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THEATER OF NATURE

Wine Tasting Report: A(nother) Day in the Dust, Napa – 2012

Several of the top wineries were pouring including Alpha Omega, Conn Creek, Flora Springs, Freemark Abbey, Frog's Leap, Honig, Monticello, Provenance, Quintessa, and Staglin among others. Quality was not wanting.



CLINTON STARK

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A Day in the Dust, the annual trade tasting focused on Napa wines from Rutherford, was hosted this year by Raymond Vineyards. 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon and 2011 Sauvignon Blanc were featured.



Theater of Nature: Raymond Vineyards, host of Day in the Dust 2012

It was a hot day (and I just read that July was the hottest on record for the entire country) so it was a welcome relief to enter The Crystal Cellar which

was nicely chilled, and quite dark. Candles gave the place a bit of a swanky atmosphere — if you've been to Raymond before you know there's a bit of a quirky hipster vibe (Studio 54?) to the place as a result of gregarious owner Jean-Charles Boisset, who was named to Decanter's top 50 power players a few years back. My first meeting with Jean-Charles, which would happen on this day, was not exactly my finest hour, far from the suave intro that I'd anticipate. James Bond I was not. And as yet another aside I should point out the women here were a bore (see photo at bottom). But more on that in a moment. First the wine.

Several of the top wineries were pouring including Alpha Omega, Conn Creek, Flora Springs, Freemark Abbey, Frog's Leap, Honig, Monticello, Provenance, Quintessa, and Staglin among others. Quality was not wanting. Over the years I've come to realize that this is one of the best tastings that I get the privilege to attend. Not only do you get to revel in some fine juice, but you're apt to run into the owners at each of the stations. Usually they're pouring and telling stories. There's plenty of laughs and it's a reminder of just how tight knit this group of Napa growers, winemakers, marketers and — all told —

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BY CLINTON STARK

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the wine community at large really is.

The wines themselves, especially the Cabs, did indeed exhibit that beautifully expressive Napa quality that many associate with the region: rich, fruit forward, layered. These are not wallflowers.



The Crystal Cellar – clubby atmosphere.

SB is not my favorite varietal. At its worst I find that it can taste as if someone mashed-up some flowers into a glass of water. *Ack, too floral!* Of course, that's an extreme (and silly) generalization. Well made Sauvignon Blanc can be gorgeous, and is often a perfect companion as I'd discover on a hot day. Fortunately there were several extremely well made examples on this day.

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It was difficult to pick the standouts (a wild guess would peg about two-thirds of these wines at 90+ points).

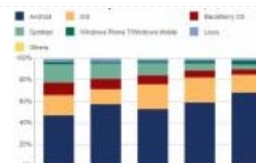
And it was also tricky navigating this tasting which was, for all its dramatic stylings, a wee bit cramped. Still, a little hustle never hurt anyone, and it was enjoyable seeing so many familiar faces, many whom I hadn't seen since the [previous year's Day in the Dust](#) tasting.

A Day in the Dust 2012

2011 Alpha Omega Sauvignon Blanc Rutherford
Estate "1155"

An estate wine with 1155 referring to the address. Although Alpha Omega just planted some Semilion grapes for blending, this one is 100% pure SB. It's an extraordinary wine. Balanced, with just enough herbaceousness without entering that cloying, happy farm.

2009 Conn Creek Cabernet Sauvignon Hozhoni Vineyard
Rutherford



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BY CLINTON STARK

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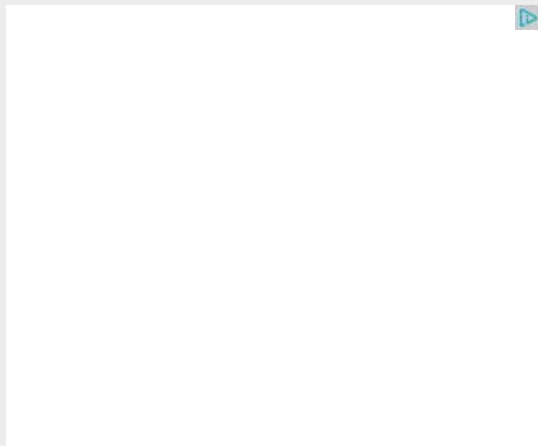
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Succulent (I just had to use that word). Yes, big and bold, but also smooth and textured. There's light berries like raspberry here, with gorgeous vanilla notes that I always welcome. A beauty by winemaker Mie McGrath.

2009 Frog's Leap Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford

I thought all three Frog's Leap wines — the others were a 2010 Merlot, 2011 Sauvignon Blanc — were exceptional. But push to shove, I'd rank the Cab as tops. Owner John Williams, along with Paul Moschetti, comprises the winemaking team, and himself was also pouring. A \$75 wine, which by Napa standards is on the reasonable end of the pricing spectrum, once given a little time to breath, you're going to be knocked off your socks by that earthy, tobacco, and — heck, yep — *farmyard* cornucopia. There's a lot happening and it's superbly focused. It comes out in October, and this advance preview was a treat.



[MORE NAPA WINE COVERAGE: A Day in the Dust - '08 Rutherford Cab tasting report](#)

2009 Honig Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford (Campbell Vineyard)

A single vineyard Cab. Winemaker Kristin Belair has another winner in

this red beauty. At \$80 another value play (yes, odd that I find myself using "value" in a wine almost pushing a Benjamin Franklin, but sophisticated high-end fine wine out of Napa is not exactly cheap these days — compare it to the best of France, and you're definition of value recalibrates). Dark berries, some anise surround some delicate spices (I love that). Mild tannins, so it could be the ready drinker of the bunch.

2009 Martin Estate Collector's Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

Lovely. Lush. Deep. Three words that popped out from my tasting notes. Another stellar Napa example of hallmark Cab. \$125 but so so worth it. Age this one. Thank me in 2025, and remember to please have horseradish on the ready with that seared lamb when we pop it open together.

2008 Peju Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford

I know Peju well. I've got what seems to be a boatload in the cellar, having been a club member for several years. Peju reds in particular have an unmistakable profile. I'd almost wager I could pick out a Peju cab from a line-up of Rutherford reds 9 times out of 10. *Almost* wager. Under pressure is the most difficult time I find to taste, and surely I'd slip up. But, hey, I like to talk a big game. But first another social gaff, this one not nearly as embarrassing as my brief encounter with Mr. Boisset. I mistaked owner Herta "Hell of a Bottle" Peju for her daughter Lisa when I introduced myself. Oops. Then again, she was wearing Lisa's badge so that's my defense, and besides I'm sure she didn't mind the mix-up. Herta is a wonderful personality, an easy-going, intelligent conversationalist and if you've been to the (also unique) grounds at Peju you'll immediately understand her fingerprints are all over the place. This '08 Cab is a standout among standouts. Black currant, lush and vibrant with a

long elegant finish. Highly recommended.

2008 Sequoia Grove Cabernet Sauvignon Morisoli Vineyard



Here's a medium bodied sleeper. It's easy to whiz right past the Sequoia tasting room which is just to the right of highway 29 as you head North. I wholeheartedly suggest you seek their wines out, and if you do find yourself in the tasting room, make sure you do the barrel tasting.

2009 Staglin Salus Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford

Wow. Classy, austere. Many might not appreciate the dry finish, but it's a remarkable Cab. My palate tends to veer to the lean, to the mineral-like, to the tight and *anything-but-sweet*. It's how I like my espresso (absolutely no sugar ever, ever), and it's how I like a nice red too.

... and, about that brief non-James Bond moment with Jean-Charles Boisset...

Okay, so here's the deal. I had to bolt after this tasting, and get back to Silicon Valley for a meeting. And time was tight, and the Prius not exactly a trackstar. So I visited the lieu, washed my hands (this is key!) and made a hasty exit. Hands not fully dry. And who should pop out from the backroom as I make my way to the exit? None other than Jean-Charles Boisset, proprietor of Raymond Vineyards. I had not met him before, so this was a pleasant surprise... but: about that timing, and the semi-wet hand. He immediately reaches for my hand, "so nice to finally meet you." *Oh, man*. His expression was priceless, and I felt so embarrassed. It all happened so quickly. And at this point you really have two choices: pull your hand away, or go through with the shake. I did the latter, besides it all happened in a nano-second. And so I gave him the ol' clammy, semi-damp handshake. Not the the stuff of Bond (why do I keep making those references?). The only thing you can do afterwards is to stumble through some explanation of having just been in the men's room, etc. etc. None of that can sound right at this point. Okay, end of ridiculous confession. Now, off to Google some Miss Manners.



To be honest, the women, though smartly dressed, were a bore..



CLINTON STARK

Clint writes about Silicon Valley, film, California wine ([Stark Sips](#)), theater ([ATCA member](#)) and tech (including his trusty Droid and Canon EOS 60D). A would-be NHLer if it weren't for the clarinet, he tries in vain to direct [Loni](#) on [Stark Insider TV](#). He's held executive marketing roles at Cisco, EMC and Salesforce.com, and is active with start-ups across the valley.

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