

Larkmead



FAMILY ESTATE FOUNDED 1895



“Sauvignon Blanc aged for nine months in 39% new French oak. 645 cases made. Released in April 2024. Smells of white flowers and lemon oil. Beautiful floral notes of lemon pith, grapefruit and green apple have a wonderful, electric sizzle thanks to fantastic acidity. Bright, juicy and delicious. Drink 2023-2027.

- Alder Yarrow | April 2024

17.5

Jancis Robinson

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Sonoma and Napa get savvier

by Alder Yarrow - April 2024

I try to keep up with as much of what's going on in the wine world as I can. I accomplish this by tasting widely, reading widely, and talking with my colleagues in the industry whenever the opportunity allows. While I think I'm far from masterful at such activities, I don't often find myself blindsided by emerging trends in the wine industry. But in 2023, when according to the [Silicon Valley Bank State of the Wine Industry Report](#) California Sauvignon Blanc was the only grape variety that showed positive sales depletion growth (what distributors actually sell to their retailer or restaurant customers) over the prior year, I can honestly say I never saw that coming.

With that little statistic as the spark, suddenly news outlets within and outside the world of wine were reporting on the state-wide shortage of Sauvignon Blanc grapes, and the fact that bottles were flying off of shelves and wine lists everywhere. . . . Given all the buzz surrounding the category, I thought it was past due time for me to do some serious tasting and find out whether anything has really changed. To be clear, California makes a *lot* of Sauvignon Blanc, so I decided to focus on Napa and Sonoma for this report. I tasted 150 wines, primarily from the 2021 and 2022 vintages.

Before I get to my tasting notes, let me make a few observations. The predominant Napa style of Sauvignon Blanc has long been heavily influenced by two factors. First and perhaps most importantly was Robert Mondavi's visionary idea to release a barrel-aged Sauvignon Blanc under the name 'Fumé Blanc' in 1966 and charge more for this 'serious' version of Sauvignon Blanc. The considerable commercial success of this wine firmly cemented Napa's idea to model even its white winemaking traditions on Bordeaux.

Secondly, while many producers in Napa have long made Sauvignon Blancs, until 2002 they were mostly inexpensive wines that, by virtue of being for sale in the spring or early summer following harvest, produced the cash flow useful to cover expenses until the (typical) autumn release of a winery's red wines. But in 2002, Lail Vineyards was convinced by their winemaking consultant at the time, Philippe Melka, to make a luxury wine in the style of a fine dry white Bordeaux.

My tasting revealed that Napa has thankfully become much more adept at making barrel-fermented and aged Sauvignon Blanc. In the past, most of these wines tasted primarily of new oak rather than fruit. Most of the barrel-fermented wines I tasted from Napa for this report, even those using 100% new oak, were much more balanced than in the past. Winemakers have clearly figured out the right oak to use, and how to utilise lees-ageing and [bâtonnage](#) to much better effect.

My top-scoring wines are listed below.

Larkmead, Lillie 2022 Napa Valley [17.5]

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13.5% | Drink 2023-2027 | \$75 RRP

