wine to drink for the fruit. It has a dark color and an oaky nose with a fruity/slightly herbaceous flavor overlayed by considerable oak (12). \$4.25

## Below Average

**Alexander Valley Vineyards "Alexander Valley."** Give this wine an award for the strangest nose of the vintage—turnips! Is there such a thing as turnip barrels? How about fermenting on the turnips? Who knows, but it's there. Otherwise the wine has a medium dark color and an amber edge with grapy, slightly herbaceous flavors and a short finish (11). \$6.50

**David Bruce "San Luis Obispo."** Another weird one with a dark color and a pungent nose reminiscent of vinegar and corn (sour mash?). It is grapy, ripe, acidic, and WEIRD (11). \$7.50

**Chateau Chevalier "Napa Valley."** This estate bottled wine is hard to love. It has a dark color and a pungent, oaky/bell pepper nose. In the mouth it has briary/oaky flavors and massive tannin. A thick wine that wrenches your mouth with tannin and bitterness, it's hard to believe this juice will ever come around (11). \$10



### **Chateau Chevalier "Napa Valley, Second Crop."**

The back label speaks for itself, except that the grapes might as well have stayed on the vine. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a musty/medicinal nose—not attractive. There are ripe, tannic flavors, but the wine is bitter and out of balance. Time is not likely to help. Small quantity or no, the \$15 price is absurd—caveat emptor (11)!

#### **A Very Unique Wine for Your Enjoyment.**

This special bottling of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, Second Crop, from our vineyard, may be the first of its kind ever made. I know of no other that has been made like this one. Due to the drought in 1976, we pruned for a very short crop in 1977. This produced a higher number of "lateral shoots," or axillary buds, which did not remain inactive or dormant until the following season, as would have been normal. Laterals of this type serve the grower in the same capacity as normal canes and bear fruit which is called "second crop." Normally, second crop grapes, which appear three to four weeks after the primary crop, do not have enough growing time to mature fully. Therefore, they are usually harvested with the primary crop or left on the vines. In 1977, our second crop was of sufficient quality to go in and pick them the third week of November at 23½° Brix. The wine has deep color, fragrant Cabernet nose and flavors, and while unmistakably Cabernet, has nuances all its own. We produced 350 cases of this wine.

*Greg Benvenuto*

**Cygnat Cellars "California."** Another Central Coast Cabernet that smells and tastes like a vegetable garden. There is also a chocolate-like richness that does not enhance the weedy/vegetative quality (11). \$5.50

### **Gundlach-Bundschu Winery "Sonoma Valley."**

This estate bottled wine has seen better days. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a weak, fruity nose. It is thin with a coffee bean flavor and a short finish (11). \$8

### **Lytton Springs Winery "Sonoma County."**

Phew! This wine is loaded with sulphur. Otherwise, oaky/fruity/vanilla flavors and soft texture are overpowered by the skunkiness (11). \$6

### **Sanford and Benedict Vineyards "California."**

This Santa Ynez Valley Cabernet is a huge wine with a very dark color and a predominant weedy/grassy/herbaceous quality. It is alcoholic and grapy with a sweet/sour taste in the mouth. The chocolate-like richness doesn't fit with the other grassy flavors—chocolate covered grass? (11). \$9.50

**Stonegate "Steiner Vineyard."** This wine is quite strange. With a dark color, it exhibits a fruity/oaky nose that is quite musty. It tastes worse than it smells.

The flavors are metallic and medicinal with an overlay of mustiness—easy to forget (11). \$7.50

**Felton-Empire "Robert Young Vineyard."** This wine, while never much, was at least drinkable six months ago. Now it's skunky, grassy, spritzzy, and lacking a present as well as a future (10). \$7

**Obester "Sonoma County."** Here's a Cabernet with a medium color and a chem-lab mint nose overlaid by a musty/earthy character. It's musty tasting and not pleasant (10). \$6.99

**Sycamore Creek Vineyards "Ron Bergstrom Vineyards."** Here's one to forget—pungent, alcoholic nose; fruity, bitter flavors; petillant; and bitter. Enough said (10)? \$8

**Thomas Kruse "Monterey County."** Double phew! This wine seems to have been made from rotten grapes. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a prune/moldy/chemical nose. Thin, sweet, over-ripe, rotten flavors make this wine a real loser (9). \$6

**Husch Vineyards "Mendocino."** Awful! Give it points for color and not much else—a really foul, stinky nose and rotten grape flavors make this a memorable loser (8)! \$9

While many of the 1977 Cabernets are yet to be released, it is clear that the wines are generally lighter than their 1976 counterparts. This has caused many to proclaim the vintage "less good." To the contrary, just because the wines are not tannic monsters doesn't mean they won't age. The balance of many of the 1977's is harmonious and it seems entirely possible that some could be around for a decade or two. In the interim, many wines will make delicious drinking—the Trefethen is a prime example. All in all, it seems likely that 1977's will be more attractive than their immediate predecessors, both short and long-term. But, even though 1977 is a very good vintage, it is likely to be overshadowed by 1978. Many of the 1978's should be really fine, combining a depth of flavor and balance that truly makes for memorable wine. Further down the road, 1980 also holds early promise for some magnificent wines.

Beginning with 1974, this concludes our series of comprehensive vintage California Cabernet articles. In upcoming issues, all Cabernets will be reviewed as released and this will become a regular feature. Just now the 1978's are starting to reach the market along with other vintages from 1974-79. Of course, we will also have tasting notes on pre-release 1977-80 Cabernets and comprehensive reviews of older vintages such as 1973, 1970, and 1968. For now, be selective in purchasing and watch for many new and outstanding Cabernets over the next few years.





## CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BRUT CHAMPAGNES

**"Our advice is simple: Stock up now before prices escalate further."**

There is usually nothing any better than sitting down with Champagne and appropriate food. The latter is quite easy since almost anything goes well with Champagne (except sweets and fruit which should be accompanied by sweeter Champagnes). Cold foods such as fish, shell fish, and meats are particularly good—not to mention the classic combination of caviar and Champagne. As an aperitif, Brut Champagne is unequalled. Our statement from last year is still valid (Volume I, Number 3): "It has no peer and nothing else deserves the name."

Just as everyone gets hooked, guess what happens? Right again. The bad news is that the already lofty prices are about to increase by 20-40% in the next 3-6

months. Why? The laws of supply and demand at work primarily, but by definition Champagne is certainly a monopoly, or at least an oligopoly, of sorts. Two of the last three years (1978 and 1980) have been small crops. Meanwhile, consumption has reduced the supply. The result—higher prices. In 1980, the crop was so short that a special premium was paid to growers. This had the effect of nearly doubling the price of grapes. One calculation comes up with \$5,000 per ton, and another shows that grape costs alone could be as much as \$10 per bottle or more! Our advice is simple: stock up now before prices escalate further. The following notes should make purchases a little easier and somewhat less painful on the budget.

## BRUT LIMITED VINTAGE CHAMPAGNES

**"... prices and quality are often not synonymous."**

These Champagnes include Blanc de Blancs (made exclusively from Chardonnay grapes), and "Tete De Cuvee" Champagnes which are sold as the producer's finest wine (mostly for export and at prices often more than double the non-vintage and vintage Champagnes from the same house). Since Champagne is often consumed in the United States as a "prestige" beverage, many producers have clamored to be the most expensive. As the following shows, prices and quality are often not synonymous.

palate and the wine vanishes with a silky smoothness. Just a touch of sweetness compliments the taste on the finish—another winner from Taittinger (18)! \$50

### Outstanding

1973 Taittinger "Comptes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs." Consistently, year in and year out, this Champagne represents the pinnacle of elegance and finesse. If not quite as rich as the superb 1971, it is delicate and maybe even more elegant. The color is light yellow and the nose is intensely fruity showing fresh, spicy/yeasty complexity. The flavors fill the





## Very Good

**1973 Charbaut "Certificate Blanc de Blancs."** This Champagne is produced in very limited quantities only in the finest years. This is the second vintage (1971 was the first and there will also be a 1976 and 1978). Some 10,000 bottles were made. The wine has a light yellow straw color and a perfumed fruity/spicy nose. It is delicate, well balanced, full of flavor, and long on the palate with just a hint of sweetness—delicious (17½). \$40



**1973 Piper-Heidsieck "Florens-Louis Blanc de Blancs."** This is a lovely, delicate Champagne with a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, spicy/fruity/yeasty nose. Elegant and flavorful with nice balance and style, the price is still affordable (17½). \$32

**1973 Laurent-Perrier "Cuvee Grand Siecle."** Consistently, this is one of the finest of all Champagnes with the ripe, rich, impeccably balanced flavors tinged with sweetness. This wine has those characteristics and just a hint of coffee bean in the nose—a very, very nice Champagne (17). \$41

**NV Piper-Heidsieck "Sauvage."** This is a unique Champagne—the first without a dosage (addition of sugar). Made from 50% Pinot Noir and 50% Chardonnay grapes, only 12,000 cases were produced—all for export. The packaging is as unique as the wine—a gorgeous silky black bottle encased in an elegant black bag. The wine will be made infrequently, for to make Champagne without a dosage, the grapes have to be very ripe and Mother Nature is rather fickle. This first effort is really lovely. The color is a light yellow gold and the nose is fruity and subdued. The flavors are light and delicate with a superb balance and a spicy complexity. Not at all austere, the wine, nonetheless, has less bubbles than other Brut Champagnes and tends to go flat very quickly. So consume this with gusto, pausing only long enough to savor the delicious, unique style and flavor (17). \$29

*Brut Sauvage*  
*de Piper-Heidsieck*  
*Champagne*  
*Reims, France*

**1973 Pol Roger "Cuvee de Blancs de Chardonnay."** If not quite as rich as the outstanding 1971, this is still a very nice Champagne with a lovely fruity/yeasty nose, nice fruit, complex flavors, nice balance, and a creamy texture (17). \$33

**1971 de Venoge "Cordon Bleu Champagne Des Princes."** This is a nice Champagne in a unique Ship's decanter bottle. Now showing a bit of age, the wine has a fruity/yeasty/spicy nose and nice, rich flavors with a nut-like quality. The wine is well-structured and creamy with a nice finish—very nice Champagne (16½). \$25

**1975 Deutz "Blanc de Blancs."** This is a very nice Champagne with a light yellow color and a fruity/spicy/yeasty nose. It has good fruit in an elegant, well-defined style (16½). \$20

**1973 Heidsieck "Monopole Cuvee Diamant Bleu."** Fanciers of older tasting Champagne will love this. It has a light yellow gold color and a yeasty/coffee bean nose. The wine is very rich and creamy with fruity/vanilla/caramel flavors. Not a taste for everyone, but flavorful (16½). \$33

**1973 Henriot "Reserve Baron Philippe de Rothschild."** This wine is slightly oxidized, but has a spicy/fruity/yeasty nose and good flavor and balance. The choice between a barrel of crude oil and a bottle of this Champagne is still valid at the \$50 price. Most would still be better off with a barrel of crude oil (16½).

**1973 Moet & Chandon "Dom Perignon."** The ultimate Champagne for label drinkers, this DP is one of the better wines of recent vintages. It has a light yellow color and a lovely, fruity/yeasty nose. It is nicely balanced and has good depth of flavor with just a hint of sweetness in the finish—very nice (16½). \$53

**1970 Bollinger "RD" (Disgorged 1978).** This is another big, rich, full-flavored Champagne showing the slightly caramelized quality of old Champagne in the nose and taste. Those with thick wallets who savor these qualities will find this wine very attractive (16). \$50



**1973 Deutz "Cuvee William Deutz."** This is a full-flavored Champagne with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/yeasty nose. It has good depth and richness in a clean, tart style (16). \$30

**1975 Perrier-Jouet "Fleur de Champagne."** The flower bottle is nice, but frankly the Perrier-Jouet NV Grand Brut and 1975 Brut are just as good, if not better, for a lot less money. If you must have the bottle, the Champagne inside has a light straw yellow color with a slight greenish tinge. It has a fruity/yeasty nose and fruity flavors in a rather austere style that finish just a bit short (16). \$42

**1973 Philipponnat "Clos des Goisses."** This is a much better wine than the 1971, although it is already showing signs of age. With a light gold color and a fruity/yeasty nose, the wine has nice texture and flavor with a hint of caramel (16). \$35

**1974 Louis Roederer "Blanc de Blancs."** This is one of the few vintage Champagnes produced in 1974. Roederer owns a large proportion of their own vineyards, and, as a result, was able to produce this very fine wine from a difficult year. Made in a Cremant style with one-half the bubbles of regular Champagne, it has a very fruity nose and good flavors showing a spicy complexity in a somewhat austere style (16). \$27

**1973 Dom Ruinart "Blanc de Blancs."** This is a nice Champagne with a yeasty/fruity nose, firm structure, and good, clean, fresh, fruity flavors showing depth and a spicy complexity (16). \$33

**1975 Veuve Clicquot "La Grand Dame."** This is a nice Champagne in a full style. It has a light yellow gold color and a yeasty/toasty nose with good flavor, style, and texture (16). \$48

**Pommery & Greno "Avize Blanc de Blancs."** This wine is made from Chardonnay grapes from the single cru vineyard of Avize. It has a light yellow gold color, an intensely yeasty/fruity nose with good fruit and a slightly bitter finish (15½). \$28

**1975 Ayala "Blanc de Blancs."** Already showing signs of oxidation in the nose and taste, this wine is still quite attractive with nice flavors and good structure (15). \$30

**1970 Laurent-Perrier "Blanc de Blancs."** This

wine has a light yellow gold color, a coffee bean nose, and good fruit and richness, if slightly oxidized (15). \$26

**Mumm "Cremant de Cramant Blanc de Blancs."** This unusual wine is made from entirely Chardonnay grapes of the single cru vineyard "Cramant" in a Cremant (partly sparkling) style. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla nose with straightforward fruity/vanilla flavors that show just a hint of bitterness (15). \$30

**Joseph Perrier "Cuvee Royale Blanc de Blancs."** This Champagne is a good value with a fruity/yeasty nose and clean, fresh, fruity flavors (15). \$16

**1975 Roederer "Cristal."** Again, this is not an outstanding year for Cristal. The wine has nice fruit and flavor, but it lacks distinction and the impeccable balance and creaminess that Cristal can achieve. The price is painful (15). \$56

## Good

**1975 Joseph Perrier "Cuvee du Cent-Cinquantenaire."** This is a clean, fresh, fruity Champagne made in an austere style with a hint of oxidation in the nose (14½). \$21

**1973 Mumm "Rene Lalou."** This Champagne has never been an impressive wine and it is even less so for the \$42 price. It has a curious, fruity/slightly herbaceous nose with clean, fresh, tart flavors that have a strange basil aftertaste—very different indeed (14).

**1971 Salon "Le Mesnil."** Supposedly made only in the very greatest years, this 1971 still is not as attractive as previous vintages. With an oxidized nose, the wine is austere with a slight bitterness and is short on the palate (14). \$44

## Below Average

**1961 Gosset "RD."** Despite being recently disgorged, this wine doesn't taste it. It is badly oxidized, lacks fruit, is austere, and is rather dull and flat. All this for only \$50 per bottle! Better bottles supposedly exist, but at the price why take a chance (11)?



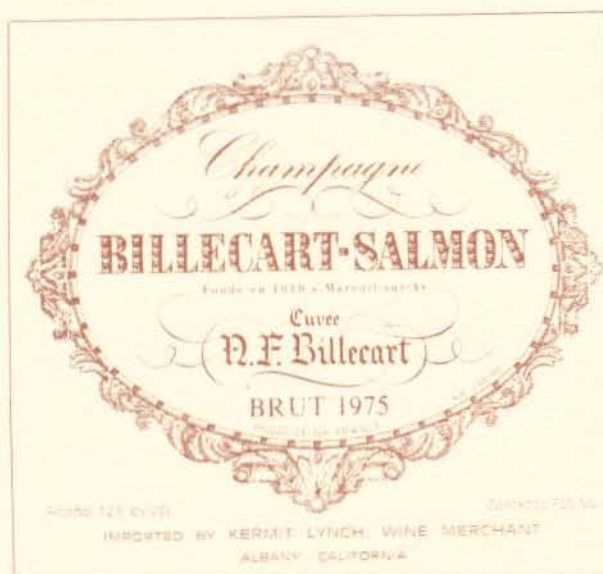
## BRUT VINTAGE CHAMPAGNES

**"If you're looking for top quality Champagne at prices only about one-half those of the Limited Champagnes, this is your wine."**

Generally costing only a few dollars more than Non-vintage Champagnes, the wines as a group are significantly better. In fact, wines such as the 1975 Billecart-Salmon and 1973 Charbaut are the best values around. If you're looking for top quality Champagne at prices only about one-half those of the Limited Champagnes, this is your wine.

### Outstanding

**1975 Billecart-Salmon "Cuvee N.F. Billecart."** All things considered, this has got to be the best Champagne value available—even two or three times the money will not provide a better wine. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, yeasty/citric/spicy/fruity nose. The flavors are full, clean, and fresh—very fruity with excellent balance and a long aftertaste. In a word, it is delicious (18). \$18



### Very Good

**1973 Charbaut.** This is another excellent value. The wine has a light straw yellow color and a fruity/yeasty/vanilla nose. It is fresh, fruity, and delicate with a spicy complexity and a very nice finish—a very, very nice Champagne (17½). \$18



**1975 Moët & Chandon "Imperial."** This is a very nice Champagne with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/yeasty nose. It has a lovely texture, nice fruit, flavor, and depth—very nice (17). \$27

**1975 Pol Roger "Extra Cuvee."** This is also a very nice Champagne in a big, rich, full style. It has a light yellow color and good fruit and balance with a lingering finish (17). \$26

**1973 Pommery & Greno.** This Champagne has a light yellow gold color and an intense fruity/yeasty nose. There is nice fruit and full, rich, harmonious flavors with good depth and balance (17). \$25

**1973 Taittinger "Reserve."** This is a very nice Champagne with a light straw yellow color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/vanilla-tinged nose. It has ripe, delicious flavors with a fine balance (17). \$31

**1971 Krug.** This is a very full, rich Champagne. It has a light yellow gold color and a slightly toasty/spicy/fruity/earthy nose with lots of flavor (16½). \$36

**1975 Perrier-Jouet.** Although some bottles of this Champagne show a slight coffee bean quality in the nose, the wine is still very nice. It has a light yellow color and nice body with good fruit and flavor (16). \$25

**1975 Piper-Heidsieck.** This Champagne has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/yeasty nose. It has nice fruit, balance, and style (16). \$21

**1975 Veuve Clicquot.** This Champagne has very



large bubbles. Otherwise, it is a big, full-flavored wine with nice fruit and flavor (16). \$24

**1973 George Goulet "Extra Quality."** This Champagne has a rather short, harsh finish. Otherwise, it is very nice with a spicy/fruity/yeasty nose and clean, crisp, fruity flavors (15½). \$26

**1975 Roederer.** An additional year in the bottle seems to have helped this Champagne. It is still quite a curiosity with an apple cider-like nose and flavor, but the wine has richness and depth of flavor. Unusual, but really quite nice (15½). \$27

**1973 Ayala "Extra Quality."** This is a clean, fresh Champagne with a light yellow color and a yeasty/fruity/vanilla nose (15). \$26

**1973 Bollinger.** This Champagne has a light yellow color and a fruity/yeasty nose with nice fruit and clean, fresh, somewhat austere flavors (15). \$26

**1971 Lanson.** This Champagne has a light yellow

gold color and a vanilla/coffee bean nose. The wine shows old flavors with richness and vanilla-like nuances (15). \$22

**1975 Joseph Perrier "Cuvee Royale."** This is a simple, pleasant, straightforward Champagne with a light yellow gold color and a spicy/fruity nose (15). \$16

## Good

**1971 Henriot.** Not different than a year ago, this wine still has a coffee bean/oxidized quality in the nose and a curious, strong flavor that shows richness and a degree of oxidation (13). \$18

## Below Average

**1970 Rene Brun "Grand Reserve."** Past its prime, this Champagne has a vanilla/coffee bean nose and dry, austere flavors that are flat (11). \$21

# NON-VINTAGE BRUT CHAMPAGNES

**"... for a few dollars more some Vintage Brut Champagnes have a lot more to offer"**

*Although a few of the best bargains are available in non-vintage Champagnes, for a few dollars more some Vintage Brut Champagnes have a lot more to offer. In addition, with non-vintage wines, consumers have no way of knowing which cuvee they are buying. Old, poorly stored cuvees can be oxidized and over-the-hill. As Champagne prices escalate, it may be that the relatively few bargains may disappear also. That being the case, when available in the \$10-15 price range, wines such as Billecart-Salmon, Charbaut, Lanson "Black Label," Joseph Perrier "Cuvee Royale," de Venoge "Cordon Bleu," Charles Heidsieck, and Henriot look even more attractive.*

## Very Good

**Charbaut.** This is another very nice Champagne at a reasonable price. With a lovely fruity/yeasty/vanilla nose, the wine has nice fruity, vanilla-tinged flavors and is clean and crisp (16½)—a very good value at \$15.

**Krug.** In the typical Krug style, this wine has a light yellow gold color and a yeasty/fruity/woody nose, with good fruit and clean, rich, full flavor (16½). \$32

**Perrier-Jouet "Grand Brut."** A great improvement over last year's cuvee; this wine is not overly sweet. It has a citric, yeasty nose and clean, fresh flavors with a nice texture and tiny bubbles—very nice. (16½). \$19

**Pol Roger "Extra Cuvee."** This is an excellent Champagne. With a light yellow color and a lovely, fresh, fruity/spicy, yeasty nose, the wine is rich and full of flavor. A creamy texture and nice balance provide the final touch of perfection—very, very nice (16½). \$22

**Taittinger "La Francaise."** This is an especially good cuvee. The wine has a fresh, yeasty/fruity/spicy nose and fresh, clean flavors with nice balance and tiny bubbles (16½). \$21

**Veuve Clicquot.** This is a very full, richly flavored Champagne with a deep yeasty/fruity nose and nice depth of flavor (16½). \$19

**Billecart-Salmon.** At \$13 per bottle this is an excellent value. The wine has a lovely, fruity/spicy/yeasty nose and is clean and fresh with good fruit and a spicy complexity (16).



**Bollinger "Special Cuvee."** A bigger style Champagne with a fruity, yeasty nose and fresh, clean, full flavors, this is very nice (16). \$22

**Lanson "Black Label."** Although there seem to be several different cuvees of this wine, all are very good. The best of them has a lovely, spicy/fruity nose and delicate, balanced, lingering flavors. At prices from \$9-13 per bottle this is a very good value (16).

**Mumm "Cordon Rouge."** If not terribly complex, this wine is fresh, clean, and well-balanced with a nice richness and just a hint of sweetness. This is a particularly nice cuvee with freshness and balance the primary attractions (16). \$21

**Joseph Perrier "Cuvee Royale."** This Champagne has a lovely fruity/yeasty nose and clean, fresh, fruity/lemony flavors that are quite attractive—a very good value (15½). \$14

**Ayala "Chateau D'Ay."** This wine has a slightly oxidized nose, but is fresh and clean in the mouth with nice flavors (15). \$23

**de Venoge "Cordon Bleu."** This is another very good value in today's Champagne market, with a fruity/yeasty nose and clean, fresh flavors—one to buy (15). \$12

**Gosset "Reserve."** With a light yellow gold color, this wine has a yeasty/slightly oxidized nose, yet is clean, fresh, and lively in the mouth with good flavor (15). \$24

**Charles Heidsieck.** Although a tinge oxidized, the yeasty/slightly citric nose is still appealing. The taste is lovely and balanced with a creamy texture and good balance—a good value (15). \$15

**Henriot.** At the same price as last year's offering, this is probably the same cuvee. The only difference is the

oxidized, toasted quality that was absent a year ago. Still the wine has good texture and nice, rich flavor (15). \$15

**Laurent-Perrier "Cuvee Speciale."** Fresher than the regular non-vintage Laurent-Perrier, this Champagne has a yeasty/earthy nose and a nice flavor (15). \$20

**Pommery & Greno.** This Champagne seems a bit high in acid, but it has a nice fruity/yeasty nose and nice flavor (15). \$21

## Good

**Deutz.** This is a clean Champagne with a yeasty/fruity nose and clean, citric, somewhat austere flavors (14½). \$16

**Laurent-Perrier.** This seems to be part of last year's inventory as the wine was just starting to show oxidation then. Now the color is light gold. The wine has an oxidized coffee bean nose and, while the flavors are rich, it is slightly flat. Let's hope this is gone from the market by next year (14). \$20

**Piper-Heidsieck "Cuvee Des Ambassadeurs."** Rather austere in style, this Champagne has a metallic/citric quality in the nose and is a bit short on flavor (14). \$20

**Roederer.** This wine seems to be oxidized in varying degrees. Some bottles have a coffee bean nose and taste, others have just a tinge of oxidation. Still the wine has richness and flavor, but unless you want an old Champagne flavor this is probably best left on the shelf (14). \$22

## BRUT ROSÉ CHAMPAGNES

**"Be the first on your block to have a Rosé Champagne tasting."**

*Brut Rosé Champagnes are nothing new. However, they do go through periods of varying popularity.*

*Some say Champagne makers hold the Rosé or Pink Champagne in disdain. Others say it is great rarity*

*that is highly regarded by Champagne makers. Like everything else, this probably depends on who is doing the talking. Actually, there are two ways to make Rosé Champagne. The first, is by short-vatting red grapes which insures only a small amount of*

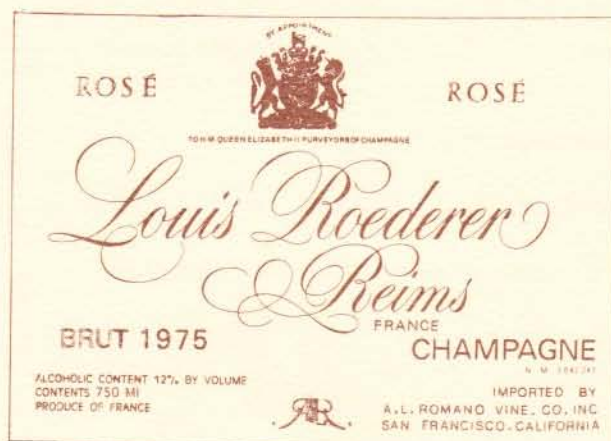


coloration. The second, is by adding some red wine to the white, a practice that is apparently widely used in Champagne, making it somewhat unique in this respect. No matter what method is used, the wines seem richer, fuller, and generally better balanced and less austere than most other Brut Champagnes.

Rosé Champagne is said to be the current rage of Paris. Well, what's good enough for Parisians is usually good enough for everyone else in the Western world, so it's just a matter of time before they're the rage in your neighborhood. So don't be out of it. Be the first on your block to have a Rosé Champagne tasting. The wines are delicious!

## Outstanding

**1975 Roederer.** What a fabulous Champagne! You owe it to yourself to taste this and experience how excellent Rosé Champagne can be. The wine has a light yellow color with just a tinge of amber and the slightest blush of pink. The nose is intensely fruity and the lovely, delicate fruity flavors literally explode on the palate. Great balance and very long on the aftertaste, this is outrageously good (18½). \$36



## Very Good

**NV Billecart-Salmon.** At \$18 this is another outstanding value. The wine has a light yellow amber/orange color with a pink tinge. It has a fruity nose and delicious, harmonious flavors (17½).



**1973 Bollinger.** This is said to be Bollinger's first Rose Champagne. It is very nice with a light orange/amber color and a rich, full, fruity nose. The wine has nice, tart, fruity flavors that are rich, and long on the palate (17). \$26

**NV Laurent-Perrier.** Showing some signs of age this is a very rich, full-flavored Champagne. The color is a light orange-pink with a fruity/yeasty/toasty nose. The wine has great depth and very nice balance (17). \$27

**1974 Roederer "Cristal."** This is a yellow gold/amber colored Champagne with just a blush of pink. It has a very fruity nose and nice fruit with full flavors that are clean, delicate, and lasting on the palate. Very nice, but you might need a second mortgage to acquire a bottle (17). \$90

**1973 Taittinger.** This is a lovely Champagne with a medium orange/amber color and a rather subdued, fruity nose. It has lovely, fruity/grapy, rich flavors that finish slightly sweet. With elegance and style, this is distinctly Taittinger (17). \$50





**NV Gosset.** This is a very full-flavored Champagne with a light amber/pink color and a very fruity/yeasty nose. The wine has grapy flavors and very nice balance with a pleasant aftertaste (16½). \$27

**1973 Moët & Chandon.** This Champagne has a light amber/orange color and a fruity/spicy nose with clean, fresh, fruity flavors rendered in a slightly austere style (16½). \$26

**1975 Perrier-Jouët.** This is a nice Champagne with a light amber/gold color showing a tinge of pink. The nose is fruity and just ever so slightly oxidized. The flavors are rich and full with an abundance of fruit in nice balance (16½). \$30

**1973 Piper-Heidsieck.** This Champagne has a light amber/orange color and an intense fruity/grapy nose. It is very nicely balanced with grapy flavors that finish well (16½). \$25

**NV Joseph Perrier "Cuvee Royale."** The darkest of this group of Rose Champagnes, this wine has a dark pink/strawberry color. The nose is intensely perfumed with the aroma of fresh raspberries. It is delicious with berry-like flavors. Not very much like Champagne, but a uniquely delicious wine that would be a perfect accompaniment for holiday turkey, cranberry sauce, and all the trimmings. At the \$17 price, you could even afford some for the mother-in-law (16).



## COMING ATTRACTIONS

More 1978 Red Burgundies • More 1978 White Burgundies • Recent Cabernet Sauvignon Releases • Recent Chardonnay Releases • 1975 and 1970 Vintage Ports • 1975 and 1976 Sauternes • Chateau Petrus 1920-1976 • More Barrels and Bottles • Older Cabernet Sauvignons

## 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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