



# THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

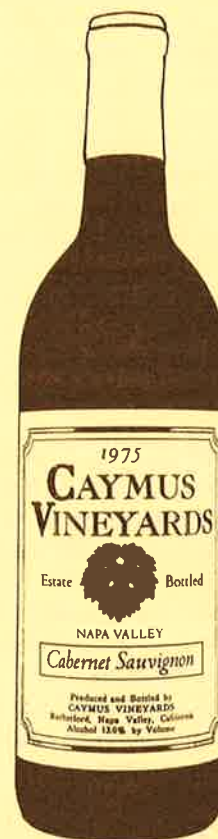
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## **It's Our Anniversary: But The Best is Yet to Come!**

It's really hard to believe, but this issue marks the end of our first year. It's been fruitful and rewarding, and we're already immersed in Volume II. The world of wine is becoming increasingly complex with more and more wines to taste and evaluate. We're particularly excited about the Barrels and Bottles feature in this issue. This will become an integral part of our publication enabling you to stay ahead of what's happening with the best California wines. We're also working on establishing a similar feature for foreign vintages. Hopefully, this will become a reality in Volume II. Wherever fine wine is being made we hope to be able to evaluate some of the best wines before they begin their way through the retail trade.

The focus of our letter will remain the same—fine wines exclusively. Chardonnays will continue to be reviewed regularly. Once our exhaustive review of recent Cabernet Sauvignon vintages is complete these will also be reviewed as released, along with older vintages such as 1968 and 1970. Combined with our notes on pre-release wines, this will provide you with more timely and comprehensive reports on



Cabernet Sauvignons and Chardonnays than any other publication. Periodically we'll also review other California vintage wines of interest such as we have done with Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, and Gewurtztraminers. French wines will also continue to be a major part of our emphasis. A review of 1978 Burgundies and 1978 Bordeaux will be part of Volume II. In the interim, we have articles on recent vintages of Port and Sauternes. Also, we will monitor the progress of recent good Bordeaux vintages and do exhaustive reviews of 1970, 1966, and 1961. Our review of the 1928 and 1929 vintages will also appear shortly. We'll also cover other vintages and individual chateaus such as Petrus featuring vintages from 1920-76. All in all, the best is yet to come. We can hardly wait!

John Tilson  
Editor

## 1975 CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

**"While most 1975's will mature earlier than their 1974 counterparts, many are very attractive."**

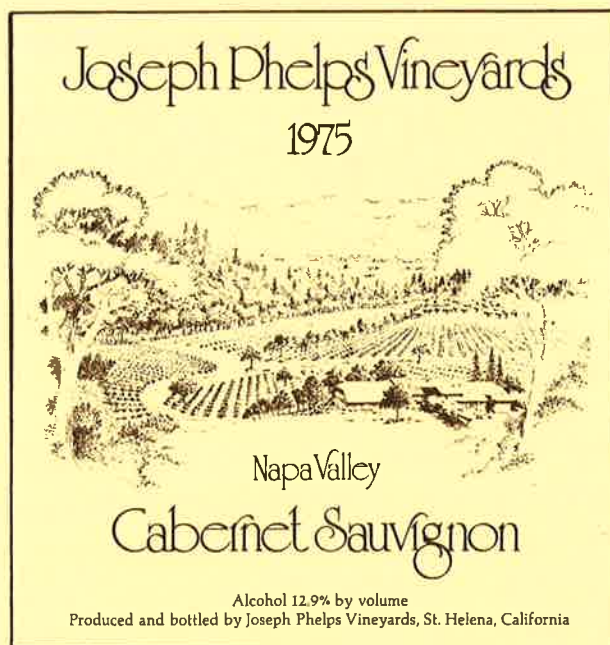
*The 1975 vintage for Cabernet Sauvignon has never been widely acclaimed. It suffered from less than ideal growing conditions as compared with the outstanding 1974 vintage. A cool growing season retarded sugar development and the situation was further aggravated by October rains. Fortunately, the rains, while heavy in some areas, were short-lived and within a few days harvesting continued. Yields were generally below expectations and in some vineyards were down 25-30% from 1974.*

1975 also witnessed a sharp fall-off in Cabernet Sauvignon acreage planted. As was discussed in the review of 1974 Cabernet Sauvignons (Volume 1, Number 5), plantings increased dramatically from 1968-1974. However, in 1975 only 440 acres were planted as compared with 5,772 acres the previous year. Even with reduced yields, the large increase in new plantings resulted in a record production of 39,000 tons vs. 25,000 tons in 1974.

However, despite the large production, the majority of Cabernet Sauvignon vines planted in California were too young to produce a commercial crop in 1975. Of the total 26,788 acres planted, 14,076 acres or 53% of the total acres planted were non-bearing. Even the prime Napa and Sonoma areas had large parcels of non-bearing acreage: 1,661 acres in Napa, or 31% of total acreage, and 2,576 acres in Sonoma or 51% of total acreage. Below is an assessment of some 120 1975 Cabernet Sauvignons, an increase of about 30% over the number of 1974's reviewed in Volume 1, Number 5. Since virtually all 1975's have been released, notes on price and availability are also included. Wines still available at the winery are designated with an \*.

### Outstanding

**Caymus.** Beginning with its first wine in 1972, Caymus has produced in each year through 1974 one of the top Cabernets of the vintage. In 1975 the wine ranks at the very top—a classic Napa Valley Cabernet. The color is dark with just a trace of amber at the edge. It has a lovely, deep, perfumed, fruity nose tinged with vanilla. The flavors are rich and full with chocolate nuances. Beautifully balanced, this voluptuous wine still has tannin and acid to lose, indicating an additional 3-4 years bottle age to reach its peak. Some 1700 cases were produced and the wine was originally offered at \$8.50 per bottle in March, 1978. A small amount is still available at the winery at \$18.00 per bottle (18).\*

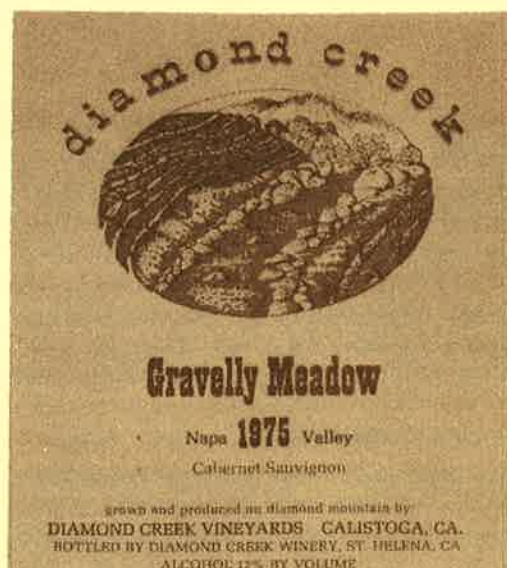


**Joseph Phelps Vineyards.** After a disappointing 1974, Phelps bought grapes from several different Napa vineyards in 1975 and produced this superb Cabernet which is blended with 5% Merlot. The wine has a dark color and a deeply perfumed nose offering hints of violets and sandalwood. It is rich and full with good acid and tannin and a long palate impression. While not unpleasant to drink now, the wine should be a keeper and probably needs 4-6 years to fully develop. Some 2500 cases were produced and the wine was released in June, 1978, at \$8.75 per bottle. Although there is none left at the winery, the wine may occasionally be found on retailers shelves at a modest premium to the offering price (18).

### Very Good

**Caymus "Special Selection."** This wine received additional time in oak. As a result, it is less fruity and seemingly a bit more tannic than the regular bottling. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky nose. It is a rich, fruity wine that is a bit more closed-in than the regular bottling. It may require more bottle age to develop fully, but will prove to be a very fine Cabernet with depth and style. Some 190 cases were produced and the wine was released in April, 1980, at \$22.00 per bottle. There is still a small amount for sale at the winery (17).\*





**Diamond Creek "Gravelly Meadow."** While this wine may not be as big a wine as the 1974, it is still a substantial wine showing the characteristic depth and structure. In 1975, the five acre Gravelly Meadow Vineyard produced even less than in 1974—95 cases vs. 105. The wine has a dark color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. There is loads of fruit and flavor. The acid/tannin balance indicates at least 5-10 more years bottle age to fully develop. With the characteristic vineyard blend of 10% Merlot, the wine is most attractive. Originally sold at \$7.50 per bottle in September, 1977, it is now being sold from the winery in a three pack with the other two 1975 Cabernets at \$37.50 (17).\*

**Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Eisele Vineyard."** In 1974 Conn Creek bottled an Eisele Cabernet and in 1975 Phelps purchased the grapes. The 1975 is not as rich or complex as the 1974, but it is very good. Some bottles have a strong musty odor that cleans up with air. The wine is very dark and the nose yields only a youthful grapy aroma. It is a huge, rich, concentrated Cabernet with a blackberry quality that needs 3-5 more years to develop. A limited number of cases were produced and it was originally released at \$15.00 per bottle. A diligent search will still turn up a bottle or two (16½).

**Diamond Creek "Volcanic Hill."** True to form, in 1975 the 8 acre Volcanic Hill Vineyard produced the biggest of the Diamond Creek Cabernets. The wine has a very dark color and an oaky/grapy/cassis-like nose. It is a huge wine, very similar to the 1974. Again the vineyard blend contains 10% Merlot. Like the 1974, it will take at least 5 years to begin to develop softness and complexity. Some 571 cases were produced and the wine was sold in September, 1977, at \$7.50 per bottle. It is currently available at the winery for \$12.50 (16).\*

**Robert Mondavi "Reserve."** This is one of the few unreleased 1975's. Numerous tastings indicate that this will be a lovely wine and may be as good as the 1974. Hopefully, consumers will not be asked to pay the \$30 per bottle the 1974 has demanded. More ready to drink than the 1974, it seems strange that the wine is not yet released. The wine is blended with 10% Cabernet Franc and 5% Merlot and has a dark color with an amber edge. The nose is attractive and complex with a berry/spicy/vanilla quality. It is a very flavorful and grapy Cabernet with a seductive roundness. Perhaps a bit low in acid for longer term aging, the wine still should improve for a minimum of 3-4 years (16).\*

**Ritchie Creek.** Lovers of rich, intensely flavored Cabernets should seek out the wines from this tiny vineyard located on Spring Mountain in Napa Valley. The 1975 produced only 240 cases and the wine was sold in March, 1979, at \$8.50 per bottle. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely spicy/fruity/cassis-like nose. It is a big, fruity, oaky wine with loads of flavors. It is soft and round with soft tannins which need more bottle age to diminish (16).

**Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Lot 3."** In 1975 Stag's Leap produced three lots of Cabernet differentiated only by bottling dates. This Lot 3 was the last bottled and seems to have more depth and flavor than the other two wines. It has a dark color with an amber edge and fruity, perfumed nose. It is a rich wine with good fruit, balance, and style. The flavors have a chocolate-like component which is most attractive. Lovely to drink now, the wine should, nonetheless, improve for several more years. Some 1985 cases were produced and the wine was sold at \$8.00 per bottle in November, 1978 (16).

**Tulocay.** Only 277 cases of this 100% Cabernet were produced from the Moller Vineyard on the Silverado Trail in Napa Valley. Two acres yielded about 5 tons of grapes. The resultant wine shows the concentration with a very dark color and a fruity/spicy/oaky nose. It is a firm, tannic wine in a big style. Many years will be needed for the wine to soften and develop. If the fruit outlives the tannin the wine will be very good indeed. The wine was released at \$6.50 per bottle in November, 1978. There are still a few cases for sale at the winery at \$7.50 per bottle (16).\*

**Veedercrest Vineyards "Napa Valley, Batch 2."** This wine may be the only California Cabernet to use all the major Bordeaux red grapes. Aged in Nevers oak and designated Cask NEV 59, the 76% Cabernet from Gamay Acres Vineyard is blended with 13% Merlot, 7% Malbec, 2% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petite Verdot. The wine has a medium dark color and a beautiful berry-like nose. The flavors are soft and elegant with a ripe sweetness. Well-balanced with a nice finish, this early maturing wine is ready to drink. Only 100 cases were produced and the wine was sold in February, 1977, at \$12.00 per bottle (16).

**Villa Mt. Eden.** Villa Mt. Eden's 25 acres of three year old vines produced only 550 cases of wine in 1975. Like the 1974, it shows amazing character; and, if not quite as rich, there is still plenty of fruit and depth. With good tannin and acid, the wine needs at least 3-5 more years bottle age for maximum development. Originally released at \$9.00 per bottle in April, 1978, the wine has become difficult to find (16).

**Burgess Cellars "Vintage Selection."** This 100% Napa Mountain Cabernet shows the ripeness and concentration that have become a distinguishing characteristic. Very nearly as fine as the 1974, this wine shows a dark color and a slightly amber edge with a fruity/ripe/oaky nose. It is not quite as rich as the 1974, but the fruit/acid/tannin balance will require 3-5 years to harmonize. Just over 1780 cases were produced and the wine was sold in September, 1978, at \$10.00 per bottle (15½).

**Chateau St. Jean "Wildwood Vineyards."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/cedary nose. Straightforward grapy flavors are backed by lots of tannin. This concentrated wine will need many years to develop. About 583 cases were released in September, 1978, at \$9.00 per bottle (15½).

**Cuvaison "Signature."** This monster Cabernet from the summit of Spring Mountain in Napa Valley has a black/purple color and an alcoholic, late-picked fruit nose. In the mouth it is big, rich, and concentrated with fruity/spicy flavors. A bit hot and alcoholic, the wine is extremely tannic and needs a decade or two to develop. The limited quantity available is being sold only from the winery at \$15.00 per bottle (15½).\*

**Mayacamas.** A typical big Napa Mountain Cabernet, this wine has a dark color and a fruity/oaky nose showing a bit of mustiness that cleans up with air. It is quite backward with fruity, tannic, green-olive tinged flavors. This is one to lay away for at least 5-10 years. Produced from Mayacamas Vineyards and Draper Vineyards on Spring Mountain, this wine is blended with 10% Merlot. Some 2500 cases were produced and sold in October, 1979, at \$12.00 per bottle (15½).\*

**Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Lot 2."** Some 2144 cases of this wine were produced and it was released for sale in May, 1978, at \$8.00 per bottle. Not as rich as Lot 3, it shows a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/vanilla-tinged nose. It is clean with fruity flavors. A wine to be drunk now and for quite a few years hence (15½).

**Sterling Cellars "Reserve."** What an enigma! Some bottles of this wine show unpleasant varnish-like

aromas that with air seem to clear up, but also can return after more exposure to air; there is no real consistency. Our ranking is based on bottles without this underlying problem. Unfortunately, there's no way to tell what you have until you pull the cork. Perhaps time will help the problem bottles, but at \$20.00 per bottle it's a risky bet. Nonetheless, the unaffected bottles are very attractive with an appealing blackberry fruity quality and lots of depth and flavor backed by substantial tannin that will need many years to soften (15½).

**Arroyo Sonoma.** This Sonoma Cabernet is an appealing straightforward wine with a dark color and a fruity nose. It has good grapy flavors and nice balance (15). \$8.50

**Cakebread Cellars "Lot 2."** Made from grapes grown in the Steltzner Vineyards in Napa, it is very similar to the 1974. The color is dark with an amber edge and a perfumed, late-picked fruit nose tinged with volatile acidity and chocolate. It is a big, raisiny, almost port-like wine that has alcoholic overtones. A wine that is probably best drunk young for the youthful flavors (15). \$12

**Chappellet Vineyard.** This Napa Valley Cabernet is blended with 10% Merlot. It is a big wine with a dark color and a fruity/herbal nose. Like the 1974, it is fruity and rich with hints of chocolate, but there is a weedy flavor component showing through that is detracting. More bottle age is needed for full development. Some 5000 cases were produced and the wine was released in September, 1978, at \$12.00 per bottle. The current price is \$20.00 per bottle (15).\*

**Chateau St. Jean "Glen Ellen Vineyards."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity, volatile nose. It is a big wine with lots of fruit and loads of tannin. The volatile quality is beginning to show through in the taste and time will tell if the fruit and tannin will hold off the volatile components. Only 333 cases were produced and the wine was sold in June, 1978, at \$13.50 per bottle (15).

**Hacienda Wine Cellars.** This Sonoma Cabernet has medium dark color and a fruity/spearmint nose. The fruity flavors have a dusty, almost Napa-like, complexity. Some 439 cases were produced and the wine was released in May, 1978, at \$6.00 per bottle (15).

**Heitz Cellar "Fay Vineyard."** With this vintage Heitz branches out with a new vineyard designation (also, there's reportedly several other new vineyard designations that will be offered over the next several years). The Fay Vineyard has produced consistently good Cabernet and Heitz did a fine job with this



vintage. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a clean, fruity/spicy nose. With medium body, it is attractive for the clean, fruity flavors. A few more years in the bottle hopefully will develop more complexity. Some 4000 cases were produced and the wine was originally released in July, 1979, at \$11.75 per bottle. The current price is \$15.00 per bottle (15).\*

**Heitz Cellar "Martha's Vineyard."** Given the outstanding success of this wine over many years, this can only be labeled a mild disappointment. Whereas most Martha's Vineyard bottlings are big, rich wines (including the off vintage of 1972), this is not. Also, whereas many 1975 Cabernets are likewise big, rich wines, this is not. Attractive, yes. Extraordinary, no. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a restrained fruity/minty nose. There are nice fruity flavors rendered in a light style that lacks depth. A wine that is enjoyable now for the youthful fruit; a few years bottle age should round out the rough edges. Some 4450 cases were produced and the wine was originally sold for \$15.00 per bottle in February, 1980. The current price is \$20.00 per bottle (15).\*

**HMR "Estate Bottled."** This San Luis Obispo Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity nose. It has a very fruity, almost cherry-like flavor with clean, youthful astringency that should give the wine good aging potential for at least 3-5 years. Originally released at \$10.00 per bottle in February, 1979, the current price is \$12.50 (15).\*

**Mt. Veeder "Bernstein Vineyard."** Very similar to the 1974, this Napa Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/slightly herbaceous nose. It is a strong, firm, grapy, straightforward wine with lots of flavor and ample tannins. It should develop for 5-10 years and yield an attractive flavorful wine. Some 867 cases were produced and the wine was released in March, 1978, at \$11.00 per bottle (15).

**Raymond "Estate Bottled."** At \$5.25 per bottle this Cabernet is a great value for consumption now and over the next 3-4 years. It has a medium dark color, an intense, perfumed, oaky/blackberry nose. The flavors are clean and fruity in a medium-bodied style (15).

**Ridge "Monte Bello."** This is one of the lightest Monte Bello Cabernets Ridge has ever made. It has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a prune/vanilla nose. It is fruity with nice flavors that are a little short. A wine to keep for 1-2 years and consume relatively soon thereafter. Some 1680 cases were produced and the wine was originally released at \$10.00 per bottle in October, 1979. The current price is \$20.00 per bottle (15).\*

**Ridge "York Creek."** This Napa Cabernet is blended with Merlot. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy nose. It has good straightforward fruity/oaky flavors with good tannin and acid that require 2-3 more years bottle age to soften. Some 1160 cases were produced and the wine is currently available at \$12.00 per bottle (15).\*

**Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.** Not as rich as Lots 2 and 3, this Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity nose. The flavors are fruity and nicely balanced. Some 2630 cases were produced and the wine was released in August, 1977, at \$8.50 per bottle (15).

**Stonegate "Napa."** Produced from two contiguous vineyards above Calistoga and blended with 9% Merlot, this Cabernet has a dark color and an oaky/fruity nose. A big wine with good fruity/oaky flavors, 3-4 more years bottle age should produce a fine bottle. Some 470 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$8.50 in March, 1978 (15).

**Trefethen Vineyards.** Better balanced than the 1974, this Napa Valley Cabernet was blended with 25% Merlot. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/cedary nose. It has nice flavors and good fruit in a light, pleasant style. Some 750 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$7.00 per bottle in the spring of 1979 (15).

## Good

**Alexander Valley Vineyards "Estate Bottled."** This Sonoma Cabernet was blended with 12% Merlot and has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky nose. It has a medium body with good, clean, fruity flavors that finish just a bit short. Some 4400 cases were produced and the wine was released in May, 1978, at \$5.50 per bottle. It is currently available at \$7.50 per bottle (14½).\*

**Corti Brothers.** This is a limited bottling from a selected cask of Cabernet produced by Edmeades Vineyards in Mendocino. Not as rich as the 1974, it has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/vanilla nose. There are rich, fruity, supple flavors in a pleasing, light style. Eighty cases were produced. It was released in December, 1977, at \$8.00 per bottle (14½).

**Davis Bynum "Sonoma."** At \$5.50 per bottle this ready to drink Sonoma Cabernet is a good value. It has a medium color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity nose with hints of bay leaf. The wine is clean, fruity, and straightforward with a short finish (14½).

**Diamond Creek "Red Rock Terrace."** Again in 1975 the Red Rock Terrace seems the least attractive

of the Diamond Creek Cabernets. With the characteristic vineyard blend of 10% Merlot, the chief fault is a harsh, alcoholic quality. Otherwise, it is a dark, fruity/oaky, tannic wine with good flavor. Some 286 cases were produced and the wine was released in September, 1979, at \$7.50 per bottle. It is currently offered for sale at the winery with the other two 1975 Cabernets at \$37.50 per three-pack (14½).\*

**Franciscan "Private Reserve."** This Napa Valley Cabernet is blended with 20% Merlot and has a medium dark color with an amber edge. The nose is very perfumed and fruity, and the wine has nice flavors in a lighter style. It is ready to drink now and should develop for the next several years (14½). \$10.00\*

**Mirassou "Unfiltered."** This Monterey County Cabernet is a fair value at \$7.00 per bottle. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a clean, fruity/minty nose. The flavors are clean, fruity, and fresh. A lighter style wine that is attractive to drink for its youthful charm (14½).

**Navarro Vineyards.** This Mendocino Cabernet was produced in a small (70 case) quantity. It has a medium color with an amber edge and an attractive cherry-like nose. A lighter style wine to be drunk now for its fruity, zesty quality (14½). \$8.00

**Rutherford Vintners "California."** This Cabernet is a good value at \$6.00 per bottle. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a nice, perfumed, fruity nose. A lighter style wine that has soft, fruity flavors (14½).\*

**Spring Mountain.** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/oaky/musty nose. There is lots of fruit and a weedy flavor component backed by good tannin and acid for further aging. Not likely to be particularly distinguished, it should, nonetheless, outlive the 1974 and prove to be a better bottle. The original price was around \$7.50; it is currently being sold for \$10.00 and up (14½).

**Buena Vista.** This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color and an amber edge with a fruity nose showing hints of weediness and mint. It has light fruity flavors that are clean and straightforward (14). \$6.99

**Chateau Chevalier "Private Reserve."** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity nose. It is very oaky with a fruity/tannic quality dominated by the oak. Some 717 cases were produced and the wine was sold in May, 1978, at \$10.00 per bottle (14).

**Chateau St. Jean "Belle Terre Vineyards."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/spicy nose. It has oaky flavors, but is

a bit austere and tannic with a short finish. Some 481 cases were produced and the wine was released in June, 1978, at \$8.00 per bottle (14).

**Chateau St. Jean "Laurel Glen Vineyards."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/oaky/coffee nose—very complex. In the mouth the wine is oaky and tannic with a short finish. Only 189 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$8.00 per bottle in September, 1978 (14).

**David Bruce "Alexander Valley."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/earthy nose. It is clean and pleasant with nice fruit (14). \$8.50

**Fetzer "Sonoma."** Originally released at \$3.75 in June, 1977, the wine still can be found at less than \$5.00 per bottle. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a clean, fruity/woody nose. There are nice cherry-like flavors that finish just a bit short (14).

**Freemark Abbey Winery "Bosche."** This Napa Valley Cabernet from Bosche Vineyards was blended with 7% Merlot. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/weedy nose. It has good fruit, but a significant weediness is a detraction. Some 3600 cases were produced. Originally released at \$10.00 per bottle in April, 1979, 700 cases are being reserved for sale in 1981 (14).\*

**Harbor Winery "Deaver Vineyard."** This unfinned and unfiltered Amador County Cabernet has varietal character and is quite pleasant. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/musty nose with hints of licorice. The flavors are fruity and straightforward. Only 200 cases were produced and the wine was released at \$4.50 per bottle in July, 1977 (14).

**Kenwood.** This Cabernet is mostly from Sonoma and has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/herbaceous nose. It is fruity, with fresh, light flavors (14). \$5.00

**Robert Mondavi Winery.** This wine is not particularly distinguished, with a stemminess in the nose and taste. It is soft, round, and ready to drink. Originally released at \$7.00 per bottle in February, 1978, it currently is being sold for \$11.00 per bottle (14).\*

**Rutherford Hill.** This Napa Valley Cabernet is blended with 20% Merlot. It has a dark color and a woody/fruity/slightly peppery nose with grapy flavors. The wine is still available at the \$7.00 per bottle release price (14).\*

**Sebastiani "Proprietor's Reserve."** This Cabernet is not yet released. With some 34,000 cases produced



it should be a good supply and, if history is a guide, it should be fairly priced. Blended with 37% Northern California red wine, it nonetheless retains varietal character. The color is dark with an amber edge and the raisiny/volatile nose is appealing. It has nice prune flavors, but finishes a bit short (14).\*

**Simi.** This Alexander Valley Cabernet shows the typical Simi style with a medium color, nice fruit, and a slight herbaceousness. Another few years bottle age should round the wine out nicely (14). \$7.00\*

**Sotoyome.** This Sonoma County Cabernet was produced in a small 200 cases quantity and sold in November, 1977, at \$5.00 per bottle. It has a dark color, a fruity/herbaceous nose, and fruity/tannic flavors that are harsh and slightly bitter (14). \$5.00

**Sterling Cellars.** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a medium dark color and a clean, fruity nose with a slight hint of mint. It is oaky, tart, astringent, and tannic with a clean, berry-like fruit quality. The wine needs 3-5 more years bottle age (14). \$8.00\*

**ZD Winery "San Luis Obispo."** Blended with 25% Merlot and aged in American oak, this Cabernet has a medium dark color, an oaky/spicy nose, and soft, sweet, oaky flavors. Only 451 cases were produced (14). \$9.50

**Beaulieu Vineyards "Private Reserve."** Despite the winery's claim of a very great 1975, this recently released wine is mediocre, out of balance, and a great disappointment. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a subdued fruity nose. It is a hard wine—lacking fruit, dry, tannic, and high in acid. A wine stretched over a thin frame, it is totally devoid of the pre-1970 character of Beaulieu Vineyards "Private Reserve." Alas, as the price goes up, the quality goes down. This wine is priced 20% higher than the much better 1974 (13½). \$15.00\*

**Carneros Creek "California."** This Amador County Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/slightly weedy nose. It is fruity with a hint of bitterness in the finish (13½). \$8.00

**Chateau Montelena "North Coast."** Blended from Napa and Alexander Valley Cabernets, this wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity nose. It is clean, but a bit acidic and short on the palate (13½). \$8.50\*

**Chateau St. Jean "Sonoma."** Blended with 9% Merlot, this Cabernet has a medium color and a fruity/oaky nose with nice fruit that finishes short and a little bitter (13½). \$7.50

**Clos du Val.** This Napa Valley Cabernet is blended with Merlot and has a medium dark color and a

musty/fruity nose with fruity, flat, one-dimensional flavors. Originally priced at \$9.00 in May, 1978, it currently sells for \$12.00 (13½).\*

**Dry Creek Vineyard.** This Sonoma Cabernet is blended with 23% Merlot. It has a dark color and an amber edge with a berry-like nose and fruity, flat, one-dimensional flavors that finish short (13½). \$6.50

**Edmeades Vineyards.** Not as distinguished as the Corti Brothers bottling, this wine is distinguished by an unusual herbal/sassafras nose. It is pleasant and fruity with a harsh finish (13½). \$6.25\*

**Fortino "California."** This dark Cabernet is over-oaked. It has a very cedary nose and lots of tannin obscuring the fruit (13½). \$6.00

**Franciscan.** This Napa Valley Cabernet was blended with 25% Merlot and has an herbaceous nose and prune/weedy flavors with a soft texture (13½). \$6.00\*

**Freemark Abbey "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a resin-like nose. The flavors are assertive and a bit bitter belying the blending of 14% Merlot (13½). \$8.50\*

**Gemello "Santa Clara Valley."** This wine was aged in Nevers oak and the woody, slightly smokey quality overpowers the fruit in this big, tannic wine. A keeper, but seemingly not enough fruit to outlast the oak (13½). \$7.00

**Pope Valley "Offerner Vineyards."** This wine has a medium dark color and an oaky/fruity nose. It is fruity and oaky, but is a bit thin and short on the palate (13½). \$5.00

**Richard Carey Winery "Special Reserve."** This Lake County Cabernet has a medium dark color and a fruity/earthy nose, with stemmy/fruity/tannic flavors (13½). \$8.50

**Souverain "Vintage Selection."** This Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy nose. It has good fruit, but is a bit acidic and thin with a short finish (13½). \$8.25\*

**Burgess Cellars.** This Napa Valley Cabernet was blended with 14% Merlot. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/stemmy nose. It is rather thin and oaky with slightly stemmy flavors (13). \$7.50

**Fetzer "Estate Bottled."** This Mendocino Cabernet has a medium dark color and a fruity/spicy nose. It has fruit and tannin, but is a bit thin and finishes short. Originally priced at \$6.50, the wine now sells for \$12.50 (13).\*

**Landmark.** This Sonoma County Cabernet has a medium color and a musty/weedy nose. It is fruity with a weedy quality and short and bitter on the finish (13). \$6.00

**La Zaca Vineyard.** This Santa Ynez Valley Cabernet has a medium dark color and a pungent/oaky nose marred by free sulphur. The flavors are grapy with lots of oak (13). \$5.50

**Parducci "Cellar Master's Selection."** This Mendocino Cabernet has a medium dark color and a clean, fruity nose. It has fruit and is soft, but lacks complexity (13). \$7.50

**Richard Carey Winery.** This Lake County Cabernet has less depth than the "Special Reserve," but otherwise is quite similar with a medium color, fruity nose, and fruity/soft/herbaceous flavors (13). \$4.90

**Round Hill Vineyards "North Coast."** This Cabernet has a medium color and a varnish-like nose with good fruit and flavor (13). \$4.49

**Silver Oak "Alexander Valley."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium color with an amber edge and a vanilla nose. It is soft, dry, and a bit thin (13). \$12.00\*

**Sonoma Vineyards "Alexander's Crown."** This wine never had the initial richness of the 1974 and it doesn't seem that time will help. It has a medium dark color and a musty/fruity nose. It is fruity, but bitter, stemmy, tannic flavors are predominant (13). \$10.00

**Veedercrest Vineyards "Sonoma County."** This Cabernet was blended with 14% Merlot and has a light medium color with a fruity, berry-like nose, and clean, simple flavors that are thin and watery (13). \$6.85

**Beaulieu Vineyards.** A medium color and a fruity/weedy nose with thin, watery, acidic flavors characterize this Napa Valley Cabernet (12½). \$5.45

**Beringer "North Coast."** This Cabernet has a medium, slightly amber color and a fruity nose with light herbaceous flavors (12½). \$5.50

**Carneros Creek "Steltzner's Vineyard."** This Napa Cabernet has a medium dark color and a fruity/herbaceous nose with thin, tannic flavors (12½). \$5.50

**Cuvaison.** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color, a skunky nose, and musty/woody flavors that finish short (12½). \$7.50

**Granval.** Clos du Val's second label is over-oaked, rather flat, bitter and lacking distinction (12½). \$7.60

**Inglénook "Estate Bottled."** Another out of balance wine that has a medium color, fruity nose, and simple, thin, tannic flavors (12½). \$6.50

**Kenwood "California Artists Series."** The label is better than the wine. The wine is fruity, stemmy, and short on the palate (12½). \$6.50

**Konocti Cellar.** This Lake County Cabernet is characterized by a medium color, fruity/vanilla nose, and thin, tart flavors. It is at least fairly priced (12½). \$4.33

**Mill Creek Vineyards.** This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium color, a fruity/herbal nose, and acidic, thin flavors (12½). \$5.50

**Montclair Winery.** This Sonoma Cabernet was blended with 20% Merlot. It has a fruity/metallic nose and an herbaceous/tannic flavor (12½). \$8.75

**Mt. Eden.** When it's good, it's very, very good (like 1973). When it's not . . . Well, it's like this 1975: weedy, peppery, tannic, overpowering, and grossly overpriced (12½). \$22.00

**Adobe Cellars "Sonoma."** A "Private Selection" with a medium color, a fruity/weedy nose, and thin watery flavors. The label is more exalted than the wine (12). \$5.00

**Chateau Chevalier.** This Napa Cabernet has a medium color, medicinal nose, and fruity, sharp flavors (12). \$7.50

**Christian Brothers.** Bottled only in magnums as a tricentennial wine, this Napa Cabernet has a weedy/vanilla nose and thin weedy flavors (12). \$18.00

**David Bruce "California."** The "home" vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains produced this wine with a charcoal-like nose and light, slightly baked flavors (12). \$12.00

**NV Wines.** This "North Coast" Cabernet has an oaky/carmelized nose and fruity flavors that are short, tannic, and bitter (12). \$5.50

**Parducci Winery.** This Mendocino Cabernet has a medium color, a metallic, wet, cardboard nose, and flat, simple flavors (12). \$5.50

**J. Pedroncelli.** This Sonoma Cabernet has a medium color, a skunky nose, and simple flavors. The price is fair (12). \$4.00

**San Martin "Limited Vintage."** This Santa Clara Valley Cabernet has a dark color, a carmelized nose, and soft, slightly oxidized flavors (12). \$5.50

**Sonoma Vineyards "Northern California."** This Cabernet has a medium color, an herbaceous nose, and flat, thin, slightly bitter flavors (12). \$4.50

**Stonegate "Sonoma County."** This Cabernet is not nearly as attractive as the "Napa" bottling. It is over-oaked and short on the palate (12). \$5.50



## Below Average

**Lost Hills "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet has a medium color with an amber edge and a pungent, weedy, slightly skunky nose. The wine has fruit in a straightforward, light style (11½). \$4.00

**Adobe Cellars "North Coast."** This "Private Selection" has a weedy nose and flavor and lacks fruit (11). \$4.99

**Callaway "Estate Bottled."** This unusual wine is over-oaked and strong in character with a raisiny flavor (11). \$7.00

**Charles Krug "Napa Valley."** This wine lacks varietal character with thin, grapy flavors (11). \$5.50

**The Firestone Vineyard.** Firestone's first Cabernet is marred by a creosote-like nose and bitter, harsh, stemmy flavors (11). \$10.00

**Johnson's Alexander Valley.** This estate bottled wine has a skunky nose and is lacking fruit with a gritty texture and austere flavors (11). \$7.75

**Louis M. Martini "California."** This Cabernet has a grassy nose and thin, watery flavors with a slight cooked quality (11). \$4.25

**Monterey Peninsula "Monterey."** This wine is full of Monterey vegetable garden flavors with an additional dose of bitterness (11). \$8.50

**Mountainside.** Chateau Chevalier's second label is not attractive with an acetic, slightly petillant quality (11). \$6.00

**Stone Creek "North Coast."** This Cabernet has

little varietal character and a musty nose with stemmy, thin, bitter flavors (11). \$3.75

**Zaca Mesa.** This Santa Ynez Valley wine is vegetative and bitter (11). \$5.00

**Charles Le Franc "Monterey."** This is a poorly made wine with an oxidized nose and dried out, flat, austere flavors (10). \$6.25

**Veedercrest Vineyards "Napa County."** Designated Lot 1, Cask LIM 59 and blended with 15% Merlot, this wine is a loser. The nose is skunky and the acidic, thin, grassy flavors are not attractive (10). \$7.25

**Geyser Peak "California."** Another poorly made wine with a skunky nose and thin, acidic flavors (9). \$5.00

**Vines of Nepenthe.** This wine is so volatile it very nearly qualifies as wine vinegar (8). \$4.00

*Even though the growing conditions were not ideal, the best of the 1975 Cabernets have enough depth and fruit to balance the acidity. While most 1975's will mature earlier than their 1974 counterparts, many are very attractive. Wines such as Caymus and Phelps are a match for the best 1974's. On a lesser level, there are many very good wines. We rank 12 or about 10% of the wines reviewed as a 16 or better. In the review of the 1974's (Volume 1, Number 5) there were 19 or over 20% of the wines reviewed that rated a 16 or better. So, while it's no surprise that the vintage cannot match 1974 in overall quality, there are many very good wines. In a period of ever rising prices, many of these 1975's are also very good values.*



## 1977 BORDEAUX

**"Like the uninvited dinner guest, they should have stayed home"**

A severe frost hit Bordeaux during late March resulting in damage to the vines, especially the Merlot. The vintage was further harmed by unseasonably cold and rainy weather during much of the spring and summer. It was only the advent of excellent weather in September and October which saved a complete disaster. The crop was about 50% normal in the Medoc, and less in St. Emilion and Pomerol.

The wines of this unhappy vintage are just now becoming available, and, like the uninvited dinner guest, they should have stayed home. Initial tastings have served to substantiate the poor quality. Generally, they are light, thin, and uninteresting. Along with the 1972's they will go down as the poorest vintage of the 70's. Also, like the 1972's, they are grossly over priced with some first growths in the \$30-40 per bottle range and most other classified growths in the area of \$15 per bottle. Even at ½ these prices, most are no bargain.

It is our normal procedure to review in depth each new Bordeaux vintage. This entails a series of blind tastings. Each wine (sixty-five 1976's were reviewed in Volume 1, Number 4) is usually tasted on at least two such occasions before a final evaluation and ranking

is determined. In addition, any wines that are particular stand-outs (good or bad) are usually reevaluated a final time or two to minimize any bottle variations. Given such an extensive, time consuming, and expensive procedure, we simply don't feel the 1977 vintage is worth it. Rather, we advise our readers to concentrate on the 1975's (Volume 1, Number 1) and 1976's (Volume 1, Number 4) and wait for the 1978's and 1979's which promise to be good, but not great. With respect to the 1977's, we will not ignore them entirely and may, from time to time, publish notes and comments on selected wines. Our first such commentary follows:

### Very Good

**Lafite Rothschild.** The recent successes of this Chateau are manifest even in the poor 1977 vintage where Lafite seems certain to be amongst the leaders. The wine has a good color and a pleasant, perfumed nose. It is nicely balanced, and, while not particularly flavorful, it is elegant and ideal for current consumption (15). \$25

### Good

**Latour.** Surprisingly light in color for Latour, this wine is loaded with tannin and coarse in texture. There seems to be fruit, but whether the wine will ever come together is questionable. At current prices, cellar space would best be reserved for other more predictable vintages (14½). \$25

**Mouton Rothschild.** With a light color and flavors to match, this wine is very hard and short on the palate. A year or two in the bottle should yield a pleasant drinkable wine (14). \$25

**Duhart-Milon Rothschild.** Like its big brother Lafite, this wine is ready to drink. It has a medium color and is fruity and pleasant with little tannin and a short finish (13½). \$12

**Lynch-Bages.** This Pauillac has a medium color and light, dry flavors without much body. It is a wine to drink soon before it dries up completely (12½). \$13

### Below Average

**Clerc-Milon Rothschild.** This Pauillac shows little breed or style. It is very light in color and body with thin, cloying flavors that are not attractive (10). \$10

*The bottom line on these wines: Unless you're desperate for current drinking wines and don't care what you pay for them—PASS!*



## CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAYS

**Recent Releases: More 1978's and  
even a few 1979's!**

### Outstanding



**1978 Quail Ridge, Lot 2.** Would you believe that this is the winery's first wine? Home winemaker turned pro, Jesse Corallo and his wife Elaine hit a home run their first turn at bat! Made from a low yielding 8 year old vineyard on Mt. Veeder Road in the Mayacamas Mountains of Napa Valley, the wine was entirely barrel fermented. The Lot 2 received more time in contact with the skins during fermentation. It is a fuller, richer wine with luscious flavors and a long, spicy palate impression. With a couple years bottle age, more complexity should evolve making this wine a California classic (18). Lot 1 is likewise a beautiful wine that suffers only by comparison. Lighter in style with a fruity/spicy nose that has hints of vanilla, it has lovely fruit in a flavorful, elegant style. Again a few years in the bottle should yield more complexity and richness (16). Only 130 cases of each wine were produced and the wine is being sold direct from the winery at \$13.50 per bottle.





**1978 Zaca Mesa "Barrel Fermented."** What a wine! This Santa Ynez Valley wine shows all the fruit, flavor and style of the finest Chardonnay produced anywhere in California. It has a light gold color and a lovely, delicate, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. It is beautifully balanced with impressive fruit and a lengthy palate impression. A great bargain at \$9.00 per bottle, only 600 cases were produced, and it's getting hard to find in California. A quantity was reserved for out of state shipment and this is one to seek out (18). There is also another bottling that was fermented in stainless steel and labeled simply "Chardonnay." This wine is a good value at \$7.50, but lacks the richness and complexity of the barrel fermented bottling (15).

## Very Good

**1978 Burgess "Napa Valley."** Again in 1978, Burgess has made an excellent, big style Chardonnay with a golden color and a deep fruity/oaky nose. It is very rich and ripe with lots of fruit and loads of flavor (17). \$10.75

**1978 Chateau St. Jean "Robert Young."** This Sonoma Chardonnay is one of the winery's best efforts. No mistaking the wine; it is a classic, fruity Chardonnay with a light, straw yellow/gold color and an apple-like nose. Very fruity and rich with a hint of oak, the wine cries out for a few years bottle age to develop elegance and complexity (17). \$13.75

**1978 David Bruce "Santa Cruz County."** As noted with previous vintages, the Chardonnays from the good Doctor's own property are usually controversial—loved or hated and most unusual. Surprise! This 1978 is almost conventional in a big style. Only the golden color and rich texture give hints of its origin. Gone are the controversial nose and flavors, yet the rich, buttery flavors and big oaky/fruity nose make the wine most attractive. Perhaps a little low in acid, a few years in the bottle should be beneficial (17). \$12.00

**1978 Pendleton "Ventana Vineyards."** O.K., there's not much controversy from David Bruce (that's almost like saying there's no wine in Napa Valley), but never fear Pendleton's here! Another of the myriad of new California wineries, Pendleton debuts with a Monterey Chardonnay from Ventana Vineyards that is perhaps the most unusual Chardonnay ever! Surely the grapes must have been botrytis affected. The nose has definite botrytis characteristics. The color? Well, would you believe golden amber with a tinge of pink! Oh yes, the taste—rich, concentrated, oily, complex, sweet, unbelievably thick, like light syrup, an essence that really does have to be tasted to be believed! Already so rich and lush, it doesn't seem as if there's enough acid to warrant much aging potential. The wine can take a good chill, watch it develop as it warms up. Serve it with something like clams casino or a roast loin of pork. However, if you're not ready for a new experience, leave this on the shelf (17). \$9.75

**1978 Carneros Creek "Sonoma County."** This Chardonnay has a lovely fruity/vanilla nose and nice, rich flavors. Still youthful the wine needs 2-3 years to soften and develop complexity (16). \$9.50

**1978 Hacienda Wine Cellars "Claire de Lune."** This is probably the finest Chardonnay yet from this Sonoma winery. In the typical lighter style, the perfumed, tropical fruit nose and nice flavors marry beautifully. Another year or so in the bottle should yield even more roundness and flavor interest (16). \$9.00

**1978 MEV "Monterey County, Ventana Vineyards."** A bit lighter in style than the Pendleton, this wine is still very rich and flavorful. With a gold color and a fruity/oaky cinnamon nose, the richness gives the impression of a slight sweetness (16). \$12.75

**1978 Robert Mondavi Winery.** This Napa Valley Chardonnay is most attractive with a light gold color and a fruity/vanilla nose. It has good fruit, nice flavor and balance, and finishes just a little short (16). \$12.00

**1978 Villa Mt. Eden.** This Estate bottled Napa Valley Chardonnay is made in a big style with lots of oak. It has a gold color and fruity/oaky nose with rich fruit layered by a strong vanilla character. Not together yet, it needs a few years in the bottle to round out and overcome the awkwardness of youth (16). \$12.00

**1978 Chateau Montelena "California."** This is one of the winery's better Chardonnays. Made from an unusual blend of Chardonnay grapes from Napa (42%), Sonoma (31%), and Santa Barbara (22%), it has a light gold color and a perfumed, floral nose. It is fruity and clean with good acid and a slight citric quality. Pleasant and straightforward, it needs another 2-3 years in the bottle (15½). \$9.50

**1978 Chateau St. Jean "Belle Terre."** Again a lovely straightforward Chardonnay, with a light, straw yellow color and an apple/almost pineapple nose. The wine has a clean, subdued fruity flavor and good acid. Another 2-3 years of bottle age should yield an elegant wine (15½). \$10.75

**1978 Rutherford Hill.** This Napa Valley Chardonnay has a gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. It is very rich, with nice flavors that finish a bit hot (15½). \$9.00

**1978 Santa Ynez Valley Winery "Reserve de Cave."** This barrel fermented Chardonnay made from three year old vines is a big, buttery mouthful that suffers only from herbal/green pepper quality in the nose that shows through slightly in the taste. Otherwise, it is complex, flavorful and indicative of the next style of Chardonnay from the Santa Ynez/Santa Barbara area. Made in a limited 50 case quantity, it is being sold only at the winery for \$15.00 per bottle (15½).

**1978 Buena Vista "Mendocino."** Who says bargains don't exist in Chardonnay? For \$6.25 this wine is a great value. A lighter style to be sure, but attractive with a light gold color and a deeply perfumed tropical fruit nose. The flavors are delicate, light, and subdued, but a few more months in the bottle should round the wine out. Drink it relatively soon for the youthful charm (15).

**Chateau St. Jean "Hunter Farms."** This Chardonnay is attractive in a light style. It has a light gold color and an apple-like nose. It's fruity with a tinge of vanilla, but is a little thin and short on the palate (15). \$11.25

**1978 Monterey Peninsula Winery "Arroyo Seco Vineyards."** Alas, lacking the richness and class of 1977, this wine has a gold color and a fruity/oaky nose with forceful fruity/oaky flavors. Probably best to drink over the next 1-2 years with flavorful foods (15). \$8.50

**1978 Raymond.** This Estate bottled Napa Valley Chardonnay has a gold color and a fruity/oaky, spicy nose with nice fruit in a straightforward, fruity style (15). \$8.00

**1978 Spring Mountain.** This Napa Valley Chardonnay is too big and too alcoholic. Nonetheless, fanciers of big Chardonnays will find the golden color, fruity/peach-like nose and oaky/fruity flavors appealing. The hot, harsh finish is a major detraction (15). \$12.00

## Good

**1978 Davis Bynum "Allen-Hafner Reserve."** This Sonoma Chardonnay has a gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. There is good fruit and nice flavors, but the wine is harsh and finishes rather short. A few years bottle age should soften the wine and add complexity (14½). \$10.00

**1978 Stonegate "North Coast."** This Chardonnay has a gold color and a fruity/vanilla nose with a hint of sulphur that dissipates with air. It is fruity and firm with good acid, but it is a bit sweet and finishes a little short (14). \$9.00

**1978 Vose Vineyards.** This Estate bottled Napa Chardonnay has a medium gold color and a fruity, somewhat nutty/slightly oxidized nose, not objectionable rather like a French White Burgundy. Unfortunately, there is little follow through on the palate. It is clean and straightforward, but lacks depth and flavor (14). \$8.50

**1979 Wilson Daniels.** This initial release from a new Napa Valley winery is painfully priced at \$13.50. One of the first 1979's, the wine could have used more time in wood and more time in the bottle. Typical Napa Valley Chardonnay with a light gold color and an apple-like nose, the light fruity flavors are overcome by the alcoholic overtones. Time may help, but here clearly is a wine before its time; and \$13.00, OUCH (14)!

**1978 Harbor Winery "Napa Valley."** This wine lacks the richness and character of previous vintages from this winery. It has a medium gold color and a fruity nose, but is rather thin and alcoholic (13½). \$7.50

**1978 Round Hill Vineyards "Napa Valley."** This wine has an appealing cinnamon-apple nose and nice fruity flavors. However, it is a little thin with a pronounced citric quality (13½). \$6.00

**1979 Callaway "Estate Bottled."** This unusual Chardonnay has little varietal character. It has a light gold color and a nose reminiscent of red licorice. If it were possible to smell sweetness this would smell sweet. In the mouth the wine is flat, dull and lacking definition. Well chilled, it is pleasant to drink (13). \$8.00

**1978 Louis M. Martini "California, Special Lot."** O.K. the wine is light and fruity, but it lacks richness and varietal character. At \$4.75, the price is fair and in return you get a fair wine. Drink it early for the fruit (12).

## Below Average

**1978 Kenwood "Sonoma Valley."** The golden amber color tells a lot about the wine, yet the nose is subdued and not strongly oxidized. The problem is a flat, flabby, one-dimensional taste that is devoid of interest (10). \$10.00

**1978 Lloyds & Elwood "California."** A gold color and a floral perfumed nose are the wine's chief attributes. In the mouth it is thin and watery with a slight sweetpea flavor and lacking varietal character (10). \$5.50



**1978 Richard Carey "North Coast."** Something went wrong here. The wine is a dark gold color and smells and tastes of caramel. Rather like some of those wierd Martin Ray wines at 1/3 the price (10)! \$6.00

**1979 Lawrence Winery.** This new San Luis Obispo winery puts its varietal wines in wooden boxes, but seems to have forgotten about varietal character in the bottle! This wine is totally without resemblance to Chardonnay. It is light, thin and slightly sweet. The price is ridiculous (9)! \$9.75



## BARRELS AND BOTTLES

**"... use this as a guide for what promise to be some of the best of upcoming new releases from California."**



### **The Underground Wineletter Staff has been evaluating barrel samples.**

*Keeping up with the thousands of wines coming from California in each vintage is a chore. However, many of the most extraordinary wines are produced in limited quantity and tend to disappear very quickly. Therefore, it is important to keep track of wines in the barrel and wines in the bottle not yet released. Listed below are notes on barrel samples and unreleased wines that should rank in the Very Good to Outstanding categories. However, please remember that individual barrels will be blended and may undergo additional cellar treatment before being bottled and sold as finished wine. Also, recently bottled wines often improve with age prior to release. Hence, these notes should not be considered definitive. Rather, they are offered as an indication of potential quality. When released for sale, we will again evaluate the wines in our customary manner and assign numerical rankings.*

### **Burgess Cellars**

**1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Vintage Selection."** This huge wine promises to be one of the finest Cabernets yet produced from Burgess. It has a very dark color and an intense fruity/oaky nose. Masses of fruit and great richness and flavor make this a Cabernet of clearly superior potential. Watch for it late this year.

### **Cakebread Cellars**

**1978 Cabernet Sauvignon:** In the typical Cakebread style, this is a huge wine with a dark color and a big, berry-like nose. There is lots of flavor, and, although tannic, there seems to be plenty of fruit. The **Lot 2** is even darker with a black/purple color and the late picked prune quality that has been a characteristic style. These wines should be released late this year.

### **Carneros Creek**

**1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Fay Vineyard":** This Cabernet is full of varietal character with a medium dark color and lots of fruit with a hint of black pepper. It is a firm tannic wine that should be a keeper. **1979 Chardonnay:** Made from 80% Carneros Chardonnay and 20% Chardonnay from Fay Vineyard, this Chardonnay has a medium gold color and a fresh, clean apple-like nose with good fruit and flavor. **1978 Pinot Noir:** This is the third Pinot Noir from the winery's vineyards which were planted in 1974. It is somewhere between the 1976 and 1977—not as big as the 1976, more flavorful and distinctive than the 1977. Very varietal, with a medium color, fruity/spicy nose and good fruit and balance, this wine will be released in November.

## Caymus

**1977 Cabernet Sauvignon:** Not as big as the massive 1976, the 1977 is lighter than the 1973-75 vintages as well, but this is relative and the wine is by no means light. It is very attractive with a dark color and a fruity, almost cherry-like nose. Already the fruit is enhanced by a spice-like complexity. The wine should be released this summer.

## Chalone

**1979 Chardonnay:** Chalone consistently produces one of California's finest Chardonnays. The 1979 promises to be lighter than the opulent 1978, but it is very flavorful with lots of fruit and nice balance. **1978 Pinot Noir "Old Vines":** This Pinot Noir may not match the richness of the unreleased 1977 (see Volume 1, Number 1), but it has excellent varietal character with lovely, fruity flavors and hints of black pepper and spice in the nose. The "early vines" will again be bottled separately and show less concentration and a bit of bitterness, but, is nonetheless, attractive.

## Conn Creek

**1978 Cabernet Sauvignon:** Produced from Cabernet from See Vineyards (75%) and Collins Vineyards (25%), this Cabernet shows great promise. The color is dark and the nose is fruity and perfumed. It is a rich, fruity wine with lots of depth and style. **1979 Cabernet Sauvignon:** Made from grapes picked before the rain, this is a successful Cabernet with a dark color, fruity/berry nose, and lots of fruit and depth.

## Diamond Creek

The 1978 Cabernets from Diamond Creek promise to be the best the winery has ever produced. With almost unbelievable fruit and richness, the wines show great structure and balance as well. **1978 "Gravelly Meadow":** The "gout de terroir" so characteristic of Graves is present in this young wine. It is a wine of great color and concentration with masses of fruit and a lean, well-balanced style. **1978 "Lake":** There is only a very small quantity of wine from this vineyard which will be blended into the "Gravelly Meadow." Again, it has a very dark, almost black color, with an intensely perfumed, cherry-like nose, and rich flavors and extraordinary balance. It should add even more fruit and depth to the "Gravelly Meadow" while leaving the complex "gout de terroir." **1978 "Red Rock Terrace (1st pick)":** This super Cabernet is characterized by an intense blackberry jam nose that follows through on the palate. Dense color and packed with fruit, the wine is nicely balanced and extremely flavorful. The "2nd pick" is from a lower portion of the vineyard that possesses richer soil. It has more tannin and is not as rich and fruity as the 1st

pick. Nonetheless, when blended with the 1st pick to make the Red Rock Terrace bottling, the resultant wine should show masses of fruit with great balance. **1978 "Volcanic Hill (1st pick)":** Typically the biggest of the Diamond Creek Cabernets, Volcanic Hill is true to form in 1978. It has a very dark color and an unbelievable nose of currants and cherries. A rich wine with lots of fruit and flavor, it is beautifully balanced and delicious. There also are small amounts of 2nd and 3rd picks which will be blended with the 1st pick to produce the Volcanic Hill bottling. The later picks are again a bit more tannic and less rounded than the 1st pick, but the resultant wine is likely to show the same fruit and a bit more backbone. In 1978, Diamond Creek produced 50 tons of grapes from the 20 acres of vineyard (vs. only 14 tons in 1977). There are 2500 cases of wine (635 Gravelly Meadow, 835 Red Rock Terrace, and 1040 Volcanic Hill), one-half of which will be sold outside California. The wines will be sold in late 1980 at \$12.00 per bottle. Don't miss these. They should be extraordinary!

## Estrella River

**1978 Cabernet Sauvignon:** This San Luis Obispo wine promises to be even better than the very good 1977. A bigger wine than the 1977, it shows good depth, and great fruit.

## The Firestone Vineyard

**1978 Chardonnay:** This certainly will prove to be the best Chardonnay yet from Firestone. Slated for a late summer release, it has a gold color and fruity/pineapple-like nose, with rich flavors and good acid. About 5,000 cases were produced so the wine should be in good supply. **1977 Pinot Noir "Vintage Reserve":** The Burgundian grapes promise to do very well in the Santa Ynez Valley. This Pinot Noir is a very good example. It has a medium dark color and a fruity/cherry-like nose. There are fruity/spicy flavors and good tannin and acid in this medium bodied wine. It is varietal, but a trace of bitterness mars the finish. Some 1800 cases were produced and the wine is scheduled for June release at \$15.00 per bottle.

## Jordan Winery

**1977 Cabernet Sauvignon:** This showplace winery in Sonoma has just released its first wine, a nice 1976 Cabernet Sauvignon. Stylistically, subsequent vintages seem similar. The 1977 is made from 85% Estate grown grapes (the 1976 was made from mostly purchased grapes) and blended with 10% Merlot. It has a medium dark color and a distinctly varietal herbaceous/fruity nose. The wine has a medium body, good fruit and nice balance. Some 40,000 cases were produced. **1978 Cabernet Sauvignon:** Some 50,000 cases of this wine were produced from 100%



Estate grown grapes. It has more depth than the 1976 and 1977, with a medium body, good fruit, flavor, and balance. **1979 Cabernet Sauvignon:** Again from 100% Estate grown grapes, 40,000 cases of this wine were produced and it seems to be the richest of the Jordan Cabernets. A dark color and loads of fruit indicate promise for the future.

### Robert Mondavi

**1978 Chardonnay "Reserve":** It begins to sound like a broken record, but this appears to be Mondavi's finest Chardonnay to date. The 1977 regular, 1977 "Reserve," and 1978 have all shown improvement. Undoubtedly, more barrel fermentation has something to do with it, but this 1978 "Reserve" is really special. It has a golden color and a lovely oaky/fruity nose. There is lots of fruit and richness with deep lingering flavors and a buttery texture. Watch for this wine in late 1980/early 1981. **1977 Cabernet Sauvignon:** This should prove to be the best "regular" Mondavi Cabernet of recent years. It has a medium dark color and a very fruity nose with berry-like flavors, good depth, and a clean, lingering finish. It is blended with 7% Cabernet Franc and 5% Merlot. A summer release is planned at about \$10.00 per bottle.

### JW Morris

**1979 Chardonnay "Black Mountain":** This barrel fermented Sonoma Chardonnay went through a malolactic fermentation. It is classically rich, with lots of texture and flavor. Watch for a fall release at \$10.00 per bottle. Only 300 cases were produced.

### Joseph Phelps

**1976 Insignia:** Insignia is Joseph Phelps designation for the best wine of the vintage. In 1976 it is this Eisele Vineyard Cabernet which is blended with 6% Merlot. A classic Eisele Vineyard wine, it has a very dark color and is very rich, concentrated, fruity, and tannic. **1977 Insignia:** For 1977, the Insignia bottling is a blend of 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, and 20% Cabernet Franc. Already this wine shows great complexity with a very dark color, a minty/fruity/green olive nose and good fruit and nice flavors.

### Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyards

**1978 Pinot Blanc:** Made from grapes grown on an

old Santa Cruz Mountain vineyard, this is an intriguing wine. It has a light gold color and a fruity/dill nose with good fruit, flavor and firm acidity. **1978 Pinot Noir:** The 1978 Pinot Noir is a monster—big, black and concentrated. There is lots of everything. More time is needed to monitor its development. The **1977 Pinot Noir** (see Volume 1, Number 1) will be released late in the year. Don't miss it. It's a classic with loads of fruit and ever increasing complexity. **1978 Cabernet Sauvignon:** This Cabernet is made from 8 year old vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains which produced their first commercial crop in 1978. The color is black/purple and the wine is intensely perfumed, packed with fruit and nicely balanced. This could match some of the old style Monte Bello Cabs from Ridge.

### St. Clement

**1979 Chardonnay:** The 1979 Chardonnay is another in the line of successes from St. Clement. It has a medium gold color and is fruity with good flavor and nice balance. **1978 Cabernet Sauvignon:** Intense fruit is characteristic of the St. Clement Cabernets. This 1978 has a medium dark color and a beautiful raspberry nose with good fruit and flavor.

### Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

**1977 Cabernet Sauvignon "Cask 23":** The 1974 Cask 23 is a classic wine. There was no 1975 or 1976, but this 1977 carries on the tradition. It has a medium dark color and a lovely, perfumed nose. Supple, with nice fruit and flavors, it is light but attractive. Release is scheduled for early fall. **1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Cask 23":** Oh my, what a wine! As impressive a wine in the barrel as one could hope to taste, this wine seems destined to be the finest Cask 23 to date and one of the best Cabernets ever! The color is very dark and the nose is intensely perfumed with cassis and violets. A very supple, rich, delicious wine with a solid backbone and great flavors. About 800 cases were produced. It will be sold near the end of the year and no Cabernet lover should miss this one!

### Ventana

**1979 Chardonnay:** This Chardonnay is not as rich and buttery as the 1978, but it is very stylistic and elegant. With clean, fresh, crisp flavors, and good acid, it should develop very nicely.

## Villa Mt. Eden

**1978 Cabernet Sauvignon:** Another 1978 Cabernet that should be a real winner, this wine has a dark color and a lovely cherry-like nose. It is a fruity, rich wine, with great ripe flavors and nice balance—possibly Villa Mt. Eden's best Cabernet. **1978 Pinot Noir:** This wine has good varietal character, medium color and spicy, fruity flavors. Consistently, Villa Mt. Eden produces one of Napa's better Pinot Noirs.

## Zaca Mesa

**1979 Pinot Noir:** Again, a Burgundian style wine from the Santa Ynez Valley that shows great promise. This Pinot Noir has a gold color and a spicy/fruity Burgundian nose. It has good fruit and flavor and is very varietal with a bit of sternness on the finish.

*Clearly, 1978 is a superb year for California wines, particularly Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. Some 1979's will also be very attractive, although late rains spoiled or diluted many. However, we caution against buying wines indiscriminately. Remember, the preceeding notes are for wines that seem to be clearly superior. Hopefully, they will show as well when released for sale, but time will tell. In addition to these wines we tasted far more wines that are not included. They're not included because they were tasted as barrel samples. For us to knock a barrel sample before the wine has undergone complete cellar treatment and bottled would serve no useful purpose. However, once released, rest assured we will call them like we taste them. In the meantime, use this as a guide for what promises to be some of the best of upcoming new releases from California.*



## 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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