WINE BUSINESS

Larkmead Vineyards Debuts Research Block Series Red Blends, Continuing Its Legacy of Innovation in Napa Valley

The 2023 Contour and Keyline Estate Red Blends debut alongside the third vintage of the acclaimed Estate Chenin Blanc, marking a new chapter in the Solari-Baker family's exploration of climate-adaptive viticulture and the future of Napa Valley winemaking.

November 11, 2026



Larkmead Vineyards announces the inaugural release of two estate-grown red blends, the 2023 Contour Estate Red Blend and 2023 Keyline Estate Red Blend, from its pioneering Research Block vineyard. The wines debut alongside the 2025 Estate Chenin Blanc, the third vintage of the acclaimed white wine that launched the Research Block Series in 2024. Together, these releases mark a milestone in Larkmead's exploration of grape varieties suited to Napa Valley's evolving climate, expanding the possibilities of estate-grown winemaking while remaining rooted in the estate's storied terroir and longstanding commitment to excellence in the vineyard and cellar.

Established in 2020, the three-acre Research Block evaluates grape varieties in a changing climate while investigating new possibilities for Napa Valley viticulture and winemaking. The project builds upon Larkmead's distinguished terroir and legacy of innovation, including pioneering grapevine research conducted on the estate in the 1940s by renowned University of California, Davis, viticulturist Dr. Harold P. Olmo.

"When you're a family vineyard and winery, you think in generations," said Ann Baker, Landscape Architect and daughter of Larkmead Vineyards Proprietor Kate Solari Baker. "We're thinking about what this property will look like for future generations and how we can best prepare for a changing climate. The Research Block Series allows us to remain curious, study new grape varieties, and produce exciting new wines that honor Napa Valley's heritage while exploring its future."

The inaugural red blends showcase two distinct expressions of the Research Block. Contour features Cabernet Sauvignon at its core, paying homage to Larkmead's celebrated Cabernet-driven heritage, complemented by Tempranillo, Aglianico, Malbec, and Zinfandel. Keyline takes a more exploratory approach, bringing together an international selection of grape varieties in a Mediterranean-inspired style defined by expressive aromatics, savory spices, vibrant acidity, and structured tannins.

"Keyline is a spicy, aromatic blend that explores a new expression of Napa Valley," said Avery Heelan, Winemaker at Larkmead. "Contour, on the other hand, is rooted in Cabernet Sauvignon, offering a more familiar point of connection to our estate portfolio. What's exciting is the opportunity to explore entirely new blending combinations while maintaining the quality, balance, and sense of place that define Larkmead."

The wines are united not only by their origins in the Research Block, but also, by their names and labels, which feature original artwork by Kate Solari Baker. Inspired by the relationship between the contours of the land and the natural movement of water, the names Contour and Keyline reflect the estate's distinctive landscape and its connection to the surrounding environment. Larkmead plans to continue incorporating Kate's artwork into future releases, celebrating the intersection of artistry, agriculture, winemaking, and family.

Alongside the debut of the red blends, the 2025 Estate Chenin Blanc marks the wine's third vintage following the enthusiastic reception of its 2023 debut. Its continued popularity has prompted Larkmead to expand Chenin Blanc plantings in the Research Block to support increased production in future vintages. The vineyard is also evolving with the introduction of Assyrtiko, a Greek white variety, and Nero d'Avola, a Sicilian red variety, broadening the estate's experimentation with Mediterranean grapes. Both varieties were harvested in 2026, with a limited-production Assyrtiko anticipated in 2027 and Nero d'Avola being evaluated for future red blends.

"The success of Chenin Blanc has shown us the potential of our Research Block varieties beyond our traditional portfolio," said Heelan. "Assyrtiko brings an entirely different white wine expression to our lineup--it's fresh and vibrant. We're continuing to learn what works best on our estate and how these varieties can diversify the future of Larkmead's portfolio."

Beyond exploring new grape varieties, the Research Block serves as a living laboratory for advancing Larkmead's commitment to environmental stewardship. Through minimal irrigation, a long-term goal of dry farming, and ongoing experimentation with native grasses and wildflower cover crops, the project explores ways to conserve water, enhance soil health, and support biodiversity.

"The Research Block gives us an opportunity to look at how we manage the land, from water use and soil health to creating habitat for pollinators," said Baker. "It's about continuing to learn, adapting our practices, and ensuring we're caring for this property in ways that will benefit future generations."

Together, these releases represent the next chapter in Larkmead's longstanding tradition of innovation, translating the discoveries of the Research Block into distinctive wines that honor the estate's heritage while embracing the future. All three wines will be available exclusively to Larkmead's Solari Membership beginning November 11, 2026. For more information on joining the Solari Membership and accessing the Research Block Series, visit Larkmead.com or call (707) 942-0167.