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Chilling & Grilling Wines: *California Cabernet Sauvignon*



It's Memorial Day weekend, and the official start of summer for many. It is a weekend that conjures up chilling and grilling, having fun and feasting with family and friends. If there is one wine that I automatically associate with grilling, it has to be Cabernet Sauvignon. Feeling slightly patriotic, my focus this week is on California Cabernet, an eclectic array to suit most tastes and pocketbooks.



Do you ever wonder why Cabernet Sauvignon and grilled meats are such perfect partners? Grilled meats such as beef or venison or even blackened pork or lamb beg for full-bodied wines. If nicely

marbled they like lots of tannin to cut through the fat and richness. Cabernet wines usually have good acidity as well, which offers a welcome freshness when chewing down on a hearty slice. Obviously, there are other varieties and styles of wine that also work well, but today I am in the mood for Cabernet Sauvignon, with its delicious layers of black fruit smoothly intertwined with the vanilla, spice, cedar and oak.

When we think of Cabernet Sauvignon, most of us probably first think of California and the reputation it has earned over the years. But don't forget Washington and New York are also wonderful sources of delicious Cabernet Sauvignon.

Over the past two weeks I've opened up quite a few California Cabernets across a range of price points. These are some that most impressed, brought out the carnivore in me, craving a big juicy steak, or even a simple grilled hamburger.



For all our vegetarian or 'fish-etarian' readers Cabernet also pairs deliciously with rich fish such as tuna, swordfish or any fish prepared with spices or blackened in a Cajun style. Similarly, charred vegetables, baba ghanoush or vegetarian chili dishes are a treat with Cabernet Sauvignon. And even if you are just having a salad, just chew on a piece of bread if the tannins in the wine seem a little much for the fare.



California Cabernet Sauvignon Wines for Memorial Day

• **2008 Louis M. Martini Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County, $12** – Easy drinking yet over-delivers on flavor, with layers of juicy, ripe black fruit, coffee, spice, fresh herbs and a lovely earthy underbrush note on the finish.

• **2008 R Collection, Lot No. 3, Field Blend Cabernet Sauvignon, California, $12** – Rich and ripe, this wine begs for steak. Smooth texture and packed with bright, jammy black fruit, cassis, plums, vanilla, coffee bean and a hint of eucalyptus.

• **2009 Decoy Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa valley, $22** – This is the second label from famed Duckhorn winery. Intensely flavored and refreshingly juicy. Layers of flavor, showing cassis, blackberry, tobacco, spice, toffee and hints of savory dried herbs and smoke.

• **2008 Chappellet Mountain Cuvée, Napa Valley, $30** – A classic blend of around 50% Cabernet Sauvignon alongside the other Bordeaux varieties of Merlot, Malbec and Petit Verdot. Quite vibrant on the palate, ripe and rich, yet retains a freshness. Dark plums, black cherry, tobacco, cassis, sweet spices, creamy mocha and a lovely toasty, spicy finish.

• **2007 Huge Bear Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County, $55** – A big, robust, full-bodied and concentrated wine, that calls for a big steak. Rich and warming black fruit flavors persist across the palate, along with noticeable notes of coffee, spice and vanilla. Smooth texture and a creamy mouthfeel. It has a persistent, rich finish. A little on the more expensive side but if you want to bring a gift, it is one to consider.

• **NV Clif Family Winery 'The Climber' Pouch Cabernet Sauvignon, California, $17 for a 1.5 L pouch** – Ideal for your backpack, heading off on a picnic — and quite delicious. Fresh and juicy, easy drinking, smooth with a soft texture and finish. Great everyday drinker, lightweight, so easy to transport. Novel, fun packaging.

• **2006 Waterstone Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, $20** – Fairly intense nose of oak and black berry fruit compote – cassis, plums, cherries and notes of clove and spice. Smooth, supple mouth feel with enough firm tannin for structure. Warm, ripe flavors persist on the palate, leading to a reasonably long spicy finish.

• **2009 Robert Mondavi Private Selection, Meritage, California, $10** – A pretty decent crowd-pleaser, packed with ultra-ripe, jammy black fruit, creamy vanilla and lots of sweet spice. Smooth and supple on the palate with a soft finish. A blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc.

What great wines have you lined up for Memorial Day weekend feasts?
Until next week, enjoy!

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