

Home > News & Features > Tasting Highlights



13 California Reds and Whites

New reviews of bold Zinfandels, Chardonnays, Cabernets and more

MaryAnn Worobiec
 Posted: March 5, 2012



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

This report features a delicious mixed bag of wines from the Golden State, with recommended red and white bottlings in a variety of styles.

The list is heavy on Zinfandels, as associate editor Tim Fish is working on his annual Zinfandel report. One of the top-rated Zinfandel-based wines here is the Claudia Springs Vittorio's Secret, a cleverly-named "Seductive Red Field Blend," mixing Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Carignane. Orin Swift's The Prisoner is a more kitchen-sink blend of Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Syrah, Charbono and Grenache. This widely available wine is popular for its rich, jammy flavors.

For white wine lovers, there are some terrific Chardonnays to choose from, including Robert Young's from Alexander Valley. Robert Young first started appearing on wine labels in 1975 as a vineyard designate for Chateau St. Jean Chardonnays, and about 10 years ago the Young family decided to launch its own label. The Chardonnays typically sport spice and fig notes. Sonoma wines from Chasseur and Guarachi round out the Chardonnay choices.

CLAUDIA SPRINGS Vittorio's Secret Redwood Valley 2009 **Score: 91 | \$35**

This dense, ripe and rich red delivers black cherry and licorice aromas that lead to layered huckleberry cobbler and spiced cinnamon flavors, all lingering on the long finish. Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Carignane. Drink now through 2017. 185 cases made. —T.F.

TYLER FLORENCE Zinfandel Lake County Old Vine Hoodoo Creek Vineyard 2008 **Score: 91 | \$40**

Dense and distinctive, offering an appealing mix of racy red fruit and concentrated blackberry flavors, paired with complex notes of white pepper, bittersweet chocolate and toasty licorice. Tannins sneak in on the finish. Best from 2014 through 2018. 269 cases made. —T.F.

PETER FRANUS Zinfandel Mount Veeder Brandlin Vineyard 2009 **Score: 91 | \$35**

Best Franus Zin in years. Shows great density and focus, with briary wild berry aromas and complex, layered flavors of huckleberry, cinnamon and pepper. Drink now through 2018. 815 cases made. —T.F.

MAD HATTER Napa Valley 2009 **Score: 91 | \$62**

Offers a mix of melted black licorice, currant, dark berry, spice and savory herb notes that are firm, structured and rich without being weighty. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. Drink now through 2021. 1,500 cases made. —J.L.



Courtesy of Robert Young Estate Winery

From the Robert Young winery comes a terrific Chardonnay.

See Also:

- Friday, March 2, 2012
18 Spanish Reds
- Monday, February 27, 2012
12 Winning Sonoma Zinfandels
- Friday, February 24, 2012
12 Outstanding Sancerres
- Friday, February 17, 2012
10 Impressive Washington Reds
- Monday, February 13, 2012
13 California Pinot Noirs

[More from Tasting Highlights](#)

Member Quick Links

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Personal Wine List | My Library |
| Wine Ratings Search | Value Wines |
| Vintage Charts | Top 100 of 2011 |
| Insider | Advance |
| Wine Spectator School | My Courses |
| Customer Care | Logout |

Job Opportunities

M. Shanken Communications, publisher of *Wine Spectator*, *Market Watch*, *Impact* and *Food Arts*, is hiring. [See full details.](#)

Free Email Newsletters

[Sips & Tips](#) | [Wine & Healthy Living](#)
[Video Theater](#) | [Collecting & Auctions](#)

- » [View samples](#)
- » [Or sign up now!](#)
- » [Manage my newsletter preferences](#)

Classifieds



The marketplace for all your wine needs, including:

- [Wine Storage](#) | [Wine Clubs](#)
- [Dining & Travel](#) | [Wine Auctions](#)
- [Wine Shops](#) | [Wine Accessories](#)

WALLIS FAMILY ESTATE Cabernet Sauvignon Diamond Mountain District 2008

Score: 91 | \$85

Rich without being weighty, this red features a firm mix of loamy earth, dried berry, licorice and dried herb notes. Finely detailed flavors mark the complex finish. Drink now through 2018. 200 cases made. —J.L.

ROBERT YOUNG Chardonnay Alexander Valley 2009 Score: 91 | \$42

An aromatic, perfumed and floral white, displaying spicy apricot, fig and honeydew melon notes that gain depth and persistence. Drink now through 2018. 640 cases made. —J.L.

ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS Zinfandel Alexander Valley Alexander School Reserve Old Vine 2008 Score: 90 | \$45

Ripe and racy, with aromas of freshly cracked pepper and dried cherry following through to appealingly zesty plum, licorice and herb notes. Tannins sneak in on the finish. Drink now through 2017. 219 cases made. —T.F.

CHASE Zinfandel St. Helena Hayne Vineyard Reserve 2009 Score: 90 | \$75

Shows good structure and focus, although this remains tightly wound. Aromas of wild berry and toasty sage lead to layered cherry, bitter chocolate and spice flavors. Tannins grip the finish. Best after 2013. 149 cases made. —T.F.

CHASSEUR Chardonnay Sonoma County 2010 Score: 90 | \$30

Intense, rich and well-oaked, but with plenty of ripe fig, apricot, honeydew melon and spice flavors underneath. Drink now through 2019. 160 cases made. —J.L.

DE LOACH Zinfandel Green Valley of Russian River Valley Von Weidlich Vineyard Vineyard Designate 2009 Score: 90 | \$34

This crisp, lively Zin delivers appealing cherry and mineral aromas and focused raspberry, fresh sage and spice flavors. Tannins sneak in on the finish. Best from 2014 through 2018. 150 cases made. —T.F.

DE LOACH Zinfandel Russian River Valley O.F.S. 2009 Score: 90 | \$30

Bursts with fresh cherry and vanilla aromas that lead to plush, jammy raspberry and spiced cinnamon flavors. Drink now through 2017. 445 cases made. —T.F.

GUARACHI Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2010 Score: 90 | \$35

Wins points for detail and purity, showing ripe, clean notes of honeydew melon, spice, tangerine and nectarine, giving this a range of flavors as well as depth. Drink now through 2018. 478 cases made. —J.L.

ORIN SWIFT The Prisoner Napa Valley 2010 Score: 90 | \$38

Not the distinctive Zin statement this once was, but still a bold, rich red blend that's jammed with flavor. Aromas of blackberry and caramel lead to ripe plum, licorice and spicy vanilla flavors. Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Syrah, Charbo 68,100 cases made. —T.F.

Forums: [Wine Conversations](#) | [Share Tasting Notes](#) | [Share Dining Tips](#) | [Travel Tips](#) | [Buying & Selling](#) | [Off-Line Events](#) | [Wine Education](#)

Help: [Customer Care/Manage My Account](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact Us](#)

WineSpectator.com: [Become a Member](#) | [Give a WineSpectator.com Gift Membership](#) | [Wine Spectator School](#)

Wine Spectator Magazine: [Subscribe](#) | [Give a Gift Subscription](#) | [Buy Back Issues](#) | [Issue Archives](#) | [Wine Spectator Retailers](#) | [Sell Wine Spectator](#)

Advertise With Us: [Wine Spectator Magazine](#) | [WineSpectator.com](#) | [Wine Spectator Mobile](#) | [Online Classifieds](#) | [M. Shanken Media Kit](#)

About Us: [Site Tour](#) | [Editors' Bios](#) | [How We Taste](#) | [Job Opportunities](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Services: [Apps](#) | [Mobile](#) | [E-mail Newsletters](#) | [RSS](#) | [Video Podcast](#) | [Gift Center](#) | [Online Wine Courses](#) | [Retailer Club](#)

Other M. Shanken Sites: [Trade News—Impact and Market Watch](#) | [Cigar Aficionado](#) | [Food Arts](#) | [The Whisky Advocate](#) | [Impact Databank Reports](#)

Categories: [Wine Ratings](#) | [News & Features](#) | [Collecting](#) | [Learn Wine](#) | [Dining & Travel](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Video](#) | [For the Trade](#) | [Wine Shops](#) | [Classifieds](#)

Copyright © 2012 Wine Spectator Online