

Larkmead's Firebelle Red Blend: When Old Vines Meet Bold Flavor

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Here's something I didn't know until recently: some Napa Valley wineries have been around since 1895. That's older than your great-great-grandparents' wedding photos! [Larkmead Vineyards](#) is one of Napa Valley's oldest family-owned wineries, and they've been perfecting their craft for over a century—they've had plenty of time to figure things out!

So when a bottle of their [2022 Firebelle Estate Red Blend](#) showed up for review, LittlePinkTop was beyond excited. This isn't just any Merlot-dominant blend (77% Merlot, 23% Cabernet Sauvignon, if you're keeping track). It's crafted from old-vine Merlot blocks on the Larkmead estate's 115 acres in northern Napa Valley.

On the Palate: Where Magic Happens

Here's where the Firebelle really shows off. You get these vibrant bramble berry notes that offer a refreshing juiciness—it's bright and alive in your mouth. But then (plot twist!) the darker, more savory notes start building: cocoa, cedar, and soft leather that add depth and complexity.

The velvety tannins broaden at the midpalate, showcasing the pedigree and power that comes from those old vines. After 22 months in French oak, the wine has this beautiful balance between power and elegance. The finish? It lingers gracefully with a soft, cocoa-tinged warmth and a final hint of sun-ripened berries. Chef's kiss!

The Cheese Pairing You Didn't Know You Needed

But you know what? Let's talk about how to actually *enjoy* this wine, because drinking it alone seems like a missed opportunity.

The Ultimate Pairing: Brie + Aged Gouda

Trust me on this one! The creamy richness of Brie mellows out those tannins beautifully, while the wine's fruit notes cut right through the fat. And Aged Gouda? The nutty, caramel notes in that cheese complement the ripe fruit and oak influence in the blend perfectly.

Pro tip: If you're feeling extra fancy and want to start with a white, Larkmead also makes a limited-production Lillie Estate Sauvignon Blanc that pairs insanely well with chèvre (goat cheese).

The Backstory Makes It Better

What makes this wine even more special? The estate is run by the fourth generation of the Solari-Baker family. Kate Solari-Baker grew up on the property back when Napa Valley was more rural, and she and her late husband Cam restored her father Larry Solari's vision by returning winemaking to the estate in 1995. Kate's also a talented artist whose mixed media collages (made using her mother's original ledgers!) hang on the winery walls.

The current winemaker, Avery Heelan, came to Larkmead after working as Cellar Master at Screaming Eagle, and vineyard manager Nabor Camarena has this beautiful philosophy: "I do not farm the vineyard. I listen and it tells me what it needs."

[The 2022 Larkmead Firebelle Estate Red Blend](#) is proof that when you combine old vines, organic farming practices, talented winemakers, and genuine family dedication spanning four generations, something truly special happens in the bottle. It's sophisticated without being stuffy, powerful without being overwhelming, and absolutely delicious with the right cheese. With only 1,103 cases produced, this is one of those wines worth seeking out at [Larkmead's website](#).