

## Big Bold Reds For Fall Fare

*John Mariani - October 26, 2023*

*Find the right wine to celebrate autumn.*

Fifty years ago, when the wines of California stirred worldwide interest for their sun-rich body and big flavors, many of the state's vintners made their overnight reputation on the basis of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, with alcohol levels above 14.5% alcohol, in contrast to Bordeaux models that were almost always blends of varietals in addition to Cabernet Sauvignon and with alcohol levels that rarely topped 14%. The California style could be impressive—very fruit forward, massive tannins and alcohol that after one glass could fatigue the palate.

Over time many of California's red wines remained big and bold but, led by the so-called Meritage Society members, blending Cabernets with Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot has become commonplace and has made for far better balanced wines. Still, there is a large audience for muscular reds, which in some cases, like Italy's Amarone dell Valpolicella, had always aimed for massive body and high alcohol, though modern-day Amarones have toned down.

The playing field is somewhat more even these days, not least because global warming is creating hotter, bigger wines with more sugars to turn into alcohol. If you like that style, here is an array I think you'll find very appealing. But, as my notes below show, not every big wine needs to have big alcohol.

### **Larkmead Solari 2019 (\$200)**

If you like 'em big and bold, this is a fine example of that Napa Valley style of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon aged in 78% new oak. The alcohol is 14.9% and the wine can use some age to settle things down, but this is a formidable example of old-style California red wine making, with spice and firm tannins. Only 946 cases produced.

