

450+ WINES
REVIEWED

HIGH VALUE
NAPA CABS

STEAK AND
CABERNET

BORDEAUX'S
BEST CÔTES

WINE ENTHUSIAST

SEPTEMBER 2019

THE CAB ERNIE ISSUE

SAUVIGNON



WINE ENTHUSIAST

THE CABERNET ISSUE

September 2019

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BY VIRGINIE BOONE

Winemakers from California's iconic Cabernet Sauvignon playground prove quality can come with a reasonable price tag.

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A traditional New York City feast is the perfect occasion to break out your favorite bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon.



WHY CABERNET IS KING

Powerful and versatile, the variety has found a home around the globe.

Is there a more iconic variety in the American wine world than Cabernet Sauvignon? From the 1970s on, it has been inextricably linked to the country's wine history, and its dominance—primarily when from Napa—power, ageability and versatility continues to draw savvy collectors from around the world to the American wine fold.

But Cabernet has an impressive reach beyond traditional Californian wine country. Famed for centuries for its role in the great ageable Bordeaux wines, the variety has, in recent times, shown adaptability and success in countless global wine regions as well as elsewhere in California, both as a blending grape and a poised single variety. From South Africa to Paso Robles, Australia to Washington State, Cabernet is now a thoroughly intrepid and modern grape, with expressions of terroir for every palate.

We celebrate the regal red variety this month, starting with Contributing Editor Virginie Boone's deep dive into the excellent, affordable Napa Cabernets that you should be drinking now

(page 42). Produced by storied names like Heitz, Hess, Spottswoode and more, these wines offer the best of Napa Cab without breaking the bank.

Moving to France, on page 50, European Editor Roger Voss also proves that great Bordeaux wines needn't require a second mortgage. Some of the most wallet-friendly and elegant wines in the region come from the northern Côtes appellations. Typically blends of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and the other traditional red varieties, they are must-haves for any Bordeaux wine lover that are worth stocking up on now.

But let's not forget the beauty of a big, juicy steak and a delicious Cabernet. Beefsteak banquets are the focus of Senior Editor Layla Schlack's piece on page 84. Originally all-you-can-eat-and-drink gatherings for 19th century politicians and fundraising groups, the beef-centric concept is re-emerging today to include seafood and other dishes as well as refined wines, with Cabernet at the forefront. We give you the recipes and pairings to host your own family-style affair at home.

Cabernet is now a thoroughly intrepid and modern grape, with expressions of terroir for every palate.

Also in the issue: California Cabernets beyond Napa (34); regional steak preparations to match regional Cabs (17); and an interview with comedian Mindy Kaling (22).

Cheers!



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COMING NEXT MONTH



◀◀ Top 40 Under 40

From winemakers, brewers and distillers to importers, grape growers, bartenders and beyond, we introduce the young vanguard that's reshaping the world of wine and beverage for years to come.

Greece's High-Altitude Vineyards

Discover the top high-altitude sites found in one of the most mountainous countries in the world, plus plenty of historical insights on these incredible, remote locales.

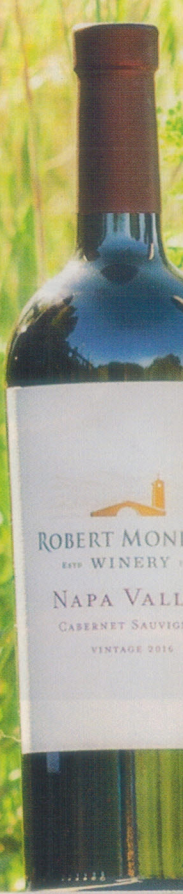
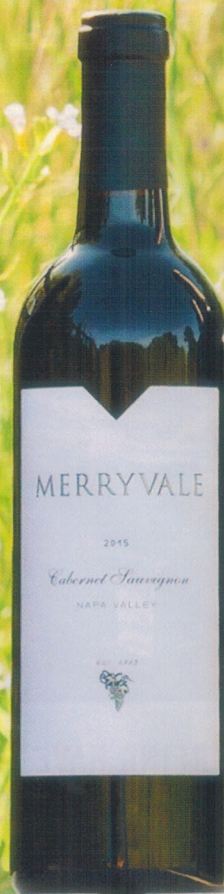
Mezcal's Moment

Practically every bartender in America is hustling to get this on their menu. Find out why the agave-based spirit is so hot right now and meet the colorful personalities who spread its gospel.

Seafood Smorgasbord

Coastal wine regions share more than geographical similarities: Many are also known for signature seafood that locals love to eat. Get exciting chef-driven recipes, with regional wines paired to each.

NAPA CAB FOR ALL



**These winemakers
from California's iconic
Cabernet Sauvignon
playground prove
quality can come with a
reasonable price tag.**

BY VIRGINIE BOONE

PHOTOS BY
ERIN & COURTNEY DE JAUREGUI

Most of us are not millionaires, and we don't necessarily have unlimited funds to invest in our love of wine. Yet, there are certain types of wine, and regions that produce them, that seem to demand significant spending to enjoy their riches.

Cabernet Sauvignon from California's Napa Valley often falls into that category. The million-dollar question: Can you find great wine for a two-digit price tag from such an illustrious region?

The answer is yes—but it's all relative. For some, a \$75 wine is a once-in-a-lifetime buy, while for others, a \$30 bottle represents the same plateau.

In Napa Valley, moderately priced Cabernet Sauvignon is just hard to offer. Costs for land, farming and labor are high. Last year, the average price per ton of Napa Cabernet Sauvignon was \$7,925.47 (the state's average price per ton across all varieties was \$831.63).

One ton of grapes yields about two barrels, and each barrel fills about 25 cases, or 300 bottles, of wine. The economics are nuts.

Yet there are producers that make accessible, attainable Napa Cabs, and their efforts are worthy of support. Here, we highlight the wines that overdeliver and the winemakers who make them.





Old-School Roots

Heitz Cellar Winemaker: Brittany Sherwood

Heitz was one of the Napa Valley's oldest family-owned wineries until 2018, when Gaylon Lawrence Jr. purchased the St. Helena business, complete with its more than 400 acres of vineyard and 40,000-case production.

Founded in 1961 by Joe Heitz, an industry legend, the winery became most famous for its Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon.

Through the decades, Heitz has always overdelivered. That includes Martha's, which, at just north of \$200, remains half the price of many of the cult wines that have come after it.

But it's the brand's nondesignated Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon that pleasantly surprises at a comparable bargain of \$63. Sherwood is committed to keeping Heitz wines as an affordable luxury.

"The goal is to have wines of high quality that are relatively affordable and accessible," says Sherwood. "It started with Joe Heitz, and the new ownership is trying to adhere to that, to make wine people can get their hands on."

Heitz owns its own fruit and farms everything organically.

That cost savings allows the Napa Valley Cab to enjoy two years in oak, while Heitz's single-vineyard Cabs age for three years. The Napa Valley Cab is Heitz's largest case production and the brand's most widely distributed selection.

"It's a starting point, it's how we build a following with new people," says Sherwood. "It's important to engage with new consumers, and price point is part of that."

Hess Family Wine Estates Winemaker: Dave Guffy

Guffy is a big believer that if you control your land, you can control your destiny. So it comes as no surprise to find him working here, where many of the vineyards have been winery-owned for multiple decades, especially on Mount Veeder, where the winery is situated.

This May, that control was extended even more, when another 420-acre property was acquired. Called the Iron Corral Vineyard, it boasts 186 acres planted primarily to Cabernet Sauvignon, and is located in Pope Valley, a northeastern region of the Napa Valley popular with winemakers who know where to find value.

"One of Donald Hess's core values was to make wine accessible to the American people," says Guffy.

Iron Corral is expected to help grow Hess's Lion Tamer brand, which overdelivers relative to price. The new property is near to the winery's 205-acre Allomi Vineyard, which is the key to one of the winery's best values, the \$33 Allomi Cabernet Sauvignon.

"Every year, the grape crush report comes out, [and] I cringe and look at it with one eye closed," says Guffy, fearful of Napa's ever-escalating grape prices. "Every contract is tied to

the average [price]. We chose to invest more in owning Napa Valley vineyards."

For the Allomi Cab, blending with Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot and Malbec helps bring those average prices down, as does a lean winery operation.

"It's about common sense, and we're always looking at better technology," he says. "It's easy to throw money at labor. We try to be smart about it."

Robert Mondavi Winery Winemaker: Geneviève Janssens

Janssens feels lucky to work for a winery that Robert Mondavi founded. Almost everybody in the Napa Valley remains respectful of his vision and the relationships he has built with farmers over time. It's this respect that makes a \$36 Napa Valley Cabernet possible.

"You have to be careful to pick the right vineyards and people," says Janssens, the longtime winemaker.

A larger winery like Mondavi has a whole department of people to look after the company's vineyards. Still, it's up to Janssens to maintain style and quality at a high production level. It's all done in the hopes to produce a wine that's, as she puts it, "direct, fresh and easy to drink."

For the Napa Valley Cab, grapes come from Oakville and the winery's own Wappo Hill Vineyard in the Stags Leap District. To blend from the two sites is paramount, as is the addition of other varieties. Janssens adds Cabernet Franc for fragrance and silkiness, Merlot for softness and Petit Verdot for color and power. It's aged in French oak, though only 19% of it is new.

"The Napa Valley Cabernet is important to our philosophy of offering wine at every price point," she says. "This was very important to Mr. Mondavi."

RECOMMENDED WINES

92 Heitz 2014
Cabernet

Sauvignon (Napa Valley); \$63.

Representing one of the finest values in Napa Cabernet, this 100% varietal wine is bright and plush, layered in anise and cassis liqueur. A fresh, high-toned midpalate evolves to show a softly round ending, as a classic style of structure and elegance play out.

Editors' Choice.

92 Hess 2016
Allomi

Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley); \$33.

Dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon, this has smaller amounts of Petite Sirah, Malbec, Petit Verdot and Merlot. Bold, black fruits expand on the palate, with a lengthy powder keg of tobacco, gun smoke and cigar box that shines through. The tannins are persistent yet soft.

Editors' Choice.

87 Robert
Mondavi 2016

Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley); \$36.

With the addition of Petit Verdot, Merlot and Cabernet Franc, this is a soft, supple red wine, dusty in leather, clove and tobacco. It has full-bodied power and a substantial tannin presence.

The estate is home to which are planted to the wines of a production decided long ago to not