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9 Impressive Napa Cabernets

New reviews of California Cabernet Sauvignons from 2012 vintage

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

The 2012 vintage of Napa Cabernets is proving exceptional. The long growing season allowed the grape to ripen slowly, but also produced a record-breaking crop. An early assessment of the vintage indicates that the wines are rich and ripe in flavor, with better balance than many of the 2011s.

Many of these wines, made from thick-skinned grapes, feature ample tannins and should age well over the long term. Edward Wallis' Cabernet, the top-scoring wine here, is dense and chewy, with fine-grained tannins, but also elegant, showing the balance of the vintage. It comes from 13 acres of Cabernet and other Bordeaux varieties planted in 1997 in the Diamond Mountain District. Thomas Rivers Brown is the winemaker.



Courtesy of Cliff Lede

Cliff Lede's outstanding 2012 Stags Leap District Cabernet is elegant and finessed.

Amici's Napa Valley Bottling exhibits the ripe, juicy side of the grape and vintage. Joel Aiken, who has his own eponymous label, used grapes predominantly from Rutherford and Atlas Peak, and aged 50 percent of the wine in new French oak for 20 months. At \$45, it hits the sweet spot for price and quality.

Rounding out the selection are wines from Janzen, Roberts & Rogers, Cliff Lede and Vine Cliff. H Posert is the label of the late Harvey Posert Jr. and his son Harvey Posert III.

WALLIS FAMILY ESTATE Cabernet Sauvignon Diamond Mountain District 2012 Score: 92 / \$85

Firm and dense, this is well-focused on a tight core of mineral-laced dark berry, vanilla bean, licorice and espresso notes. Chewy and elegant, supported by fine-grain tannins, this wine will best be served by short-term cellaring. Best from 2016 through 2028. 500 cases made.—*J.L.*

AMICI Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2012 Score: 90 / \$45

Delivers a core of ripe blackberry and wild berry flavors, supported by lively acidity and firm tannins. Ends with a persistent fruit- and cedar-driven finish. Drink now through 2026. 3,200 cases made.—*J.L.*

JANZEN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2012 Score: 90 / \$65

A juicy, zesty style, with a racy streak to the core of wild berry and blackberry fruit. Snappy acidity keeps the flavors lively. Ends with firm tannins. Drink now through 2024. 650 cases made.—*J.L.*

CLIFF LEDE Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District 2012 Score: 90 / \$75

Strikes a balance between elegance and finesse, with a mixed core of dark berry, savory herb, cedar, crushed rock and tobacco flavors. Firmly tannic on the finish, ending with a burst of black licorice. Drink now through 2026. 5,776 cases made.—*J.L.*

ROBERTS & ROGERS Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain 2012 Score: 90 / \$90

Packs lots of rich, extracted flavors, with a mix of roasted coffee, cedar, dark berry, loamy earth and licorice flavors. Despite the power and density on display, this shows a measure of finesse that will take some time to fully reveal itself. Best from 2016 through 2028. 850 cases made.—*J.L.*

TURLEY Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2012 Score: 90 / \$40

Pleasant, firm, rich and deftly balanced, this offers a mix of ripe dark berry, cedary oak and black licorice flavors, leading to a long, pure finish that tightens toward the end. Drink now through 2024. NA cases made.—*J.L.*

H POSERT Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley II & III 2012 Score: 89 / \$75

Exhibits a dusty, cedary edge to the dried berry, currant and dried herb flavors, combining complexity with finesse. Ends with firm, drying tannins. Drink now through 2024. 173 cases made.—*J.L.*

VINE CLIFF Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2012 Score: 89 / \$85

Features a toasty oak overlay, adding dimension to the taut core of dried dark berry, licorice and tobacco leaf flavors, ending with savory tannins. Drink now through 2026. 1,192 cases made.—*J.L.*

VINE CLIFF Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2012 Score: 88 / \$60

Firm, with a tight core of dried dark berry, savory herb, cedar, tobacco and sage notes, tilting toward progressively drier tannins. Drink now through 2024. 2,230 cases made.—*J.L.*

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