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Larkmead Vineyard Research Block Series

September 19, 2026 - By Peter Goldman

Continuing my series on climate adaptation in Napa's vineyards, I had the great pleasure to meet with Avery Heelan, Winemaker at Larkmead Vineyards located in the Calistoga AVA on 115 acres.

As we walked the vineyards, Avery confirmed, "climate change is about extremes, 2023 and 2025 are the two coolest seasons I have seen, while the 2022 heatwave brought temperatures of 120°F (48.9°C)".

As such, Larkmead is experimenting with shade cloth, misters, and many of the other vineyard adaptations I have mentioned in the two previous parts of this series.

Where Larkmead stands out regarding adaptation is their decision to install a three acre "Research Block" in 2020.

This was done with the express goal of exploring non-typical grape varieties while according to Avery "maintaining our commitment to Cabernet Sauvignon as a varietal that defines our estate".



Some of the red varietals include: Tempranillo, Shiraz, Malbec, Touriga Nacional, Charbono, and Aglianico.

As the vines mature in Larkmead's Calistoga Research Block, Avery gains a better understanding of these varietals and how they may one day become primary blending grapes with Cabernet Sauvignon or perhaps create their own blends.

To this end, with the 2023 vintage, Larkmead is releasing two new red blends:



Contour: 40% Tempranillo, 28% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Aglianico, 12% Malbec, 8% Zinfandel.



Keyline: 29% Shiraz, 17% Malbec, 15% Petite Sirah, 14% Charbono, 14% Touriga Nacional, 11% Zinfandel.

I had the opportunity to taste these wines along with a 2023 Chenin Blanc which was gorgeous! Both red blends were exceptional and should be released quite soon.

I don't have room for detailed notes, but I shared these wines blind with 9 other people. Preferences were evenly split and accolades sent to Avery for her winemaking mastery, ingenuity and vision for what Napa might become.

Thanks to Avery and the Larkmead team.