

Larkmead Vineyards: *This historic Calistoga property, under the ownership of the Solari-Baker family since 1948, now counts 115 acres of vineyards, certified as organically farmed in 2023. The team recently top-grafted Merlot over to Sauvignon Blanc to increase production of that wine, sold under the Lillie moniker. "I really like the whites in 2024; they're fresh, but also really floral," said winemaker Avery Helen, as we tasted the 2024 Sauvignon Blanc Lillie with consultant Maayan Koschitzky. "We're working on opening up the canopy to get more golden clusters but maintain freshness," she said. Barrel fermented, the Sauvignon Blanc balances richness and freshness. It also mitigates fire and heat risk by increasing the proportion of white grapes on the property.*

Still, most of the production here is red, led by Cabernet Sauvignon. Water usage has been ratcheted way down over the years, with some of the vines only requiring about four gallons per plant in recent vintages. Under former winemaker and consultant Dan Petroski, the red wines were picked at lower sugars, leading to leaner wines. The current style is what I would describe as a healthy medium—adding enough flesh to give the impression of generosity, while avoiding excessive ripeness and dried-fruit characters. With such long-term family ownership, Larkmead has been able to keep prices for most of their wines reasonable in the context of Napa Valley, making them a winery worth following.



2023 THE LARK ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 96+ points

Only offered to club members and only bottled in top vintages (the 2019 was the most recent release), Larkmead's 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon The Lark features soaring florals and raspberry nuances above deeper notes of black cherries. Full-bodied and concentrated, it's plush and velvety, finishing long, with loads of dried spice notes.



2023 SOLARI ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 95+ points

Blended from the property's best-performing blocks, Larkmead's flagship 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari—easily distinguished by its black label—offers up notes of black cherries, dark chocolate and ground cloves. It's full-bodied, rich, deep and concentrated, with an almost creamy mouthfeel, plenty of ripe tannins and a lush, velvety-textured and long-lasting finish.



2023 ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 93 points

Larkmead's 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate—identifiable by its white label—is 100% varietal. Scents of crushed stone accent black cherries and red raspberries in this pretty wine, which also shows ample richness and concentration. It's medium- to full-bodied, somewhere between silky and velvety in texture, with a long finish.



2023 FIREBELLE ESTATE RED BLEND 91 points

Usually a Merlot-dominated blend, the 2023 Firebelle is the first vintage in a while to include Cabernet Franc and the first ever to include Petit Verdot. Black cherries, dried spices and cigar-wrapper notes develop on the nose of this medium- to full-bodied wine. Framed by silky, fine-grained tannins and featuring a softly dusty finish, it may be enjoyed over the next decade or so.



2024 ESTATE LILLIE SAUVIGNON BLANC 92 points

Larkmead's 2024 Sauvignon Blanc Lillie was entirely barrel-fermented. Despite that, the oak influence is muted, leaving the bold melon, fig and stone fruit to shine in this medium-bodied effort. It's ripe and silky in texture across the mid-palate, then adds bright grapefruit notes on the lingering, mouthwatering finish.