

Premiere Napa Valley 2014

Possibly the best week of the year

By Denman Moody
Author, *The Advanced Oenophile*

For many in the wine trade, Premiere Napa Valley is considered the best week of each year. The wines served are among the rarest and best in the world. Generally, five cases or less are made by either one winery or a collection of wineries (for example, CONSTANT, David Arthur Vineyards and Reynolds Family Winery crafted a Cabernet Sauvignon from the very best grapes from Stags Leap District, Diamond Mountain and Pritchard Hill).

One huge attraction was the vintage presented in almost all the offerings — 2012 — which has been universally held by Napa winemakers as one of the best ever. After tasting close to a hundred of these fabulous offerings, I agree.

Prior to the morning tasting on February 22, when I tasted more great wines in three hours than a human should be allowed to do, I visited eight wineries a day — Feb. 20 and 21 — and many of these wineries were hosting another five or more wineries besides their own. By far the largest selection I encountered was at the Far Niente caves, where more than 20 Oakville Winegrowers were strutting their stuff including such icons as Harlan Estate, Bond, Opus One, Far Niente, Nickel & Nickel and others.

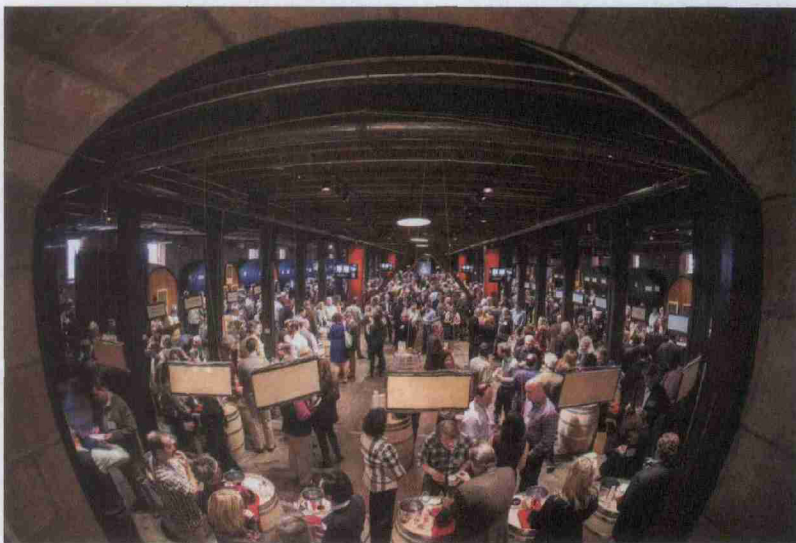
It was during these two days that I concentrated on the wineries that showed their current releases — items available for purchase by my readers now. Here is a list of the best of the best. If I loved a wine, but thought it was overpriced, I did not include it, as is always my practice.

The first five wines come from a “Breakfast and Petite Sirah” tasting:

Tres Sobres Petite Sirah 2010 — \$45



The luxurious velvet-ensconced Red Room at the Raymond Winery. ♦ The barrel room at the Culinary Institute of America was packed with trade sampling the lots for the auction.



Chase Cellars Petite Sirah Hayne Vineyard 2010 — \$50

Turnbull Petite Sirah 2010 — \$40

Jacob Franklin Petite Sirah Chavez-Leads Vineyard 2010 — \$45

Jacob Franklin Petite Sirah Hayne Vineyard 2010 — \$65

Frank Family Petite Sirah Reserve 2010 — \$65

I didn't encounter too many whites,

but two blew me away:

Spottswoode Sauvignon Blanc 2012 — Year in and year out, along with Merry Edwards Sauvignon Blanc, pretty much unrivalled — \$36

Franciscan Equilibrium White Wine 2012 — Best new white blend (Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Muscat) I've had in years. So good, I'm still trying to figure out how to describe it and do it justice! \$25

And here are the rest—all reds:

Frank Family Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2010 – \$85 (no increase in price for at least five years)

Swanson Merlot Oakville 2010 – \$38

Nickel & Nickel Cabernet Sauvignon

Sullinger Vineyard 2010 – \$100

Larkmeade Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 – \$70

Pine Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District 2011 – \$50

Chimney Rock Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District 2010 – \$75

Rocca Cabernet Sauvignon Collinetta Vineyard 2009 – \$85

Tournisol Proprietor's Blend 2009 – \$75

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My most startling discovery on this trip was seeing the dramatic change at Raymond Winery since it was purchased by the James Bond-type, vibrant, possibly best dressed man in the world — Jean-Charles Boisset. The Red Room Lounge, pictured here, is the location of just one of about five choices a visitor has to engage in tastings, blendings, sniffings (no kidding), and various other variably-priced wine related activities. This is now unquestionably one of the premier locations for visitors in the Napa Valley. Although all the whites and reds were very good, the two wines I most enjoyed were:

Raymond Cabernet Sauvignon St. Helena 2009 – \$85, and

Raymond Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2010 – \$85

Because of the mass of people attending this weekend of events, rooms were hard to come by. The ever-dependable El Bonito Motel was ever-dependable,

comfortable, rather centrally located south of St. Helena, and one of the few places available for around \$150. Short on amenities, but they do have a complimentary continental breakfast in the lobby.

One night, because of a cancellation, we were able to secure a room at the Auberge du Soleil. We were once again completely spoiled (third stay there over the years) with the room, amenities, restaurant, room service, grand view of the Napa Valley from the room, and a perfect location near Rutherford on the Silverado Trail. Extremely pricey, but worth it. Be sure and dine there during daylight hours if possible for the view — indoors or outdoors — your choice.

WINE & FOOD WEEK, JUNE 2-8

Wine & Food Week celebrates “10 Years of Magic” June 2-8 with gastronomic grandeur featuring scores of events with more than 500 wines, 50 restaurants, leg-

endary wine producers and culinary personalities. Most events are held at venues in The Woodlands, with unique experiences throughout Houston.

Wine education classes, chef demonstrations, and casual to fine wine-and-dine experiences lead up to Saturday's Wine Rendezvous Grand Tasting & Chef Showcase where chefs compete for Wine & Food Week's Waterford Crystal *Chef of Chefs* Award and a \$5,000 cash prize. For more information or tickets visit WineandFoodWeek.com. ●



Denman Moody is the former publisher of *Moody's Wine Review*, which the *Washington Post* said was "...certainly the best publication in this country for tracking the state of rare and exotic wines." He was also the contributing editor on rare wines for the *International Wine Review* in New York from 1984-1990. He is an author; freelance wine writer and wine consultant. Denman is the Texas broker for the wines of Dr. Konstantin Frank, Finger Lakes, N.Y. TheAdvancedDenophile.com.