California BEST of The BEST

We tasted through hundreds of wines to arrive at this short list.

QRW TASTING TEAM

A fter five months and after more than 640 wines, *QRW's* 27th Annual Best of The Best in California is completed. We tasted what we feel are most of the Best wines. Of course, this isn't always possible. Some wines are not available because their scheduling productions come after tasting dates; some don't have enough production to enter our tastings; some are simply not sent. We insist that the wines we taste be available at retail, at restaurants, or on-line. This means we don't taste "trophy wines" — those fine but extraordinarily expensively unavailable wines (except by private subscription). In these perilous economic times, trophy wines seem an affront to economic and common sense. Since we can't buy it and you can't get it, we won't taste it. The same is true of some quasi-cult but highly allocated wines. Invariably, we get e-mails and phone calls protesting this, claiming that, since we have not tasted the trophies or cults, we have not tasted the best. But to us the argument is still rather specious. Let's face it: if you pay an enormous amount for a bottle of wine, it becomes more precious to you. You start fantasizing over it. It becomes something other than wine; it becomes something you're unlikely even to open. Such people are *vino voyeurs* — wine collectors admiring their labels and themselves.

27th

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The Wines

The **2007 Cabernet Sauvignon and Red Blends** vintages are fabulous, better than the 2005s and comparable to the 2001s. They have enough tannin to cellar for several years. We found a number of Five-Star wines, with the usual names, like Caymus, HALL, and Insignia dominating. For those needing numbers, start at 95. (However, don't miss our four-star selections, which are delicious and offer some superb values.)

2008 Merlot: For the last three out of four years, we refused to list any Merlot in Best of The Best because the quality wasn't there. It still isn't, and the five dozen we tasted did not measure up.

The **2008 Pinot Noir** are very good. With our selections, the level of quality and depth are remarkable, and Belle Glos and Donum lead the way. As with all the wines on our list, they're pricey, but Pinot Noir is hard to grow, the grape is fickle, and labor is intensive. Prices are certainly not going down.

2007/2008 Syrah and Zinfandel are very fine. The current vintages are luscious, spicy and filled with rich fruit and, most important, depth and finish. Shafer's Relentless is the best Syrah; with Zins, new names made the Best list: Bella and Dutcher Crossing.

The **2008/2009 Chardonnay** are very good. Finding top-notch Chardonnay, however, is no easy matter. The usual suspects don't disappoint: Beringer, Chateau St. Jean, Merryvale, and Sonoma Coast Vineyards. We tasted eight dozen to discover just a handful that are splendidly superior.

2009 Sauvignon Blanc is something which has not always interested us. The wines have either been engaging or mundane. But the 2009 vintage is one of the best we've had in years. Generally, the wines have flavor and texture, and are much more than appetizer wines. Most of the best come from Napa Valley and the Russian River Valley. The best Sauvignon Blanc isn't inexpensive: the Best of Show is Grgich Cellars, \$42.

California Sparkling Wines. We once hoped that California sparkling wines would play a significant part in California's wine future. It never happened. Nonetheless, Roederer's L'Ermitage, Schramsberg and J. Schram — all 2002 vintages — are the best high-end bubblies that California has to offer, and we count them as fine as Champagnes.

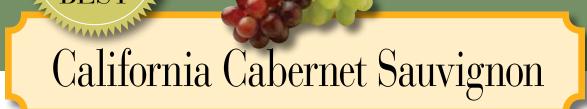
Ratings/Designation

We don't do numerical ratings at *QRW*, and we never have. It takes little imagination to understand where numerically these wines would be.

QRW designates its **very best wine** in each varietal with **Best of Show.** Then, we list those wines making **Five-Star** wines ("Outstanding") with a definition of what constitutes a Five-Star selection. We also include **Four-Star** ("Excellent") selections because they are quality driven wines, representing real value.

Note: Prices here are offered by the wineries and may vary from region to region.

— Richard L. Elia



Here are 24 wines guaranteed to thrill even the most jaded palate.

QRW TASTING TEAM

We list The Best of The Best wines followed by their tasting notes.

BEST OF SHOW

• 2008 KATHRYN HALL CABERNET SAUVIGNON SACRASHÉ VINEYARD (Napa Valley)

BEST VALUE

• 2007 FERRARI-CARANO CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Alexander Valley)

• 2008 CAYMUS CABERNET SAUVIGNON SPECIAL SELECTION (Napa Valley)

BEST

- 2007 DARMS LANE CABERNET SAUVIGNON BON PASSE VINEYARD (Napa Valley)
- 2007 DARIOUSH CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley)
- 2006 FERRARI-CARANO PREVAIL CABERNET SAUVIGNON BACK FORTY (Alexander Valley)

- 2008 HALL CABERNET SAUVIGNON DIAMOND MOUNTAIN DISTRICT (Napa Valley)
- 2007 HALL CABERNET SAUVIGNON SAGASSIA VINEYARD (Mt. Veeder/Napa Valley)
- 2007 WILLIAM HILL CABERNET SAUVIGNON BENCH BLEND (Napa Valley)
- 2007 MONTICELLO CABERNET SAUVIGNON TIETJEN VINEYARD (Rutherford/Napa Valley)

FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.



KATHRYN HALL NAPA VALLEY CABERNET SAUVIGNON



Kathryn HALL Winemaker Steve Leveque

- Kathryn HALL President and Winemaker Mike Reynolds
- 2007 DARMS LANE CABERNET SAUVIGNON BON PASSE VINEYARD (Napa Valley), \$60. Rich, lush, velvety, black fruit, mocha and nutty oak flavors.
- 2007 DARIOUSH CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley), \$80. Deep, rich, round, well-concentrated, coffee, plum and roasted nut flavors.
- 2007 FERRARI-CARANO CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Alexander Valley), \$27. Lush, velvety, elegantly wound, black fruit and dark chocolate flavors. **BEST VALUE**
- 2006 FERRARI-CARANO PREVAIL CABERNET SAUVIGNON BACK FORTY (Alexander Valley), \$85. Big, deep, rich, resounding, black fruit and coffee flavors — powerful stuff.
- 2008 HALL CABERNET SAUVIGNON DIAMOND MOUNTAIN DISTRICT (Napa Valley), \$110. Big, deep, rich, wellconcentrated, black fruit and spicy oak vanillin flavors.

- 2007 HALL CABERNET SAUVIGNON SAGASSIA VINEYARD (Mt. Veeder/Napa Valley), \$150. Big, rich, fat, succulent, elegantly knit, black fruit and mocha flavors.
- 2008 KATHRYN HALL CABERNET SAUVIGNON SACRASHÉ VINEYARD (Napa Valley), \$90. Big, walloping, earthy, ultra-rich, utterly riveting, black fruit and nutty oak flavors. BEST OF SHOW
- 2007 WILLIAM HILL CABERNET SAUVIGNON BENCH BLEND (Napa Valley), \$50. Rich, ripe, pure, lush, well-concentrated, coffee, plum and roasted nut flavors.
- 2007 MONTICELLO CABERNET SAUVIGNON TIETJEN VINEYARD (Rutherford/Napa Valley), \$65. Big, rich, round, lush, palate-coating, black fruit and mocha flavors delicious!

Darms Lane owner Larry Bump and winemaker Brian Mox



FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

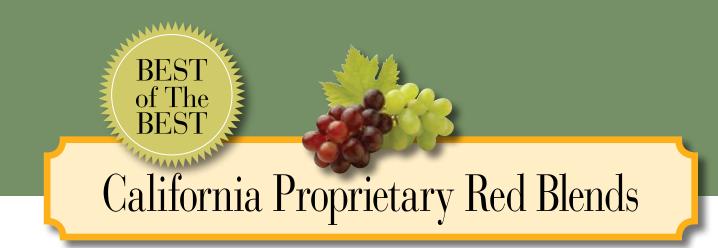
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- 2008 CAYMUS CABERNET SAUVIGNON SPECIAL SELECTION (Napa Valley), \$130. Rich, ripe, pure, silky, voluptuous, blackberry, spice and vanilla flavors.

FOUR-STAR CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Wines of outstanding character and quality; benchmarks of their type.

- 2008 BERINGER CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Knights Valley), \$27. Pure, svelte, elegant, well-knit, black fruit, chocolate and oak vanillin flavors.
- 2008 CAYMUS CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley), \$68. Big, rich, spicy, well-oaked, black fruit and cocoa flavors.
- 2006 FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA CABERNET SAUVIGNON ARCHIMEDES (Sonoma County), \$50. Big, juicy, mouthfilling, black fruit and nutty oak flavors.
- 2007 CORLEY RESERVE CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley), \$72. Well-knit, lushly textured, black fruit, mocha and nutty oak flavors.
- 2007 CORLEY CABERNET SAUVIGNON STATE LANE VINEYARD (Yountville/Napa Valley), \$65. Big, plump, wellbalanced, black fruit, coffee and roasted nut flavors.
- 2007 DOMINUS CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley), \$130. Deep, nutty, elegantly knit, black fruit and French roast flavors.
- 2006 ETUDE CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley), \$85. Big, rich, juicy, utterly delicious, black fruit and mocha flavors.

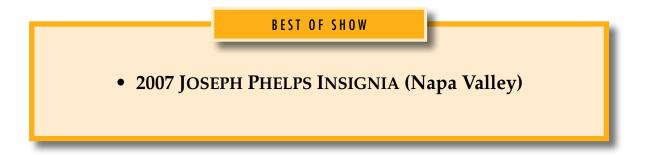
- 2006 GRGICH HILLS CABERNET SAUVIGNON YOUNTVILLE SELECTION (Napa Valley), \$135. Big, deep, earthy, wellstructured, black fruit and dark chocolate flavors.
- 2007 GROTH CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Oakville/Napa Valley), \$55. Big, chewy, somewhat smoky, black fruit and French roast flavors.
- 2008 HALL CABERNET SAUVIGNON JACK'S MASTERPIECE (Napa Valley), \$100. Plush, velvety, well-knit, black fruit and mocha flavors.
- 2005 HELLER ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Carmel Valley), \$25. Deep, taut, well-focused, black fruit and French roast flavors.
- 2006 KENWOOD ARTIST SERIES CABERNET SAUVIGNON LA BOHEME (Sonoma County), \$75. Pure, ripe, well-knit, black fruit and spicy oak vanillin flavors.
- 2007 NAPANOOK CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley), \$40. Big, rich, plump, juicy, round, black fruit and mocha flavors.
- 2007 JOSEPH PHELPS CABERNET SAUVIGNON (Napa Valley), \$43. Rich, round, lush, medium-weight, black fruit and nutty oak vanillin flavors. ♀



There's strength in numbers, as these multi-grape concoctions attest.

QRW TASTING TEAM

The signature wine for many California wineries is their proprietary red blend, the idea being that an artful mixture of grapes will lead to a more nuanced and complete wine. The following 12 wines certainly do nothing to counter that idea.



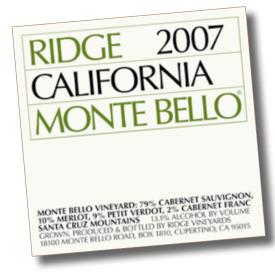
- 2007 J. LOHR CUVÉE PAU (San Luis Obispo County)
- 2007 KUNDE MERITAGE 202 (Sonoma Valley)
- 2007 RIDGE MONTE BELLO (Santa Cruz Mountains)
- 2007 SIGNORELLO PADRONE (Napa Valley)
- 2008 TY CATON TYTANIUM CATON VINEYARD (Sonoma Valley)



• 2007 BERNARDUS MARINUS (Carmel Valley)

FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA PROPRIETARY RED BLENDS

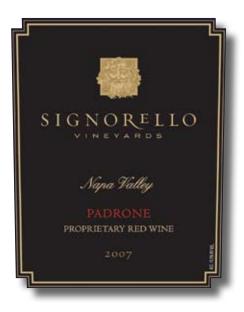
Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.



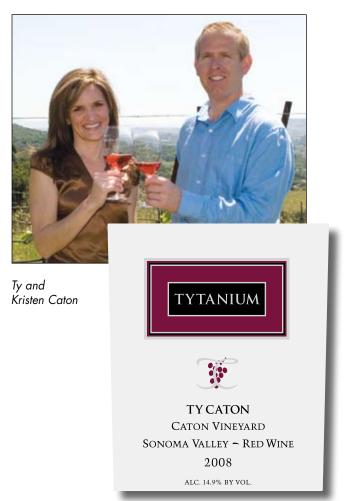


Ridge Vineyards wine team: David Gates, VP of Vineyard Operations; Eric Baugher, VP of Winemaking at Monte Bello; Paul Draper, CEO and Winemaker; and John Olney, VP of Winemaking at Lytton Springs

- 2007 JOSEPH PHELPS INSIGNIA (Napa Valley), \$175. 88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Merlot and 4% Petit Verdot. Big, deep, rich, voluptuous, black fruit, mocha and nutty oak flavors — stunning stuff. **BEST OF SHOW**
- 2007 J. LOHR CUVÉE PAU (San Luis Obispo County), \$50. 93% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot. Elegant. Blackberry. Oak spice and fig with rich blackberry flavors.
- 2007 RIDGE MONTE BELLO (Santa Cruz Mountains), \$145. 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 9% Petit Verdot and 2% Cabernet Franc. Big, deep, dense, chewy, utterly riveting, black fruit, roasted nut and coffee flavors.
- 2007 SIGNORELLO PADRONE (Napa Valley), \$110. 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Franc. Big, rich, round, earthy, black fruit and French roast flavors.



• 2008 TY CATON TYTANIUM CATON VINEYARD (Sonoma Valley), \$80. 31% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Syrah, 18% Petite Sirah, 12% Merlot and 9% Malbec. Big, rich, round, plush, black fruit, mocha and toasted nut flavors.



FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA PROPRIETARY RED BLENDS

Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

• 2007 KUNDE MERITAGE 202 (Sonoma Valley), \$30. 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 5% Malbec and 5% Petit Verdot. Big, rich, earthy, mouthfilling, black fruit, coffee, mint and vanillin flavors.



The Kunde Family

FOUR-STAR CALIFORNIA PROPRIETARY RED BLENDS

Wines of outstanding character and quality; benchmarks of their type.

- 2008 AUDELSSA SUMMIT (Sonoma Valley), \$48.95% Syrah and 5% Viognier. Deep, rich, juicy, black fruit, graphite and French roast flavors.
- 2007 BEAULIEU VINEYARDS RESERVE TAPESTRY (Napa Valley), \$60. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Big, deep, dense, chewy, black fruit, anise and nutty oak flavors.
- 2007 BERNARDUS MARINUS (Carmel Valley), \$28. 69% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc and 5% Petit Verdot. Nice, plump, lush, round, mouthcoating, black and red fruit flavors. **BEST VALUE**
- 2006 FERRARI-CARANO PREVAIL WEST FACE (Alexander Valley), \$55. 64% Cabernet Sauvignon and 36% Syrah. Rich, concentrated, well-balanced, black plum and nutty oak flavors.

- 2007 FERRARI-CARANO TRESOR (Alexander Valley), \$58. 84% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot, 4% Malbec, 4% Merlot and 2% Cabernet Franc. Rich, round, velvety, black fruit, mocha and nutty oak flavors.
- 2007 STERLING SVR RESERVE (Napa Valley), \$30. 66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Merlot and 7% Cabernet Franc. Big, rich, succulent, black fruit, coffee and nutty oak vanillin flavors.
- 2007 RODNEY STRONG SYMMETRY MERITAGE (Alexander Valley), \$55. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Malbec, 3% Merlot, 1% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot. Rich, texturous, well-knit, cassis and coffee flavors very Bordeaux-like. ♀

California Pinot Noir

The Golden State's mastery of this fickle grape is clearly on show here.

QRW TASTING TEAM

Pinot Noir is devilishly difficult to grow. But this certainly wasn't evident in *QRW*'s most recent tasting of California Pinot Noir. We encountered surprisingly few unacceptable wines (Burgundy, take note), and indeed came up with 21 that we can highly recommend.

CO-BEST OF SHOW

• 2009 BELLE GLOS PINOT NOIR TAYLOR LANE VINEYARD (Sonoma County)

• 2008 FESS PARKER PINOT NOIR BIEN NACIDO VINEYARD (Santa Barbara County)

- 2008 ARTESA ESTATE PINOT NOIR BLOCK 91-D (Carneros)
- 2008 ARTESA RESERVE PINOT NOIR (Carneros)
- 2009 BELLE GLOS PINOT NOIR TAYLOR LANE VINEYARD (Sonoma County)
- 2009 BELLE GLOS PINOT NOIR LAS ALTURAS VINEYARD (Santa Lucia Highlands)
- 2008 CHATEAU ST. JEAN PINOT NOIR DURELL VINEYARD (Sonoma Valley)
- 2008 DONUM PINOT NOIR (Carneros)
- 2008 DONUM PINOT NOIR (Russian River Valley)
- 2008 FESS PARKER PINOT NOIR BIEN NACIDO VINEYARD (Santa Barbara County)
- 2009 J. LOHR PINOT NOIR FOG'S REACH VINEYARD (Arroyo Seco)

- 2008 MERRY EDWARDS PINOT NOIR OLIVET LANE (Russian River Valley)
- 2008 PATZ & HALL PINOT NOIR BURNSIDE VINEYARD (Sonoma Coast)
- 2008 PATZ & HALL PINOT NOIR GAP'S CROWN VINEYARD (Sonoma Coast)
- 2007 SONOMA COAST VINEYARDS PINOT NOIR BALISTRERI VINEYARD FREESTONE VIEW BLOCK (Sonoma Coast)
- 2008 STEMMLER PINOT NOIR FERGUSON BLOCK (Carneros)
- 2008 RODNEY STRONG RESERVE PINOT NOIR (Russian River Valley)
- 2008 WILLIAMS SELYEM PINOT NOIR WESTSIDE ROAD NEIGHBORS (Russian River Valley)

FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIR

Outstanding. Wines of such remarkable character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

• 2008 ARTESA ESTATE PINOT NOIR BLOCK 91-D (Carneros), \$90.

Deliciously rich, round, lip-smacking, raspberry, cocoa and spice flavors.

- 2008 ARTESA RESERVE PINOT NOIR (Carneros), \$40. Rich, ripe, juicy, black cherry and French roast flavors.
- 2009 BELLE GLOS PINOT NOIR TAYLOR LANE VINEYARD (Sonoma County), \$44. Lush, pure, velvety, black cherry and chocolate flavors — perfection itself. **CO-BEST OF SHOW**
- 2009 BELLE GLOS PINOT NOIR LAS ALTURAS VINEYARD (Santa Lucia Highlands), \$44. Big, deep, powerful, chocolate, nutmeg and raspberry flavors.
- 2008 CHATEAU ST. JEAN PINOT NOIR DURELL VINEYARD (Sonoma Valley), \$40.

Big, deep, rich black cherry and spice.

- 2008 FESS PARKER PINOT NOIR BIEN NACIDO VINEYARD (Santa Barbara County), \$50. Beautifully polished, well-concentrated, elegantly knit, chocolate-cherry flavors. **CO-BEST OF SHOW**
- 2009 J. LOHR PINOT NOIR FOG'S REACH VINEYARD (Arroyo Seco), \$35. Ripe, succulent, deliciously silky, chocolate-cherry flavors.
- 2008 MERRY EDWARDS PINOT NOIR OLIVET LANE (Russian River Valley), \$60. Hefty, yet well-balanced, dark chocolate and damsun plum flavors.
- 2008 PATZ & HALL PINOT NOIR BURNSIDE VINEYARD (Sonoma Coast), \$70.
 Lush, silky, utterly riveting, black cherry, chocolate and vanilla flavors.
- 2008 PATZ & HALL PINOT NOIR GAP'S CROWN VINEYARD (Sonoma Coast), \$70. Plump, plush, lip-smacking, black cherry, spice and chocolate flavors.





ALC HATS BEVOR

FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIR

Outstanding. Wines of such remarkable character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

- 2008 DONUM PINOT NOIR (Carneros), \$65. Rich, ripe, spritely, black cherry and spicy vanilla flavors.
- 2008 DONUM PINOT NOIR (Russian River Valley), \$65. Big, deep, rich, long, black cherry and nutmeg flavors.
- 2008 RODNEY STRONG RESERVE PINOT NOIR (Russian River Valley), \$40.
 Lush, velvety, deliciously round, black cherry, chocolate and vanilla flavors.
- 2007 SONOMA COAST VINEYARDS PINOT NOIR BALISTRERI VINEYARD FREESTONE VIEW BLOCK (Sonoma Coast), \$75. Rich, lush, mouth-coating, black cherry and dark

chocolate flavors.

• 2008 STEMMLER PINOT NOIR FERGUSON BLOCK (Carneros), \$44. Elegantly knit, highly filigreed (indeed, very French) black raspberry and spice

very French), black raspberry and spice flavors.

 2008 WILLIAMS SELYEM PINOT NOIR WESTSIDE ROAD NEIGHBORS (Russian River Valley), \$75.
 Rich, concentrated, well-focused, damson plum, vanilla and spice flavors.



Anne Moller-Racke, Donum President and Winegrower



FOUR-STAR CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIR

Excellent. Wines of exemplary character and quality — benchmarks of their type.

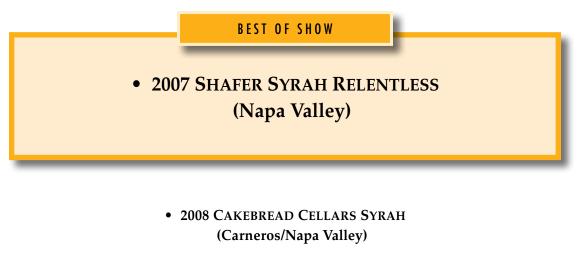
- 2007 ETUDE PINOT NOIR (Carneros), \$42. Soft, round, elegantly knit, chocolate-cherry flavors.
- 2008 FREESTONE PINOT NOIR (Sonoma Coast), \$55. Big, rich, vibrant, black cherry, spice and coffee flavors.
- 2008 LONGORIA PINOT NOIR RANCHO SANTA ROSE VINEYARD (Sta Rita Hills), \$45. Soft, plush, juicy, black cherry, spice and mocha flavors.
- 2009 TALBOTT LOGAN PINOT NOIR (Monterey), \$25. Fresh, ripe, elegantly knit, black cherry, spice and coffee flavors. **BEST VALUE**
- 2008 TALBOTT PINOT NOIR SLEEPY HOLLOW VINEYARD (Monterey), \$40. Fresh, lively, black cherry and spice flavors. ♀



Syrah is California's stealth grape, producing great under-the-radar wines.

QRW TASTING TEAM

Some years ago, we predicted great things for California Syrah. But for some reason, consumers have never cozied up to the wine, and it's become a hard-sell. 'Tis a pity, because no other red grape — not even Cabernet — is a better fit for California than sun-loving Syrah, a point proven by the following five wines.



• 2007 EPIPHANY SYRAH HAMPTON VINEYARD (Santa Barbara County)

• 2007 EPIPHANY SYRAH STAGECOACH VINEYARD (Napa Valley)

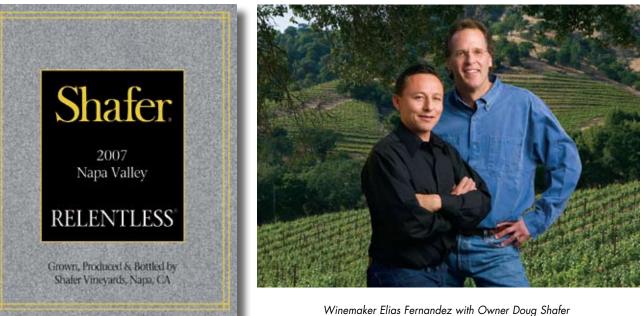
FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA SYRAH

Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

- 2008 CAKEBREAD CELLARS SYRAH (Carneros/Napa Valley), \$75. Big, rich, succulent, well-balanced, black fruit, spice and oak vanillin flavors.
- 2007 EPIPHANY SYRAH HAMPTON VINEYARD (Santa Barbara County), \$35. Big, walloping, super-ripe, black fruit, spice and nutty oak vanillin flavors.
- 2007 EPIPHANY SYRAH STAGECOACH VINEYARD (Napa Valley), \$49. Lush, elegant, highly nuanced, blackberry and vanillin flavors.
- 2007 SHAFER SYRAH RELENTLESS (Napa Valley), \$60. Big, deep, rich, resolute, black fruit, spice and nutty oak flavors simply marvelous. **BEST OF SHOW**



Photo @2008 RUSS WIDSTRAND



FOUR-STAR CALIFORNIA SYRAH

Wines of outstanding character and quality; benchmarks of their type.

• 2008 CHAMISAL SYRAH CALIFA SELECTION (Edna Valley), \$42. Plush, silky, elegant, black fruit and nutty oak flavors. T

California Chardonnay

BEST

These tasty 14 are priced to please every pocketbook.

QRW TASTING TEAM

hardonnay is California's most widely planted premium white wine grape, with 100,000 acres under cultivation. Much of this acreage is used to produce humdrum, bulk-commodity wine. Hence, the lowly reputation California Chardonnay has among so many wine drinkers. But that said, there are numerous Golden State vintners who do right by Chardonnay. They grow it in cooler zones, where it ripens slowly and achieves good acidity levels. They optimize fruit quality via close-cropping and high-density planting. And they strive during vinification to produce wines that are well structured and elegantly balanced. Here are 14 such California Chardonnays.

BEST OF SHOW
2009 BERINGER PRIVATE RESERVE CHARDONNAY (Napa Valley)
2008 MERRYVALE SILHOUETTE CHARDONNAY (Napa Valley)
2008 CHATEAU ST. JEAN CHARDONNAY BELLE TERRE VINEYARD (Alexander Valley)
2007 ERNEST & JULIO GALLO ESTATE CHARDONNAY (Sonoma Coast)
2008 KNIGHTS BRIDGE CHARDONNAY BERESINI VINEYARD

(Napa/Carneros)

• 2008 SONOMA COAST VINEYARDS CHARDONNAY (Sonoma Coast)

FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAY

Outstanding. Wines of such remarkable character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

- 2009 BERINGER PRIVATE RESERVE CHARDONNAY (Napa Valley), \$37. Rich buttery aromas; lush, nougaty, elegantly spun flavors. **BEST OF SHOW**
- 2008 CHATEAU ST. JEAN CHARDONNAY BELLE TERRE VINEYARD (Alexander Valley), \$25. Big, rich, mineral and toast flavors buoyed by good underlying acidity.
- 2007 ERNEST & JULIO GALLO ESTATE CHARDONNAY (Sonoma Coast), \$50. Elegantly turned almond and lemon curd flavors.

- 2008 KNIGHTS BRIDGE CHARDONNAY BERESINI VINEYARD (Napa/Carneros), \$65. Rich, nutty nose; rich, buttery, yet well-focused flavors.
- 2008 MERRYVALE SILHOUETTE CHARDONNAY (Napa Valley), \$65. Elegantly cast buttered toast and lemon flavors.
- 2008 SONOMA COAST VINEYARDS CHARDONNAY (Sonoma Coast), \$40. Rich, toasty nose; plush, nougaty, well-knit flavors.



Sean Foster, Vice President of Production and Senior Winemaker of Merryvale

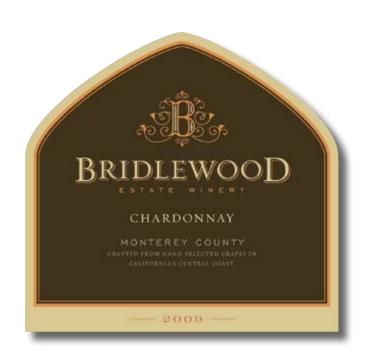


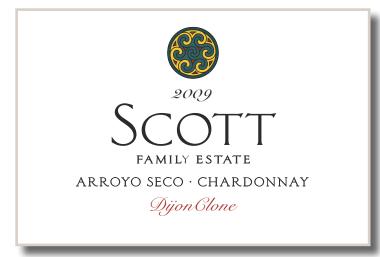


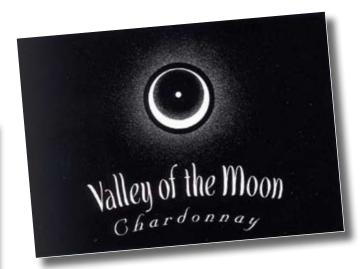
FOUR-STAR CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAY

Excellent. Wines of exemplary character and quality — benchmarks of their type.

- 2009 BRIDLEWOOD ESTATE CHARDONNAY (Monterey County), \$14.
 Ripe, succulent, utterly fetching, tropical fruit flavors.
- 2008 FERRARI-CARANO RESERVE CHARDONNAY (Napa/Carneros), \$30. Subtle, elegantly knit, tropical fruit and toast flavors.
- 2008 FREESTONE CHARDONNAY (Sonoma Coast), \$55. Taut, elegant, oatmeal flavors reminiscent of Meursault.
- 2008 J VINEYARDS CHARDONNAY (Russian River Valley), \$28. Nice, crisp, well-knit, toast and lemon curd flavors.
- 2008 PATZ & HALL CHARDONNAY HUDSON VINEYARD (Carneros), \$55. Crisp, clean, well-knit, pear and hazelnut flavors.
- 2009 SCOTT FAMILY ESTATE CHARDONNAY DIJON CLONE (Arroyo Seco), \$25. Ripe, vibrant, altogether alluring, tropical fruit flavors.
- 2007 TALBOTT CHARDONNAY SLEEPY HOLLOW VINEYARD (Monterey), \$20.
 Rich, ripe, well-knit, tropical fruit and toasted nut flavors.
- 2009 VALLEY OF THE MOON CHARDONNAY (Sonoma Coast), \$17. Crisp, clean, deliciously toasty flavors. BEST VALUE









Who said Zin isn't serious wine? Certainly not these 11.

QRW TASTING TEAM

There are many out there (you know who you are) who disparage Zinfandel, dismissing its wines as poor relations of Cabernet Sauvignon. We beg to differ. Drawn from the right vineyard sources and handled with care, Zin can evince the same deep, rich, complex character as Cabernet. As supporting evidence, we offer the following 11 wines.



• 2007 ROSENBLUM CELLARS ZINFANDEL ROCKPILE ROAD (Rockpile)

BEST VALUE

2007 KUNDE FAMILY ESTATE ZINFANDEL (Sonoma Valley)

- 2008 BELLA ZINFANDEL MAPLE VINEYARD (Dry Creek Valley)
- 2008 CAKEBREAD CELLARS ZINFANDEL RED HILLS (Lake County)
- 2008 DUTCHER CROSSING ZINFANDEL BERNIER-SIBARY VINEYARD (Dry Creek Valley)
- 2008 DUTCHER CROSSING ZINFANDEL MAPLE VINEYARD (Dry Creek Valley)
- 2007 KUNDE FAMILY ESTATE ZINFANDEL (Sonoma Valley)
- 2007 ROSENBLUM CELLARS ZINFANDEL ROCKPILE ROAD (Rockpile)

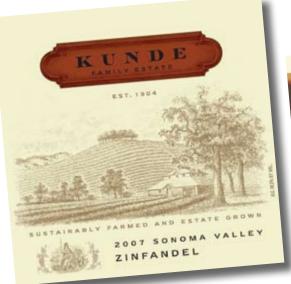
FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA ZINFANDEL

Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

- 2008 BELLA ZINFANDEL MAPLE VINEYARD (Dry Creek Valley), \$35. Beautifully ripe, lush, elegant, well-focused, black fruit and vanilla flavors.
- 2008 CAKEBREAD CELLARS ZINFANDEL RED HILLS (Lake County), \$50. Big, rich, broad-across-the-beam, black fruit and smoky oak flavors.
- 2007 KUNDE FAMILY ESTATE ZINFANDEL (Sonoma Valley), \$18. Dense, rich, plush, well-balanced, black fruit and dark chocolate flavors. **BEST VALUE**
- 2007 ROSENBLUM CELLARS ZINFANDEL ROCKPILE ROAD (Rockpile), \$30. Rich, earthy, well-concentrated, black fruit, graphite, chocolate and oak vanillin flavors. **BEST OF SHOW**

Scott Adams, Bella Winery Owner







Bella TWO PATCH

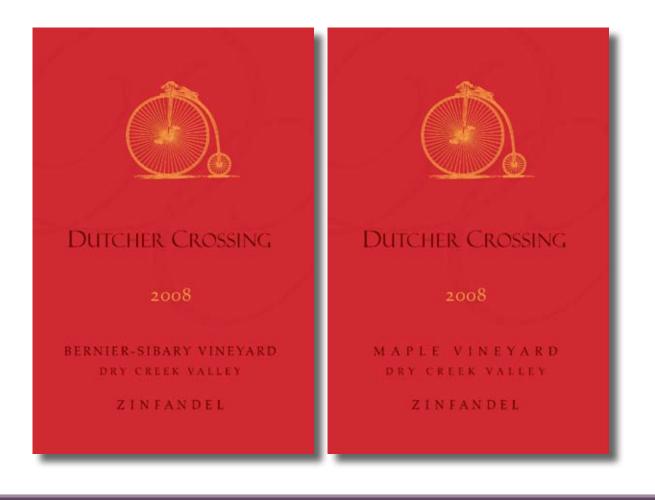
2008

alexander valley zinfandel

FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA ZINFANDEL

Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.

- 2008 DUTCHER CROSSING ZINFANDEL BERNIER-SIBARY VINEYARD (Dry Creek Valley), \$39. Ripe, zesty, succulent, well-knit, wild berry and nutty oak flavors.
- 2008 DUTCHER CROSSING ZINFANDEL MAPLE VINEYARD (Dry Creek Valley), \$40. Lush, elegant, well-concentrated, black fruit and nutty oak vanillin flavors.



FOUR-STAR CALIFORNIA ZINFANDEL

Wines of outstanding character and quality; benchmarks of their type.

- 2008 BELLA ZINFANDEL TWO PATCH (Alexander Valley), \$35. Deep, rich, full-bodied, black fruit and dark chocolate flavors.
- 2009 J. LOHR GESTURE ZINFANDEL LIMITED RELEASE (Paso Robles), \$25. Rich, ripe, silky, black fruit and mocha flavors.
- 2008 METTLER FAMILY ZINFANDEL EPICENTER OLD VINES (Lodi), \$18. Big, rich, well-concentrated, bramble and smoky oak flavors.
- 2007 ROSENBLUM CELLARS ZINFANDEL HARRIS KRATKA VINEYARD (Alexander Valley), \$40. Big, spicy, juicy, black fruit and dark chocolate flavors.
- 2007 ROSENBLUM CELLARS ZINFANDEL MAGGIES RESERVE (Sonoma Valley), \$45. Rich, ripe, well-concentrated, wild berry and smoky oak flavors. ℑ



These festive five will brighten the dreariest day.

QRW TASTING TEAM

alifornia continues to do a good job with Sauvignon Blanc, turning out fresh, lively, assertively dry wines that provide a nice counterpoint to Chardonnay.
 Here are five prime examples.

BEST OF SHOW

 2009 GRGICH HILLS ESTATE SAUVIGNON BLANC "ESSENCE" (Napa Valley)

BEST VALUE

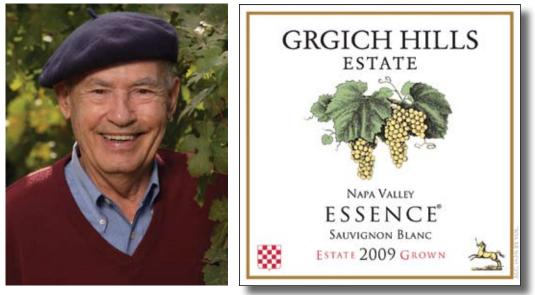
2009 STARMONT SAUVIGNON BLANC (Napa Valley)

• 2009 J. LOHR SAUVIGNON BLANC "CAROL'S VINEYARD" (Napa Valley)

- 2009 MERRY EDWARDS SAUVIGNON BLANC (Russian River Valley)
- 2009 ST. SUPÉRY DOLLARHIDE SAUVIGNON BLANC (Napa Valley)

FIVE-STAR CALIFORNIA SAUVIGNON BLANC

Wines of such extraordinary character and quality as to be in a class by themselves.



Mike Grgich

- 2009 GRGICH HILLS ESTATE SAUVIGNON BLANC "ESSENCE" (Napa Valley), \$42. Big, rich, stylish. Grassy notes, with lime and grapefruit — lots going on. BEST OF SHOW
- 2009 J. LOHR SAUVIGNON BLANC "CAROL'S VINEYARD" (Napa Valley), \$25. Gooseberry, fennel apple, and vanilla flavors. Stylish.
- 2009 MERRY EDWARDS SAUVIGNON BLANC (Russian River Valley), \$30. Ripe, succulent, snappy, crisp, melon and apple flavors.
- 2009 STARMONT SAUVIGNON BLANC (Napa Valley), \$18. Plush, delicious, ripe, elegant, vanilla and apple flavors. **BEST VALUE**
- 2009 ST. SUPÉRY DOLLARHIDE SAUVIGNON BLANC (Napa Valley), \$35. Classic wine with a soul of rich, crisp, balanced lime and grapefruit bolstered by hints of oak and apple. ℑ





Bodacious Bubblies

These five Vintage Champagnes are clearly "Best of The Best."

QRW TASTING TEAM

hampagne can elevate us in the best and worst of times. Readers of *QRW* know we're passionate about French Champagne. We consume it liberally. It has verve — a bearing and majesty all its own. And for this article we turn to "Vintage" Champagne, the bubbly which the Champenois produce three or four times a decade. Vintage means that the grapes in the Champagne come from a single harvest, not a blend of harvests and vintages like non-vintage, which is the "house wine" for Champagne estates. Vintage Champagne is pricey because the grapes are exceptional; often the experience is, too.

Below are five Vintage Champagnes that don't disappoint. We blind tasted 18 new releases, selecting only those Vintage Champagnes that are readily available retail or at restaurants. These are special event wines. The 2004 Roederer Cristal was Best of Show; the remaining wines should be considered "Outstanding," our highest rating.

BEST OF SHOW

• 2004 Roederer Cristal, Reims, \$229. In a class by itself. Even in an average vintage

Cristal delivers. Toasty, frothy, elegant, creamy, with pear and nutty notes, and a gorgeous finish.



OUTSTANDING

• 1998 Krug, Reims, \$225.

Krug is Krug: one of the greatest names in Champagne. An excellent 1998 vintage. Rich, stylish, nutty, with coffee notes, Pinot Noir finesse, and a finish that is forever.

• 1998 Nicolas Feuillatte Palmes D'or, Épernay, \$110.

Stylish, well-made, frothy, well defined flavors with apple and nutty notes, nicely textured. Elegant finish that's long.

• 1999 Taittinger Comtes Des Champagnes, Blanc de Blancs, Reims, \$150.

One of the finest Blanc de Blancs — all Chardonnay available. From an excellent 1999 vintage. Elegant, frothy, textured, rich, and inviting.

• 2000 Bollinger La Grande Année, Aÿ, \$110.

Nice, long, *lees* contact. Lemon notes. Steely, firm and well-made. Almond tones. Creamy finish that is long and attractive.

Champagne Note: To be called Champagne, the wine must be produced in Champagne, France. Everything else must be labeled sparkling wine. And while we respect tradition, we decided to tweak it a bit for this blind tasting and include a bottle of California bubbly, the **2001 Schramsberg Reserve**, **\$105**, which could easily be added to the above list. It was frothy, rich, with eternal bubble activity (invaluable because it pushes up the flavors of the wine), good long *lees* contact, and a delicious finish. \Im