

Cabernet sauvignon continues to be a favorite

If popularity is any indication then cabernet sauvignon is the best grape for making wine. I recently asked a dozen people what they prefer to drink if their choices were between cabernet sauvignon and merlot. All answered cabernet sauvignon.

This grape has been the backbone of the wine industry in Bordeaux for centuries. It is at the heart of the Californian quality wine trade. Cabernet sauvignon is being highly planted throughout the southern hemisphere. Grapes native to Italy and Spain are being supplanted by the cabernet sauvignon. The varietal grows best in moderate temperatures and on gravelly soil but can grow in most conditions.

California has its fair share of acreage dedicated to this grape. The counties of Napa and Sonoma have the most favorable combination of temperatures and soil for this varietal. It is found planted throughout the state with varying degrees of success. In areas where the temperature is too warm the grape lacks the acid needed to produce wines of high quality. In areas that are too cold for the grape the fruit traits of the varietal never fully mature.

The label of a wine bottle can tell you a lot about the quality of the wine that you will be experiencing. Is the winery older and have an established reputation or is it a new venture?



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Wine Talk

Another key point on the label is where the grapes were grown. Well rounded cabernet offerings are the norm for Napa. Sonoma cabernet sauvignon offerings generally are more fruit forward. Reading the label will help you pick out a Californian cabernet sauvignon just right for your tastes.

The 2008 Brownstone Winery cabernet sauvignon (\$10) was created from grapes that were sourced from throughout the state of California. The back of the label states that the wine was "Cellared and Bottled by Brownstone Winery Lodi, California." Lodi is noted for its zinfandel grapes but other varietals are grown there. The wine-makers at Brownstone need to source fruit from other regions in order to get the highest quality cabernet sauvignon that they can produce.

This offering was created from cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petite sirah. It was aged in American oak for about six months before bottling. This is not a wine that you would want to cellar for any length of time. Drink it

now to get the most out of this wine. It features plenty of good fruit traits. Look for red currant, cherry and berry. It is affordable enough to have with hamburgers but big enough to enjoy with a grilled steak.

The bottle of 2008 Vampire Cabernet Sauvignon (\$10-15) states that it is a North Coast offering. This refers to the North Coast AVA (American Viticultural Area) which includes the counties of Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Solano and Sonoma. Cabernet sauvignon is highly planted and a prized crop in this area.

This wine was created from a blending of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and syrah to provide the consumer with a very fruit forward wine styling. Look for cherry, raspberry, plum, cassis and a bit of rhubarb. Traits of vanilla, oak and smoke add to the complexity of this nice wine. Try this with a big piece of red meat.

In 1974 Roy Raymond Sr. decided to put a 33 year career at Beringer Vineyards behind him. He and his two sons, Walter and Roy Jr. went into the wine making business for themselves. Purchasing land in Napa, California was easier to do back then than it is today and the Raymond family ended up with three parcels in the county. The two northern vineyards concentrate on cabernet sauvignon production. The Jameson Canyon Vineyard in the south-

ern part of the county is planted with chardonnay, merlot and sauvignon blanc.

The winery was sold by the Raymond family in 1989 to the Japanese brewer, Kirin. In 2009 the Boisset family of Burgundy, France added the company to their portfolio of winery holdings.

The 2008 Raymond Reserve Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$25-30) was created from a blending of 85 percent cabernet sauvignon, 12 percent merlot and 3 percent petite sirah. If you are going to open a bottle any time soon make sure that you aerate or decant the wine before serving. At first this wine had cranberry, currant and licorice traits. With an hour of resting in the glass the wine developed traits of blueberry, raspberry, cherry, plum, bell pepper, vanilla and wood. This bold wine needs food to bring out its best.

Not all cabernet offerings are created equal. At the end of the wine making process, the blending skills of the wine maker are an important part of the finished offering. There are very few cabernet sauvignon wines that are 100 percent cabernet sauvignon. At the beginning of the process the land that the grapes are grown on is of ultimate importance.

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