

THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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ONE WINEDRINKER'S OPINION

Some Thoughts On Buying Old Wine

Preparing the review of the 1928 and 1929 Bordeaux vintages (Volume II, Number 1), substantial variation in the quality of different bottles of the same wines presented some initial difficulty in determining how to most accurately evaluate and rank the particular wines. This gave rise to the question, often asked, as to where and how to best find truly sound bottles of great old wines.

Auctions continue to offer and sell, at constantly escalating prices, old bottles that all too often contain wine which is anywhere from tired to spoiled. Such bottles have become so prevalent that many people, having apparently never experienced a really sound old bottle, believe that old wine is simply a novelty, and that any signs of life therein should be rejoiced and rhapsodized over. It is particularly amusing to observe the ridiculous prices often paid for old, off vintages of Lafite. Despite the fact that these bottles are many times nothing more than vinegar, some will declare the wine "ethereal." In buying an old wine described as

"ethereal" it might be advisable to approach the bottle with the same trepidation you would a piece of real estate described as "rustic." The fact is, however, that old wine, at its best, is totally alive and complete, possessing unique and incredible length on the palate, as well as tremendous complexity.

For an old wine to be at its best, it must have been stored under ideal conditions of steady low temperature and proper humidity, and should have been moved very little or not at all. If possible, a physical examination of the bottle can be most helpful. Flawed bottles, such as those with low levels, faulty corks, or cloudy or brownish color should obviously be avoided. It is equally vital to learn everything possible about the history and provenance of the bottle. Before one invests in such a rarity, the merchant or auction house offering the wine should be prepared to provide an interested purchaser with accurate information regarding where the wine has been kept during its long slumber. One perception is

that the most ideally preserved wines are those which have never left the cellars of the chateaux where they were produced and bottled. Such bottles are carefully pampered, being periodically topped up and recorked (usually every 30 or 40 years). However, experience indicates that such bottles, though usually excellent, are not quite up to those that have been kept in certain extremely cold and damp cellars of England and Scotland. Such cellars maintain temperatures in the low fifties and colder, which seemingly better preserves the fruit in old wine.

The other major factor in the quest for great old wine is bottle size. The larger the bottle, the slower the maturation and aging, thus resulting in increasingly improved chances that the wine will be sound. Drinking a well kept, large, old bottle can be literally like experiencing a voyage back in time—the wine

drinks just as it did in normal bottles decades before! However, there is at times a problem with the corks of big bottles improperly sealing, which can result in premature aging. Another obvious caveat in the search for great old wine, whether in large or regular sized bottles, is that the wine must have been excellent to begin with. Unless it is determined that the chateau was successful in the particular vintage, no matter how large, impressive, well-cellarred, and expensive the bottle, the wine will be unremarkable.

It cannot be overly stressed that the purchase of old bottles is at best a gamble, but acquiring them in an informed and intelligent manner can greatly improve the odds.

Ed Lazarus
West Coast Associate Editor



MORE 1978 WHITE BURGUNDIES

"There are many superb wines with prices to match"

The more of the 1978 White Burgundies that are tasted, the more that the quality of the vintage shows through. There are many superb wines with prices to match.

positively mouthfilling with richness, complexity, and a lingering finish. Well-balanced and classically structured, this wine is one not to miss (19). \$39

Outstanding

Chevalier-Montrachet "Les Demoiselles" (Jadot). What a fabulous wine. Reportedly only a few cases were shipped to the U.S. Hopefully, there is more available somewhere for this is an all-time classic. The color is light golden yellow and the nose is intensely perfumed with complex spicy/fruity aromas intermingled with hints of oranges. Incredible! And, what balance—a perfect marriage of fruit, oak, and acid—the wine is already complex and elegant, but how good this will be in five years!! Great wine!!! (19½). \$50

Bienvenues-Batard-Montrachet (Leflaive). It is a rare vintage when this superb wine does not rank at the very top. This 1978 is one of the finest ever, rivaling the 1971 for depth of flavor, but promising the elegance of the 1970 as well, given 3-4 years more bottle age. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose with just a hint of vanilla. The taste is

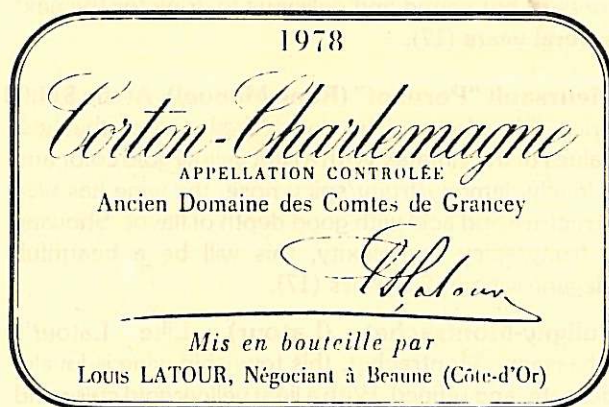


Chevalier-Montrachet (Leflaive). If not quite as rich as the Bienvenue, this wine may be even more elegant. No matter, it is superb with a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. Ripe flavors show

good structure, depth, and complexity. With 3-5 more years bottle age this should be a masterpiece (19). \$50



Corton-Charlemagne (Latour). This wine seems destined to be very long-lived and probably will not peak for 5-7 years. Patience will more than be rewarded. With a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose, the wine has lovely fruit with an impressive, spicy complexity already manifest. It is firm, solid, and well-structured. Elegance and more flavor complexity will develop with time. Really first rate. Superb! (19). \$40

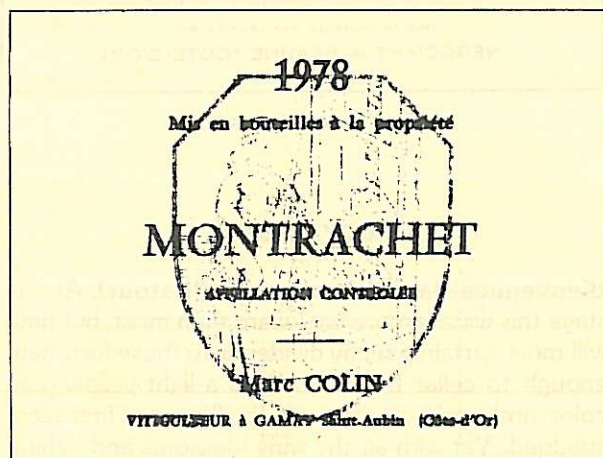


Batard-Montrachet (Leflaive). Again, a really marvelous wine that pales only ever so slightly against this producer's Bienvenue and Chevalier. A light yellow gold color and a perfumed, fruity/spicy nose are followed on the palate by full, rich flavors. A few more years bottle age will yield a wine of depth, flavor, and finesse (18½). \$45

Chevalier-Montrachet "Les Demoiselles" (Latour). Contrasted with the Jadot "Les Demoiselles," this wine is racy and shows less elegance at this early stage of its development.

However, make no mistake about it, it will be nothing less than fantastic in 5-7 years. The color is light gold and the nose shows a fruity/spicy quality with a hint of flintiness. A firm wine with good fruit and gorgeous fruity/spicy flavors, the wine has a long, lasting finish (18½). \$56.75

Montrachet (Colin). This is a really outstanding Montrachet. The color is light yellow gold and the nose shows a classic fruity/spicy quality. A delicate wine, with complex flavors of fruit and spice and a subtle smokiness, there is a firm structure and marvelous depth and balance. With a very long palate impression, this wine should be magnificent in the 4-5 years it will take to reach maturity (18½). \$60

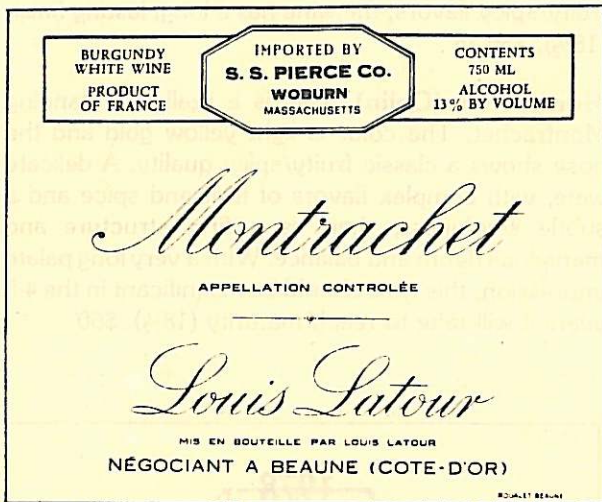


Corton-Charlemagne (Jadot). Interestingly, this wine does not seem to have the structure to develop over as long a period as Louis Latour's Corton, but neither is it likely to be short-lived either. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, spicy/fruity nose showing an intriguing, smoky quality. There is lots of fruit showing good depth and complexity backed by a very nice acid balance. A gorgeous wine that surely will improve for at least 4-5 more years (18). \$35

Le Montrachet (Jadot). Elegance and finesse are already manifest in this gorgeous wine. With a light yellow gold color and a lovely fruity/spicy nose, the beautiful balance of fruit and acid make the wine most appealing. With several more years bottle age, it seems certain to develop the creamy, velvet-like texture, and complex flavors for which the finest White Burgundies are so rightfully praised (18). \$65

Montrachet (Latour). This wine has a medium-yellow gold color and a complex nose showing hints of toasted coconut, vanilla bean, and tropical fruit. It is a lovely, richly flavored nectar, long on the palate, buttery, elegant, and really fine. The wine should show

improvement for a year or two, but it is not likely to keep for as long as many other wines of this vintage—nonetheless, a really superb wine (18). \$69



Very Good

Bienvenues-Batard-Montrachet (Latour). At this stage this wine is more backward than most, but time will most certainly repay dividends to those fortunate enough to cellar the wine. With a light yellow gold color, and a spicy/fruity nose, the flavors at first seem subdued. Yet with air the wine blossoms and behind the firm acidity, fruit and flavor become apparent. Not to drink for several years, but a keeper (17½). \$18

Chassagne-Montrachet (Marcilly). This estate bottled wine is a light style to be sure, but surely will have to rank as one of the finest township wines of the vintage. It has a light yellow gold color, and a lovely spicy/fruity nose. It has ample fruit, nice balance, and a lasting finish. Not a big wine, but lovely and flavorful with many years life ahead (17½). \$18

Batard-Montrachet (Jadot). This Batard is a lovely wine that is just a bit forward. With a light yellow gold color and a deep fruity/spicy nose, there is just a hint of coffee beans behind the fruit, although this does not follow through on the taste. Not objectionable, but this coffee bean quality raises questions about the life of the wine. The flavor is deep and complex, but like so many 1978's, the firm acidity will need years to soften. If the coffee bean quality doesn't dominate the bouquet and taste it will be a lovely wine indeed (17). \$45

Chassagne-Montrachet (Latour). This is a good example of how good the appellation wines can be in a great year from a great producer. With a light yellow gold color, a lovely vanilla/spice nose, and nice fruit,

the wine's chief attribute is a beautiful, elegant structure. A fine bottle that should be nectar in a few years, the only flaw is a slight lack of intensity (17). \$21

Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Caillerets" (Morey). In a lighter style, this is a beautiful wine that should develop complexity and softness with 3-5 years more bottle age. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely perfumed spicy/fruity nose with matching flavors. With good depth and firm acidity this will make a lovely bottle (17). \$19

Chevalier-Montrachet (Jadot). Lacking the impeccable balance and superior depth of this producers marvelous "Les Demoiselles" bottling, this is, nonetheless, a very fine wine that will require 4-5 years to develop. With a characteristic yellow gold color and fruity/spicy nose, there is good fruit, acid, and flavor that hold much promise for the future (17). \$45

Criots-Batard-Montrachet (Marcilly). Beware! That old enemy, poor handling and storage, has surfaced again. At \$50 per bottle, it is hard to understand, but a bottle purchased on the West Coast was decidedly oxidized, while the same bottle on the East Coast showed no sign of oxidation at all. Caveat Emptor! Sans oxidation, it is a lovely wine with a light yellow gold color, a lovely cinnamon nose, and rich, spicy/fruity, vanilla-tinged flavors. At its best, it is forward but sound and delicious to drink for the next several years (17).

Meursault "Poruzot" (Rene Manuel). At the \$14.00 price this wine can be considered one of the best values of the vintage. With a light yellow gold color and a lovely, lemony/fruity/spicy nose, the wine has nice structure and acid with good depth of flavor. Showing a fruity/spicy complexity, this will be a beautiful, elegant wine in 2-3 years (17).

Puligny-Montrachet (Latour). Like Latour's Chassagne-Montrachet, this township wine is lovely, delicate, and refined. With a light yellow gold color and a lovely fruity/spicy nose, the wine has nice fruit and good structure. Give it another 2-3 years to develop (17). \$21

Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" (Morey). With a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose, this wine has fruit and good flavor interest. Not terribly refined or complex, but a very nice wine that will benefit from a few more years bottle age (16½). \$20

Meursault-Genevrieres (Latour). Again, this wine seems a bit forward with a nutty, slightly caramel-like quality in the nose. It has fruity/spicy flavors, a firm structure, and nice style. Seemingly not destined for

long life, the wine should improve for a few years (16½). \$24

Meursault (J. Moreau). A nice wine with a light yellow gold color, a fruity/spicy nose and good fruit; it is well-balanced and should develop for 3-4 years (16). \$19

Meursault "Clos du Cromin" (Joliot). At the \$14.35 price, this wine is an excellent value. With a light gold color and a fruity/spicy nose, the wine has nice fruit and flavor in a lighter style. With firm acidity, it should make a very nice bottle in 3-5 years (16).

Puligny-Montrachet "Clavoillon" (Leflaive). More flavor interest would help this wine, but it may just be backward. The color is light yellow gold and the wine has a nice, spicy/fruity nose. There is fruit in a firm style. Based on the success of previous vintages (the 1969 is still alive and well), this wine should develop over many years and may ultimately be better than this initial assessment (16). \$30

Chassagne-Montrachet (Laboure-Roi). This is one of the best values from Laboure-Roi. Made in a light, delicate style with a light yellow color, a fruity/spicy nose and nice flavors, a few more years bottle age should yield an elegant wine possessing good fruit and complexity (15½). \$14.60

Puligny-Montrachet (Jadot). Youthfully austere in style, this wine needs several more years to develop. Presently it has a fruity/flinty nose, almost Chablis-like, and clean, fresh, crisp, fruity/flinty flavors. Just a bit thin, it still is quite attractive (15½). \$21

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Combettes" (Jadot). This wine is a bit forward with a fruity/spicy/coffee bean nose. There is good fruit and acid and a few more years bottle age should yield a nice bottle (15½). \$26

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Combettes" (Leflaive). This is a nice wine that suffers from a lack of depth and flavor. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. The flavors are pleasant and the wine is rounded and already quite elegant (15½). \$30

Batard-Montrachet (Morey). An \$80 investment in two bottles of this wine from two different sources yielded the same result—a pronounced toasted, coffee bean nose, noticeably oxidized. There is some richness and depth with a lovely, vanilla-tinged flavor backed by firm acidity, but the nose is disturbing and at the price, easy to forget (15). \$40

Chassagne-Montrachet "Caillerets" (Bachelet-Ramonet). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a subdued spicy/fruity nose. The structure is good and the flavors delicate, but the wine is presently

backward and unyielding needing several more years to open up (15). \$20

Meursault (Latour). This wine has a light gold color and a fruity/slightly spicy nose. It is somewhat subdued, but seems to have good structure and fruit in a nice style with a citric aftertaste. A few years bottle age should yield a nice wine (15). \$17.75

Puligny-Montrachet "Premier Cru" (J. Moreau). This wine has a light yellow gold color, a spicy/earthy nose and fruity flavors with good acid. Presently the wine is a bit austere and harsh, but it should develop well over the next 3-5 years (15). \$23

Good

Puligny-Montrachet (Laboure-Roi). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity, slightly musty nose. It has fruit, but there is an underlying steeliness that will need time to soften (14½). \$15.35

Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" (Marc Colin). This wine has a light gold color, a light, fruity/buttery/musty nose, a fruity/spicy flavor, and good acid (14). \$15.99

Corton-Charlemagne (Laboure-Roi). What a disappointment. With a light gold color and a grassy, slightly roasted nose, the wine has fruity/citric flavors that lack depth and interest (14). \$25.95

Meursault "Les Narvaux" (Bouzereau). A very forward wine with a light yellow color and a slightly nutty quality in the nose, there is enough fruit in a clean, pleasant style backed by good acid to warrant keeping a year or two (14). \$13.50

Puligny-Montrachet (J. Moreau). With a light yellow gold color, a toasted almond nose and fruity flavors, this wine lacks depth and richness. It is rather flat on the palate with a short finish. The oxidation in the nose raises questions about the longevity of the wine (14). \$22

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Pucelles" (Leflaive). This has to be considered a disappointment. The wine is bit thin and has a citric/lemony quality in the nose and taste (14). \$30

Below Average

Chassagne-Montrachet "La Romanee" (Pillot). Wow, the \$30 sting! Maybe better bottles exist, but this wine should be approached with trepidation. Not only is it terribly oxidized, but it is skunky, dank, and downright unpleasant (10). \$29.50

We noted in our initial tasting of the 1978 White Burgundies (Volume II, Number 1) that quantities were extremely limited. Again, we emphasize that the wines, while terribly expensive, are extremely difficult to find. Many of the wines are being sold primarily to restaurants. This avoids problems of selling a few bottles to unhappy retailers. It also makes it increasingly difficult for consumers to buy the wines. In a way it is tragic, for most of the wines sold to restaurants will undoubtedly be consumed before

they are fully mature. The prices quoted are from Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. Prices for the same bottles vary tremendously depending on when the wines were purchased (earlier purchases were at lower prices) and retailer mark-up. Prices are generally less expensive on the East Coast, but don't be too disturbed by a few dollars difference. The finest wines are worth seeking out. No one is likely to have a great supply and every White Burgundy lover should try to lay away at least a few bottles of the best wines from this classic vintage.

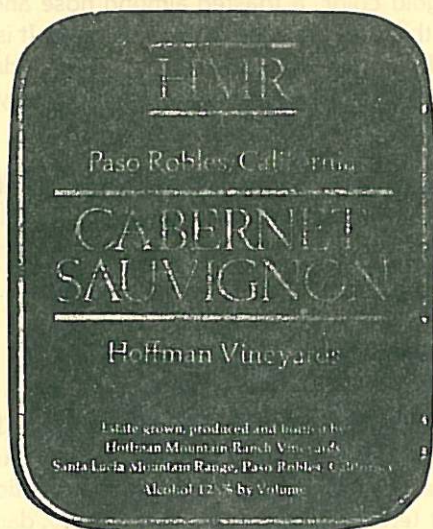


MORE 1976 CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

Continuing our coverage of the 1976 vintage, several new wines have just been released. Next month we will have a comprehensive review of the 1977 vintage. Thereafter we will review Cabernet Sauvignons when released. Currently, new Cabernet Sauvignon releases include wines from the 1976-79 vintages.

Very Good

HMR "Hoffman Vineyards." This estate bottled wine from Paso Robles is one of the real successes of the vintage. Not a big wine, but most attractive with a dark color and a deeply perfumed, fruity nose that shows hints of cassis. There is lots of fruit and good flavor with a nice tannin/acid balance. A lovely wine that should develop complexity with 2-3 years more bottle age (16½). \$10



Chateau Montelena "North Coast." This Cabernet is made in a more restrained style. Given the concentration of the 1976 vintage, the resultant wine has more character and depth than some other vintages of Chateau Montelena Cabernet. It has a dark color, a ripe, fruity, cassis-like nose with attractive, ripe, clean, fruity flavors, and a nice balance with some tannin to lose. This wine should be most attractive in 2-3 years (16). \$10

Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Insignia." Insignia is the designation for what the winery believes is the best wine of a particular vintage. In 1976 it is this Eisele Vineyard Cabernet which is blended with 6% Oakville Merlot. The wine is very similar to the Phelps 1975 Eisele Cabernet. It has a dark color and a lovely deep currant nose with an earthy complexity. It has lots of fruit and deep, rich flavors with a very tannic finish. A big wine that should be laid away for 3-5 years at least (16). \$20

Cakebread Cellars "Lot 2." In 1976 Cakebread made only this one Cabernet from Napa Valley grapes. It is similar to previous Cakebread Cabernets with a dark color and a ripe/fruity/oaky nose. The wine is rich with lots of ripe fruit flavors and firm tannin. A few more years bottle age are needed for the wine to develop. Only a small quantity was produced and the wine is very difficult to find (15½). \$12

Ridge Cabernet/Merlot "Monte Bello." The few acres of Merlot on Monte Bello ridge produce only a small amount of wine. In 1976 it was blended with Monte Bello Cabernet to produce this wine with a 85% Cabernet/15% Merlot blend. Only about 225 cases were produced and it is being sold directly from the winery. It has a dark color and an oak/berry nose

with good fruit and flavor. Just now not as rich as the 1976 Monte Bello Cabernet, it will still make a fine bottle with 3-5 years bottle age (15½). \$12

Chateau St. Jean "Wildwood." This Sonoma Cabernet is a powerful wine with a very dark color, a spicy/blackberry nose and a big, rich, fruity flavor, backed by lots of tannin. Many years will be required for this wine to develop (15). \$13.50

Conn Creek "Napa Valley." This vintage produced 1680 cases of Conn Creek Cabernet from Chateau Maja and Disney's Silverado Vineyards. It has a dark color and a fruity/peppery nose with rich, fruity flavors showing just a trace of herbaceousness. It is youthfully tannic and requires 3-5 years bottle age (15). \$11

Dehlinger Winery. This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color and an oaky/fruity/currant-like nose. The wine is rich with fruity/oaky flavors, but the tannin is presently overpowering. It still needs many years bottle age, but whether the fruit can outlive the tannin is a chancy bet (15). \$6.50

Diamond Creek Vineyards "Red Rock Terrace." Red Rock Terrace produced 259 cases of wine in 1976 with the characteristic 90% Cabernet/10% Merlot vineyard blend. It is a substantial wine with a dark color, a fruity/spicy nose, lots of fruit and fat, rich flavors. The wine should improve for at least 4-6 years (15). \$9

Diamond Creek Vineyards "Volcanic Hill." Again, the "Volcanic Hill" is the biggest of the Diamond Creek wines. In 1976 it's really something—huge, grapy, coarse, and tannic. This wine is nowhere near ready to drink, in 10 years maybe! The fruit is impressive and the wine has no late-picked quality which offers potential for the future (15). \$9

Hacienda Wine Cellars "Sonoma Valley." This is a nice medium-bodied Cabernet and a good value at the \$8.50 price. It has a dark color and a lovely, deep, perfumed berry/sandalwood nose. With good fruit and youthful tannin, the wine should benefit from a few more years bottle age (15). \$8.50

Mayacamas "California." This just released Cabernet is typical of what you would expect a 1976 Mayacamas Cabernet to be—big, dark, rich, and tannic. It is much too young to drink and difficult to evaluate. A hint of a bell pepper character in the nose and a very bitter finish are disturbing just now. Nonetheless, the wine is a keeper and the youthful faults could very well moderate or disappear with time (15). \$15

Pope Valley "Napa Valley." Some 700 cases of this were produced. It has a dark color with an amber edge

and a ripe, fruity nose with an earthy quality and a hint of volatile acidity—complex and attractive. It has ripe fruit flavors and good structure. A bit short on the palate, nonetheless, with 3-4 years bottle age the wine should be quite attractive (15). \$7

Good

Gundlach-Bundschu Winery. This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and an intense fruity/oaky/spicy/chocolate nose. The wine has lots of fruit and a cinnamon/berry-like flavor that is marred by a very tannic, bitter finish. Many years will be needed to resolve the tannin, but this one could make it (14½). \$9

Robert Mondavi Winery "Napa Valley." This Cabernet has a medium dark color and a fruity/oaky/slightly weedy nose. It has nice style and good balance with fruit and some tannin. A wine to drink now or keep a few years (14½). \$9

Souverain "Vintage Selection, North Coast." This Cabernet has a medium color and a fruity nose with straightforward, fruity flavors. Made in a light style, it is clean and fresh with just a trace of tannin—a wine for early consumption (14). \$8.25

Rodney Strong. This Sonoma Cabernet carries the name of the winemaker at Sonoma Vineyards and is intended primarily for sale via the Windsor mail-order business. Some 1500 cases were produced. The wine has a medium dark color, a fruity/earthy nose and nice fruit with some finesse. It is medium-bodied and a little short on the palate with a slightly tannic finish (14). \$9

Carneros Creek Winery "Esola Vineyards." This Amador Cabernet is as big a wine as anyone could possibly want or not want. It has a dark color and an over-ripe, pruny/oaky, port-like nose. The wine is very rich, thick, concentrated, and slightly sweet with a bitter tannic finish. A good example of too much everything without finesse or Cabernet character (13½). \$6

Fetzer Vineyards "Estate Bottled." This Mendocino Cabernet has a medium color with an amber edge and a berry-like, oaky nose. The wine has a light body, lots of oak, a medium amount of fruit, and a short finish. It is pleasant for current consumption (13). \$6.50

Harbor Winery "Deaver Vineyard." This unfiltered and unfiltered wine from Amador County has a dark color and a strong oaky/alcoholic nose that has a petroleum distillant quality—not attractive. It is fruity, straightforward, and tannic (12½). \$7.50

Hawk Crest "North Coast." This is Stag's Leap Wine Cellars second label. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a musty/dank nose. It has thin, fruity, light, vanilla-tinged flavors (12½). \$5.50

Toyon Vineyards. This Sonoma County Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a musty nose with an underlying fruity/cinnamon quality. In the mouth it is soft, thin, and quite oaky (12½). \$6

Almaden "California." This wine is ready to drink. It has a medium body with brownish/amber tones. The

nose has an over-ripe/weedy characteristic. It is soft with fruit slightly herbaceous flavors (12). \$4

David Bruce "Santa Barbara County, Los Olivos." This Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and an unusual musty/earthy/herbaceous nose. Characteristically Bruce in style with over-ripe flavors, it is hot on the finish (12). \$7

Zaca Mesa. This Santa Barbara County Cabernet has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a vegetative /hay-like nose. It has fruity/oaky, slightly vegetative flavors in a short finish (12). \$5.75



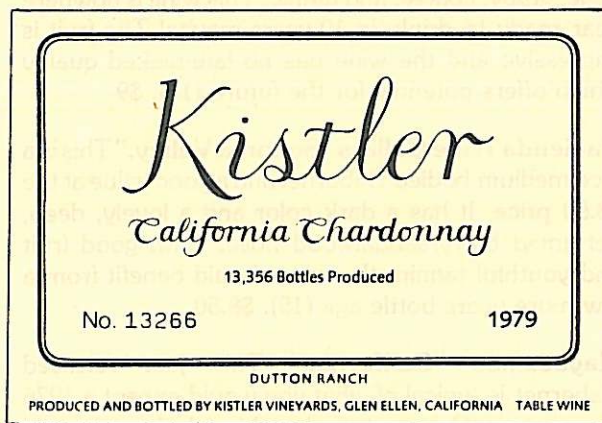
RECENTLY RELEASED CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAYS

"... some Chardonnays seem to be relative bargains"

The number of new Chardonnays continues to escalate at a dazzling pace. Many 1979's are now coming on the market as well as more 1978's. The early 1979 releases show great promise for the vintage.

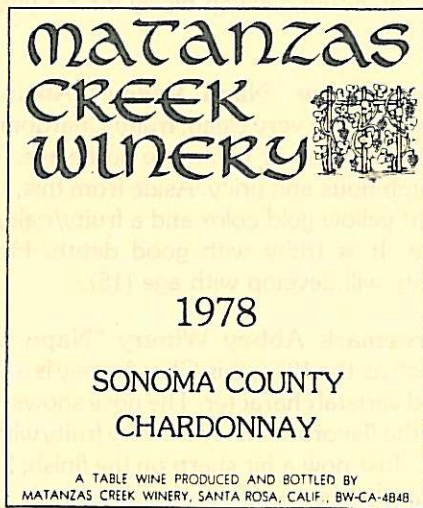
Outstanding

1979 Kistler Vineyards "Dutton Ranch." Located in Glen Ellen, this new winery crushed its first grapes in the fall of 1979. Like all of Kistler's Chardonnays, this wine was made using classical techniques including barrel fermentation and a complete malolactic fermentation. This is an excellent example of the richness and complexities imparted by these techniques. The wine has a light gold color and a ripe, lush, perfumed, vanilla nose. The flavors are ripe and complex with a buttery texture. Just now the wine finishes a little harsh, but another 6-12 months bottle age should round it out nicely. Expect the wine to develop for at least 2-3 years and provide nice drinking for several years thereafter (18). \$14

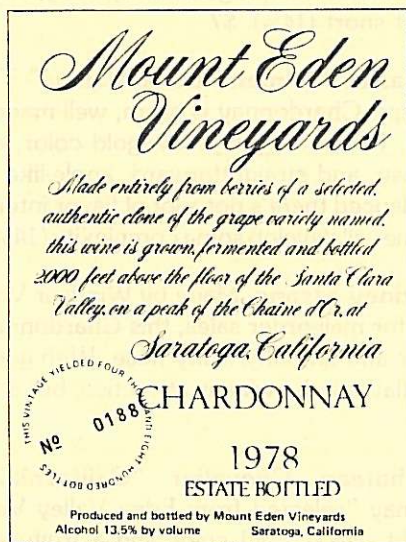


1978 Matanzas Creek Winery "Sonoma." This Chardonnay is also made from Dutton Ranch grapes (along with Chardonnay from an adjoining vineyard). It was 75% barrel fermented. The wine has a light gold color and an oaky/fruity/spicy nose with hints of oranges and coconuts—very complex. Full of rich Chardonnay fruit, the wine has a buttery texture and

deep, lingering flavors. Keep this for 2-3 years. Some 1250 cases were produced and the wine is getting hard to find (18). \$12.50



1978 Mount Eden Vineyards "Estate Bottled." The tiny acreage on the old Martin Ray Estate high in the hills of Saratoga nearly always produced excellent Chardonnay made by traditional methods. This 1978 is really extraordinary. It has a light gold color and a deep, fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. It is very rich and ripe with intense, almost sweet flavor. Oily and velvety with lots of flavor and a lingering finish, this wine should be ambrosia in 3-4 years. Don't miss this one! (18). \$16



Very Good

1979 Kistler Vineyards "Winery Lake." This is a lovely Napa Chardonnay with a light gold color, a

perfumed, fruity/oaky/spicy nose, and nice fruit with a spicy complexity. The wine is rich and buttery with good structure. Just a bit short of flavor in the aftertaste, this wine should develop well for 2-3 years (17). \$16

1979 St. Clement "Napa Valley." This is another lovely Chardonnay that should further enhance the reputation of this small Napa Valley winery. Not as complex at this juncture as the classic 1978, it has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/apple-like nose. There is lots of fruit with a hint of oak and good flavor. Clean and well-balanced, it will benefit from several more years bottle age (17). \$12

1978 Grgich Hills Cellar "Napa Valley." The very fruity quality of the Grgich Chardonnays is again evident in this vintage. Perhaps not as rich as the 1977, it is similar in style with a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity, vanilla-tinged nose. Lots of fruit and nice structure should allow this wine to develop and gain complexity for at least 2-3 years (16½). \$14

1978 Trefethen Vineyards "Napa Valley." This seems to be Trefethen's best Chardonnay to date. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely spicy/apple-like nose. The wine is clean and fresh with fruity apple-like flavors. Still youthfully acidic, the wine should improve for 2-3 years and make a very nice bottle (16½). \$10

1978 Chateau Montelena "Napa Valley." This is one of Chateau Montelena's best Chardonnays. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely fruity/vanilla-tinged nose. The wine has nice balance and good fruit in an elegant style. With 2-3 more years bottle age, more complexity should evolve (16). \$12

1978 HMR "San Luis Obispo." This Chardonnay is a good value at \$8.50. It has a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, vanilla/lemon/fruity nose. It has nice fruit, good texture, a bit of a lemony taste, and good depth of flavor. Very drinkable now, the wine doesn't seem to have the structure and acid balance to warrant keeping too long (16).

1979 Kistler Vineyards "Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyard." This is the lightest in style of the three Kistler Chardonnays, but the wine has plenty of flavor. The nose is lovely with a perfumed, vanilla/spice quality. It is clean and firmly structured with nice, ripe, fruity/spicy flavors. Another 2-3 years bottle age should yield a very elegant, flavorful wine (16). \$12

1978 Long Vineyards "Napa Valley." The 1977 Long Vineyards Chardonnay was the winery's first and it was a stunning success that is proving to be an all-time California classic. The 1978 is not in the same

league. A nice wine, but with very little family resemblance to the 1977. It has a light yellow gold color, an oaky/fruity nose, and good fruit and flavor. Without question the wine will benefit a great deal from a few years bottle age, but the depth and complex flavors of the 1977 are noticeably absent (16). \$15

1979 Silkwood Cellars "Napa Valley." Another new winery debuts with this very nice Chardonnay. The color is light yellow gold and the nose is fruity and spicy with just a hint of oranges. There is good fruit and a spicy complexity in a clean, crisp style. A few years bottle age will yield an elegant wine (16). \$11

1978 Smith-Madrone "Napa Valley." This is a very nice Chardonnay and a great value at the \$9 release price, although the small production has all but disappeared from the market. The color is light yellow gold and the nose is fruity with hints of vanilla. Very nice flavors in a fruity style, and good structure hold promise for more complexity with 2-3 years bottle age (16).

1979 Chateau St. Jean "Sonoma County." This is a very attractive Chardonnay to drink now and for the next year or two. Not terribly complex, but very fruity with a light gold color and a fruity/spicy/lemony/oaky nose. Good depth and richness leave a slight impression of sweetness (15½). \$8.75

1978 Chateau St. Jean "Wildwood Vineyards." This is a nice Chardonnay in a slightly lighter style. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/oaky nose. With nice fruit and flavor, the wine is clean, tart, and shows a vanilla-like flavor component. This should develop well for several years. The small production will be sold primarily from the winery (15½). \$12.50

1979 Leeward "San Luis Obispo, MacGregor Vineyard." This is a nicely made Chardonnay with a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/vanilla nose. There is good fruit and fruity, rich flavors—a nice wine at a fair price (15½). \$9

1978 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Napa Valley." Not as rich as the 1977, this is nonetheless, a flavorful wine with a fruity/oaky aroma and a similar taste. Just now the oak predominates and the wine is rather awkward. A few years of bottle age should round it out nicely (15½). \$10.75

1979 Cakebread Cellars "Napa Valley." This Chardonnay has a light gold color and an oaky nose. The wine has nice, rich flavors in a firm style. With several years bottle age the wine should soften and develop complexity (15). \$10.75

1978 Chateau St. Jean "McCrea Vineyards." This

wine was produced in a small quantity and is being sold primarily at the winery. It has a light yellow gold color and an attractive, fruity nose with just a hint of fennel. Made in a clean, light style, the wine has good flavors and should develop nicely for 2-3 years (15). \$11.50

1979 Far Niente "Napa Valley." Another new winery produces a very clean, fruity Chardonnay that cries out for a year or two more bottle age. The \$15 tariff is ambitious and pricy. Aside from this, the wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky, apple-like nose. It is fruity with good depth. Hopefully, complexity will develop with age (15).

1978 Freemark Abbey Winery "Napa Valley." Not as rich as the 1977, this Chardonnay is a fine wine with good varietal character. The nose shows fruit and oak and the flavors are likewise very fruity with vanilla nuances. Just now a bit sharp on the finish; 2-3 years bottle age should round out the wine nicely (15). \$10

1979 Ventana Vineyards Winery "Monterey County." This wine is less rich than the 1978, but has a clean, fruity quality and nice flavor. The nose has a grapefruit-like quality and the oakiness is quite evident at this early stage of the wine's development. Keep it for a year or two (15) \$9.75

Good

1979 J. Carey Cellars "Santa Ynez Valley." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/vanilla nose. It has good fruity/oaky flavors that finish a bit short (14½). \$7

1979 Charles Ortman "Edna Valley." This San Luis Obispo Chardonnay is clean, well-made, and a fair value. It has a light yellow gold color, a fruity/vanilla nose, and straightforward, apple-like flavors. Nicely balanced there's not a lot of flavor interest, but maybe time will develop some complexity (14½). \$8.50

1978 Rodney Strong. Made by Windsor Vineyards primarily for mail-order sales, this Chardonnay has a gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. With good body and nice flavors, the wine is attractive, but a little flat (14½). \$9

1979 Chateau Chevalier "California." This Chardonnay "selected from Edna Valley Vineyard" has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/sage-like nose. The wine has nice fruit with a hint of herbaceousness. It is rich and buttery in texture with a slight petillance (14). \$10.50

1979 Leeward "Ventana Vineyard." This Monterey Chardonnay lacks the charm of the San Luis Obispo bottling. It has a light yellow gold color, a

fruity/oaky nose, and grapefruit-tinged flavors (14). \$9.50

1979 Martin Ray "Winery Lake." While this wine isn't oxidized, it lacks the depth, richness, and complexity that Martin Ray can occasionally extract from the Chardonnay grape. It has a light yellow gold color, a nice, fruity/oaky/spicy nose, and good fruit in a straightforward style. The flavors likewise lack intensity (14). \$18

1978 Chappellet Winery "Napa Valley." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. Rather austere, the wine lacks depth and texture. Like most Chappellet Chardonnays, time should yield smoothness and elegance, but this vintage is likely to be short on flavor as well (13½). \$12

Conn Creek "Napa Valley." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color, and an oaky/slightly grassy/fruity nose. There are fruity flavors in a pleasant style (13½). \$9.75

1979 Keenan "Napa Valley." This wine seems to be marred by too much sulphur. The nose smells of sulphur and even with hours of air, the sulphur never really disappears. The flavor shows fruit in a tart style. More austere than previous Keenan Chardonnays, this wine should develop with age, but the nose is disturbing (13½). \$12

1978 Navarro Vineyards "Estate Bottled." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color, a spicy nose, and delicate, fruity flavors with a trace of sweetness. Lacking complexity, it is still pleasant (13½). \$8

1978 Roudon-Smith Vineyards "California Chardonnay." This Monterey Chardonnay has a gold color and an oaky/apricot nose. It is a rich wine with lots of fruit and oak in the flavor. Slightly petillant and a little bitterness mar the otherwise attractive features of the wine (13½). \$9

1978 Roudon-Smith Vineyards "Edna Valley." What unusual juice! With a whopping 16.1% alcohol, this wine is anything but light and delicate. It has a golden amber color and an oaky/apricot nose. Rich, thick, intensely flavored, and oaky, the wine is, nonetheless, a little flat and finishes bitter. The limited production is being sold primarily from the winery (13½). \$14

1978 Souverain "Vintage Selection, North Coast." This Chardonnay has a light gold color, a fruity/vanilla nose, and a citric fruit flavor. Not complex, but it is quite pleasant for early consumption (13½). \$8.25

1979 Vose Vineyards "Napa Valley." This estate bottled Chardonnay is marred by an overpowering aroma of oak. A shame because the underlying fruit seems to have good character (reportedly this was the source of the grapes that produced the superb 1978 Quail Ridge, Lot II Chardonnay [see Volume I, Number 6]). The wine has a gold color and an intense, oaky nose. Oak dominates the fruit which shows through as tart and citric. Undoubtedly, a few years bottle age will soften the rather hard character, but the wine will not lose the overpowering oak quality (13½). \$10

1979 Ahern Winery "California." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a citrus-like nose with subdued fruity flavors that finish a bit harsh (13). \$9

1979 Keenan "Sonoma County." Like the "Napa Valley" bottling, this wine has a similar sulphur quality in the nose. It has fruit in a subdued style. Not quite as rich as the "Napa Valley," it tends to have a French style, except for the sulphur (13). \$12

1979 Rutherford Ranch Brand "Napa Valley." This wine has a light yellow gold color, a fruity nose, and clean, crisp, simple flavors that are thin and short on the palate (13). \$7

1978 Smothers "Edna Valley Vineyards." This San Luis Obispo Chardonnay has a light gold color, an apricot nose, lots of fruit and flavor, and a very harsh finish (13). \$7.50

1979 Tyland Vineyards "Estate Bottled." This Mendocino Chardonnay was aged in Missouri oak and, as a result, is quite strange. The color is light gold and the initial aromas show a decided Roquefort cheese quality; with air a faint nuance of walnuts develops. It has good fruit and texture with an unusual banana-like aftertaste. Maybe some will like this for the texture, but it is weird Chardonnay (13). \$6.50

1979 Milano "Lolonis Vineyards." This Mendocino Chardonnay has a light gold color, an oaky nose, and tangy/oaky/fruity flavors that finish bitter (12½). \$8

1979 Monterey Peninsula Winery "Hacienda Vineyards." This Monterey Chardonnay has a light gold color that is slightly cloudy. It has an oaky nose and big oaky flavors. The wine is a bit harsh and has a slight petillant quality (12½). \$10.50

1979 Smothers "California." This Chardonnay was blended with a small amount of Pinot Blanc. It has a light yellow gold color, a fruity nose, and pleasant, tart, simple flavors (12½). \$8

1978 Bel Arbres Vineyards. This Mendocino Chardonnay has a medium yellow color, a fruity/citric nose, and clean, fruity, citric flavors (12). \$5

1979 Felton-Empire "Tepesquet Vineyards." Made from Santa Barbara grapes, this wine has an apricot nose, not unlike Riesling, and a fruity, slightly sweet apricot flavor—a strange wine (12). \$8

1979 Husch Vineyards. This estate bottled Mendocino Chardonnay has a light yellow color and an oaky nose with light buttery flavors that strangely resemble bananas. It is clean, but lacks character and interest (12). \$8

Below Average

1978 Cresta Blanca. Made from 96% Mendocino Chardonnay, this wine has a light gold color and a clean, fruity nose, but is flat, dull, and citric with a short finish (11). \$5

1978 M. Marion & Company "North Coast." This wine was cellared and bottled by Indian Trail Cellars. It should have stayed on the trail—golden color, oxidized nose, oxidized/oaky taste (11). \$4.65

1978 Page Mill Winery "Monterey County." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/swampy, almost cabbage-like nose. With this nose one might expect an unusual taste. Right again. Earthy/oaky and even slightly pickling spice flavors predominate. This wine is not easy to love (11). \$8.75

1979 Parsons Creek "Sonoma County." This

Chardonnay has a light straw-yellow color and a fruity nose. Beyond this it lacks varietal character, has swell flavor and lacks depth and complexity (11). \$7.50

1978 Tyland Vineyards "Estate Bottled." Unlike the 1979 which was in Missouri oak, this was in Kentucky oak. It is flat, thin, and dull. The Chardonnay grape doesn't seem to have any great love affair with Kentucky oak (11). \$6

1979 Weibel "North Coast." With little resemblance to Chardonnay, this wine is citric and devoid of fruit, depth, or flavor interest (11). \$6

1979 Felton-Empire "Santa Cruz, Bonny Doon." Blended with 40% Pinot Blanc, the tuna fish nose on this wine is a real turn-off. The fruity/herbal taste, likewise, leaves much to be desired (10). \$8

Although the price of Chardonnay continues to spiral upward with many new releases at \$15 or more, one cannot help but note the price comparison with the 1978 White Burgundies at 3-4x the price. On this basis some Chardonnays seem to be relative bargains, but it's like comparing apples and oranges. A White Burgundy is a White Burgundy. A Chardonnay is a Chardonnay. They are not often similar. Still with such a price disparity, it seems easy, for example, to prefer apples over oranges, although those with a taste for oranges would find them hard to live without. This is the stuff higher prices are made of.



WINE PRICE TRENDS

"Unfortunately, no matter how dear a coveted bottle or bottles seems today, the almost inescapable conclusion is that the wine will be substantially more expensive a year from now."

Inflation is rampant and wine prices seem to be going out of sight. To get a clear insight into the situation, it is necessary to concentrate attention specifically on the prices of Bordeaux in the London auction houses. The reasons for this approach are: 1) French Bordeaux is the most popular of fine wines in terms of world-wide consumption and 2) the great volume of Bordeaux which continually passes through the London auction houses provides us with a clear

reading of the current "market" on practically any vintage of any wine. Price fluctuations in London are invariably eventually reflected in wine prices world-wide.

With this in mind, what are the current price trends? Up; almost frighteningly so. Using Chateau Lafite Rothschild as an at random example, the 1961 vintage sold in 1976 for as low as \$500 per case, the 1966

vintage \$160 per case, and the 1970 vintage \$200 per case. During the past year a case of 1961 went for as high as \$2,000, a case of 1966 sold for \$1,100, and the 1970 for \$700 per case. Other wines, naturally at different price levels, reflect somewhat similar rises. It is a fair statement that the prices of most good Bordeaux from fine vintages have at the very least tripled in the last 3 years.

Decanter Magazine, published in England, commenced a price indexing in August of 1978, in order to monitor the monthly and cumulative price fluctuations of Bordeaux at auction. The index reveals some interesting things. Early in 1978, when the 1975's were about to be released, they were being acclaimed by many in the trade as a "vintage of the century," "another 1961," etc., and were being offered and sold at quite high prices. After their release, when there was ample opportunity to taste and evaluate the wines in depth, it was soon the opinion of many that the vintage was very fine, but not generally great. Yet their prices were often higher than the equally fine 1966's and 1970's, which, since older, were closer to maturity and thus of more present inherent value. Canny buyers of wine therefore recognized that these 1966's and 1970's represented relative bargains at the time. The price index indicates that from August 1978 to the present time, 1975 Bordeaux prices have increased just 16%, which does not even equal our inflation rate for the period. During the same period 1970's increased well over 40% and 1966's 50%.

Generally, the older vintages have shown the steepest price rises during the last few years. This is probably due to the fact that along with the factors which have

been pushing all fine wine prices up (inflation and increased world-wide demand), older wines have the added factor of extremely increased scarcity. This is especially magnified with respect to old rarities from the great vintages of the turn of the century and earlier. The great old cellars of England and Scotland, which have been offering up their treasures to the auction houses, are simply drying up, leaving an extremely curtailed supply to satiate a continually increasing thirst. The price rise for many of such bottles has been explosive. For example, in 1976 a bottle of 1865 Lafite sold at \$125. In 1979 a bottle of the same wine brought \$2,300. During the same period an 1875 Lafite went from \$50 to \$800, 1899 Latour from \$80 to \$575, and 1900 Leoville-Las-Cases from \$30 to \$220. Although the particular condition of these old bottles can greatly affect their price, these spreads are still quite staggering.

Between such old rarities and more recent mature vintage wines, the difference in escalating prices is only in degree. Prices have been going up, and there seems to be no reason why they will stop doing so. Unfortunately, no matter how dear a coveted bottle or bottles seems today, the almost inescapable conclusion is that the wine will be substantially more expensive a year from now.

Therefore, while it is possible that there could be favorable price fluctuations in recent vintages still in good supply, prices of older wines should continue to spiral. (As we go to press, the indications from the latest London auctions are that, after a several month hiatus, Bordeaux prices, spurred by German and other European buyers, are once again moving higher.)



BARRELS AND BOTTLES

"A Guide to Some of the Best Pre-Release California Wines"

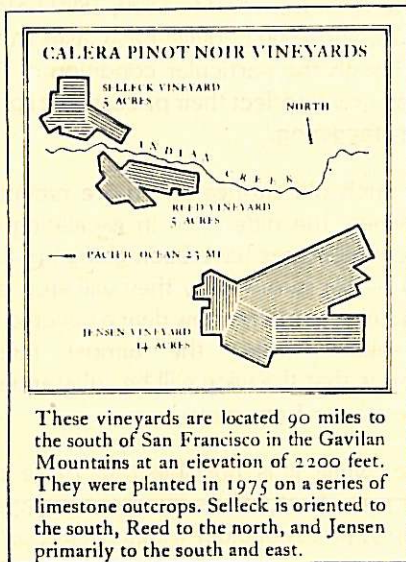
David Bruce Winery

1978 Pinot Noir: After years of trying, David Bruce has at last succeeded in producing a very fine Pinot Noir. Just bottled, the wine has a dark color and an unmistakable fruity, Pinot Noir nose with just a hint of stemminess. It is fruity and rich with spicy flavors and nice balance.

Calera Winery

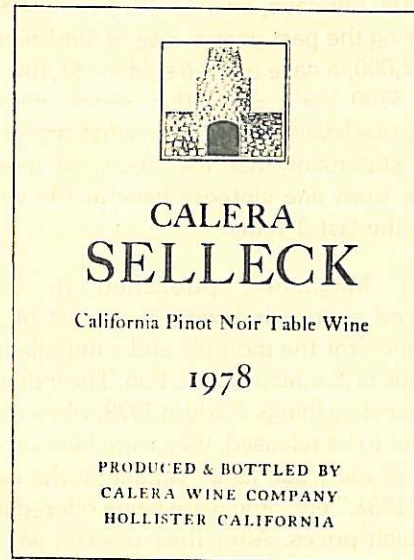
Owner Josh Jensen is dedicated to making great Pinot Noir in California. As such, he joins the growing band of fanatics who demand an ultimate challenge, for making good Pinot Noir in California is by no means easy (see Volume I, Number 1). However, in the mountainous terrain of the Gavilan Mountains

east of Chalone in Monterey County, Josh found the rocky, limestone soil that closely approximates that of Burgundy. Here he planted 24 acres of Pinot Noir in three separate vineyards. Although adjoining, each vineyard has a separate character and the wines will be bottled under the separate vineyard designations. The first crop from vines in their 4th leaf was in 1978. The quantities produced were minute, but the wines show promise. As the vines mature, production should reach 2-3,000 cases. Calera is a winery to watch.



These vineyards are located 90 miles to the south of San Francisco in the Gavilan Mountains at an elevation of 2200 feet. They were planted in 1975 on a series of limestone outcrops. Selleck is oriented to the south, Reed to the north, and Jensen primarily to the south and east.

1978 "Jensen." Only one barrel was produced from this 14 acre vineyard in 1978. The wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/berry nose with good Pinot Noir character and lots of tannin. **1978 "Reed."** Likewise, only one barrel produced from 5 acres, with a darker color, more fruit and depth, and a rich chocolately quality that promises a wine of great character. **1978 "Selleck."** The smallest production of all with only 15 cases produced from 5 acres, this wine seems to be somewhat better than the other two with a medium color, lovely Pinot Noir nose, and fruity/peppery/stemmy flavors. The 1979's share the same varietal character, but owing to the older age of the vines and more production they are fruitier and less stemmy. **1979 "Jensen."** With a medium color and a fruity/spicy Burgundian nose, it is not unlike a Dujac Burgundy. It is fruity and tannic with the underlying softness yet to be unveiled. Some 120 cases were produced. **1979 "Reed."** Very grapy, raisiny, and tannic, this wine still is unmistakably Pinot Noir. About 90 cases were produced. **1979 "Selleck."** Very berry-like and fresh with clean flavors and medium color and body, this too promises to be an attractive wine. About 110 cases were produced.



Chateau St. Jean

1979 Chardonnay "Robert Young Vineyards." This is a superb Chardonnay that should prove to be the best yet from the Robert Young Vineyards. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely fruity/spicy nose with tropical fruit nuances. A firm wine with lots of fruit and flavor, it exhibits the character of some of the finest Sonoma Chardonnays. Watch for this late this year. **1978 Johannisberg Riesling Individual Dried Bunch Selected Late Harvest "Robert Young Vineyards":** What an incredible wine! A fantastic TBA style with 37.5% residual sugar and 7.3% alcohol, the wine has the consistency of syrup. Thick, oily, and delicious, the color is a golden amber and the nose exhibits nuances of honey, coconuts, peaches, tropical fruit, you name it—complex is the word. The taste is an essence of apricots. Only 80 cases were



made and the wine will be released this fall at \$37.00 per $\frac{1}{10}$. **1979 Johannisberg Riesling Individual Bunch Selected Late Harvest "Robert Young Vineyards"**: This Beerenauslese-style Riesling has 17.4% residual sugar and 8.2% alcohol. It is in a word—Delicious! The color is golden yellow and the nose is complex with nuances of peaches, apricots, and honey. An exquisite taste of peaches and apricots is complimented by perfect balance and a very long palate impression. This wine will be released in the late fall at \$18.00 per $\frac{1}{10}$. **1979 Pinot Blanc "Redwood Valley Vineyards"**: This is a very nice Pinot Blanc with good fruit and clean, crisp flavors.

Dehlinger Winery

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon: This wine was just bottled and will be released later this year. It has a dark color, and a berry-like nose with lots of fruit. There is a good balance of fruit/acid/tannin; a very nice wine, not overpowering, but still very flavorful.

Iron Horse Vineyards

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon: This estate bottled wine is a fine example of Sonoma Cabernet with a dark color and a perfumed berry/currant nose. The wine has good fruit and depth of flavor with nice acid/tannin balance. Some 1250 cases were produced and the wine will be released in May, 1981. **1979 Chardonnay**: This Chardonnay promises to be the winery's best, with more fruit and character than previous vintages. It is clean and crisp in a lighter style with an attractive apple-like character and a slight spiciness—very nice.

Lambert Bridge

1979 Chardonnay: Tasted just after bottling, this wine will be released in February, 1981. The Lambert Bridge Chardonnays are made in a big style. The fruit is picked very ripe ($24-24\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ Brix) and the wine is entirely barrel fermented with an induced malolactic fermentation. The 1979 is already impressive with a light gold color and a complex fruity/spicy nose. The wine has good depth and flavor with good acid balance and a long palate impression.

Matanzas Creek Winery

1978-79 Pinot Noir: The 1978 vintage produced two Pinot Noirs from Matanzas Creek Winery. A simple, light, fruity, spritzy wine has already been released. A more concentrated lot of the 1978 was blended with the 1979 to yield a wine of concentration and intense varietal character. Produced from grapes grown on

the Quail Hill Ranch in Sonoma, the wine has a medium color and a very varietal fruity/spicy nose. It is rich in the mouth with impressive fruit and spicy complexity. Although still in the barrel when tasted, the wine already shows beautiful texture with a promise of great elegance. **1979 Cabernet Sauvignon**: From the barrel, this 1979 Cabernet exhibits a dark color, an intense berry-like aroma, and lots of ripe fruit flavor with good depth and style.

Mount Eden Vineyards

1977 Cabernet Sauvignon: This wine is a real mouthful. Very concentrated, this certainly will be one of the biggest wines of the vintage. It has a very dark color and concentrated, chocolate-tinged flavors with lots of tannin that will require years of bottle age. It will be released this fall at \$25.00 per bottle. Only a very small quantity was made. **1978 Cabernet Sauvignon**: There will be 650 cases of this wine, a relatively large production for Mount Eden Vineyards. It is better balanced than the 1977 with a dark color and a perfumed, fruity nose with lots of fruit and great depth. This should be a real winner! **1977 Pinot Noir**: Under 100 cases of Pinot Noir were produced in 1977, but it is gorgeous, concentrated nectar. The color is dark and the nose shows a fruity/spicy, plum-like quality with lots of fruit and complexity. It will be released this fall at \$18.00 per bottle.

Ridge Vineyards

1979 Zinfandel "Langtry Road": Made from grapes grown on 100 year old vines on Spring Mountain in Napa Valley, the vineyard also has Carignane and Petite-Sirah (about 10%) which is crushed and fermented with the Zinfandel. Made since 1973, the resulting wine shows complexity and develops elegance with age. Out of the barrel, this 1979 promises to continue the tradition. The color is medium dark and the nose shows a fruity/spicy quality. The fruity/acid/tannic balance is good and the wine is very flavorful. Only a small amount was produced and the wine will be sold only from the winery in late 1981. **1979 Zinfandel "Jimsomare"**: In 1979 the Jimsomare Vineyard on Monte Bello Ridge produced nearly 3 times as much as it did in 1970. Consequently, the wine is nowhere near as concentrated as the legendary 1970. It has a medium color, a fruity nose with lovely fruity flavors—very tasty, but not likely to be a keeper. **1977 Cabernet Sauvignon "Monte Bello"**: This drought year produced the shortest crop in over 20 years and only 25% of normal. The wine will not be released until the fall of 1981, but it promises to be exceptionally good with a dark color, a beautiful, fruity nose, and intense flavors with lots of tannin. **1978 Cabernet**

Sauvignon "Monte Bello": This should rank with the best Monte Bello Cabs. The wine has a dark color, a deep fruity nose, and ripe, fruity flavors. The wine shows incredible balance as well as concentration. Not scheduled for release until 1982, this is worth waiting for and not to be missed.

Ritchie Creek Vineyards

1977 Cabernet Sauvignon: While not as massive as the previous Ritchie Creek Cabernets, this wine should be one of the best. A lighter style, but still loaded with fruit and flavor, the spicy character of the vineyard is already present just months after bottling. Scheduled for release in 1981, this is one to buy.

Smith-Madrone Vineyards

1979 Cabernet Sauvignon: Tasted from the barrel this wine has a pronounced Bordeaux-like character. The Smith-Madrone vineyards on Spring Mountain produce very low yields and the grapes ripen with less sugar than is found in many other Napa Valley

vineyards. The wine has a dark color and a grapy nose with lots of fruit and a spicy character so often found in Cabernets from this area. It has nice structure in a lean style with a promise of great elegance to come.



To make great wine there's no substitute for traditional techniques!



COMING ATTRACTIONS

1977 California Cabernet Sauvignons • Currently Available Champagne • Recent Chardonnay Releases • More 1978 White Burgundies • 1975 and 1970 Vintage Ports • 1975 and 1976 Sauternes • Chateau Petrus 1920-1976 • More Barrels and Bottles • Older Cabernet Sauvignons

ABOUT OUT 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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