DRINKHACKER
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Larkmead
FAMILY ESTATE FOUNDED 1895

Wines of Larkmead

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Larkmead sits on an unassuming stretch of Calistoga, at the end of a lane sharing its name, and has spent over a century being one of the more interesting places in Napa Valley without ever making a grand spectacle of it. This is unusual, and it's a little suspicious: the region is thick with estates adorned with sculpture gardens, helicopter pads, and founder's tales that have clearly been through legal review. But unlike some of them, if not most, Larkmead has a good name and a cast of characters.

The land started as part of a thousand-acre Hitchcock family holding, and it was Lillie Hitchcock Coit (San Francisco socialite, firefighter fanatic, eventual benefactor of Coit Tower) who named the place and furnished it with nineteenth-century attitude. The Salmina family turned it into a working winery in 1895, won awards at the 1915 World's Fair, and made it through Prohibition by making sacramental wine, a workaround suggesting either profound faith or deft understanding of federal paperwork, maybe both. The Solaris bought the property in 1948 and have not left: Kate Solari Baker, and her late husband Cam, have tended to the land, leaning heavily towards Cabernet. The Firebelle, named for Lillie, and the Solari Cabernet tell opposing tales of the same soil. Wine writers lunge at the word "storied" for moments like this, and I will concede that the word is accurate. But a place this old, still run by one family, still making wine this good, makes the adjective feel underwhelming. It needs somebody to just get down the lane and experience it all firsthand. But make a reservation first.



2023 Larkmead Solari Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley – The year's Solari arrives with a lot on its mind. Black currants lead, running through the glass with swagger, and then the rest of the cast files in: tobacco leaf, pine needles, sage and if you're patient enough, graphite. The tannins are abundant and also, improbably, silken: a structure most wines spend years trying to compose and this one seems to have been born with. Give it time in the glass and it opens into something more herbal, finishing dry and earthy and a bit tart. Everything here points toward the long haul, and the structure to get there is already well established. Drink it now if you absolutely must: it will keep your attention and a good portion of your evening pleasantly occupied. But the smart money rests on storing it away somewhere dark and cool and forgetting about it. Do not worry: this wine will have plenty left to say in a few year's time, probably all the better. **A / $215**

2023 Larkmead The Lark Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley – Open this Solari young and you'll find it in a dark and rather serious mood: dense with graphite, anise and currants stacked up front, with charred oak following not too far behind. Giving it at least an hour in the glass is a must. Tart plums and blackberry step forward on the palate, followed dark cherry and milk chocolate. The tannins turn supple, and the finish lands somewhere earthy and bright, with the dark fruit continuously oscillating with the savory elements. With some aging, the oak and chocolate should recede into the background, and everything currently talking over each other will have learned to take turns. It is a fine argument for patience, and, if your bank account can take the hit, an even better one for buying two bottles: one to open now, out of curiosity, and one to leave alone, out of well-earned faith. Pour it now and enjoy the show or start planning for one incredible evening around late Autumn 2031. **A / $350**