



Larkmead Vineyards proprietor Kate Solari Baker is an established artist who created the beautiful labels for the Research Block series as well as this map, using her mother's original ledgers from managing the vineyard.

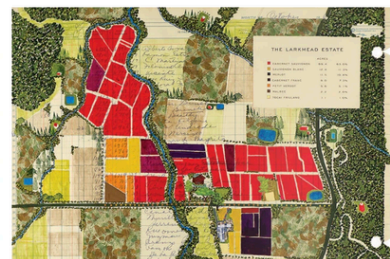


IMAGE COURTESY OF LARKMEAD VINEYARDS

Vinous Vanguard

LARKMEAD VINEYARDS' CONTIGUOUS 115-ACRE SITE TELLS A STORY OF SOIL, HISTORY, AND INNOVATION IN NAPA VALLEY by Meridith May

ONE OF THE OLDEST family-owned wineries in Napa Valley, Calistoga's Larkmead Vineyards was founded in 1895. In 1948, it came under the stewardship of the Solari family, who now cultivates 115 acres to produce a portfolio of estate wines. After years of organic farming, it earned certification by the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) in 2023. "[Our] family has long espoused organic farming in our vineyards. Achieving the CCOF status was the last piece of the puzzle," says Larkmead proprietor Kate Solari Baker.

PHOTO: LEIGHANN BEVERLEY



Larkmead winemaker Avery Heelan.

Originally from the East Coast, winemaker Avery Heelan has been with the winery since 2019. She studied chemistry in Boston but decided that a career in pharmaceuticals or DNA research was not for her. Her fondness for wine led her to the viticulture and enology program at the University of California, Davis.

I recently tasted through some current releases with Heelan while discussing her winemaking philosophy. Noting that Bordeaux varieties need extraction while oak "needs to be unnoticeable," she explained, "I aim to strike a balance between acidity, minerality, and salinity with the intention to make our wines approachable on release." **98**



PHOTO COURTESY OF LARKMEAD VINEYARDS

Larkmead 2024 Lillie Sauvignon Blanc, Calistoga, Napa Valley (\$75)

The founder of Larkmead, Lillie Hitchcock Coit, was such a wild child that her parents banished her from their property for smoking cigars. After being rescued by a fire while living in San Francisco, "Firebelle Lil" became a patron of the city's firefighters and the benefactor for the construction of Coit Tower. This bon vivant's namesake, whole cluster-pressed in French barrels, is appropriately expressive, with startling notes of lemon blossom and honeyed white-tea flowers that seem to create a bright light as you sip. Mineral tones are integrated into the spice at its core. **96**



PHOTO COURTESY OF LARKMEAD VINEYARDS

Larkmead 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, Calistoga, Napa Valley (\$125)

The grapes for this wine come from all over the estate, whose soils vary between gravel, clay, and sand. Sturdy black-tea tannins attest to its ageability along with a saline quality. Black fruit is a focal point, accented by Worcester-shire, graphite, and dried violets. **97**



PHOTO: ROBB MCDONOUGH

Larkmead Research Block 2024 Chenin Blanc, Napa Valley (\$75)

In 2020, Larkmead established its 3-acre Research Block, planting it to eight different grape varieties and releasing its first wine—a 2023 Chenin Blanc—in 2024. Proprietor Kate Solari Baker oversees this visionary experiment in sustainability and blending with an

eye toward ensuring the future of Napa Valley wine in a changing climate. In its second vintage, this wine aged 11 months in French oak shows stunning presence. Lemon sorbet glistens with an ethereal thread of gardenia, wet stone, sweet basil, and green apple. Salty sea spray demonstrates sapidity that coincides with savory, mouthwatering electric energy. Vanilla and lanolin coat the tongue with waxiness on the memorable finish. **98**

Larkmead Research Block 2023 Contour Estate Red Blend, Napa Valley (\$85)

The contour of a slope can determine how much sun and wind the vines receive as well as where water flows and collects; as a result, it can influence erosion and deposition, creating variances in soil depth and rockiness. These topographic patterns define the Research Block and impact this inaugural blend of 40% Tempranillo, 28% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Aglianico, 12% Malbec, and 8% Zinfandel in particular. Dusty plum-skin tannins adhere to the teeth, while a juicy surge of more plum washes over the palate. Bittersweet chocolate and sweet violets form a union upheld by the muscular finish of graphite. **98**

Larkmead Research Block 2023 Keyline Estate Red Blend, Napa Valley (\$85)

Keyline is conceived as a wine that crosses boundaries by blending disparate varieties together. With 29% Shiraz, 17% Malbec, 15% Petite Sirah, 14% Charbono, 14% Touriga Nacional, and 11% Zinfandel aged 20 months in neutral oak, it does just that. Showing an inky black-crimson hue, it's concentrated and coherent, with a built-in tension that unites its components with precision and elegance. Intense crushed boysenberry and vanilla latte are lifted by floral and graphite notes as freshness and tannins converge. **99**