

California's Red Wines

By Denise Castillon - December 2025

LARKMEAD VINEYARDS

Larkmead Vineyards stands as one of Napa Valley's oldest family-owned estates, originally founded in 1895 and now guided by the Solari-Baker family. Its 115-acre property in Calistoga has been under vine since the mid-1800s, witnessing Napa's evolution from a rugged frontier to a world-renowned wine region. Larkmead has contributed to that rise, with its grapes featured in celebrated Napa wines for



generations. The estate has remained in the Solari family since 1948, a continuity that has allowed decades of thoughtful study and refinement. Since beginning their modern winemaking era in 1997, the family has focused on precise vineyard and cellar practices that reveal the true character of their land.

The Larkmead wine collection features four prominent labels, each showcasing a different facet of the estate's diverse vineyards. Among them, the Firebelle Estate Red Wine is a standout—a Bordeaux-style blend led by Merlot, a variety long associated with Calistoga. Firebelle offers Merlot's signature plush texture and expressive aromatics, supported by added structure from other classic Bordeaux grapes. Grown in rich loam soils layered with clay and gravel, Larkmead's Merlot demonstrates both power and elegance, continuing the region's strong tradition of producing exceptional wines from this variety.

The 2022 Larkmead Firebelle Red Blend shows its Merlot-driven elegance from the first swirl, offering rich aromas of morello cherry, mulberry, blackcurrant, and raspberry compote layered with hints of black tea, dark chocolate, and baking spice. On the palate, vibrant bramble berries and savory notes of cocoa, cedar, licorice, and soft leather add depth to its full-bodied character. The wine is handsomely structured yet plush, with fine, velvety tannins that broaden at midpalate and support flavors of black cherry, mocha espresso, and subtle tobacco. It finishes polished and lingering, leaving a graceful warmth and a final impression of sun-ripened berries.

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