

# WINE NEWS

## feature story

### California's Best Wines of 2008

*Introduction by  
Steve Pitcher*



Proprietary Blend of the Year:  
Joseph Phelps, 2005 Insignia,  
Napa Valley

The Golden State's 2004 vintage was a hard act to follow. Based on the showing of North Coast Cabernet Sauvignons alone, it was acclaimed as a truly stellar vintage. It certainly is the greatest 21st-century vintage to date and is, arguably, the benchmark against which succeeding California vintages are being judged. That said, 2005 compares quite favorably to 2004, although there are some important distinctions: Where 2004 was lighter than normal, 2005 was the largest harvest ever in terms of the volume of wine grapes picked, with crush up 20 percent from the previous year. Where 2004 was one of the earliest and fastest harvests in California history (running two to three weeks ahead of normal), 2005 was drawn out, with late harvest extending into the early part of November after a few heat spikes in September. Indeed, throughout most of the '05 harvest season, vineyards were bathed in sunshine and warmth - ideal conditions that enabled growers to make multiple passes for optimum selection.

The cooler-than-normal temperatures for much of the typically hot summer months in 2005 resulted in grape sugars generally lower than normal, which resulted in lower alcohol levels than in 2004 and some previous vintages. This means (thankfully) 2005 yielded fewer ultra-ripe Cabernets, Syrahs and Zinfandels.

Many winemakers share the view of Tor Kenward of Kenward Family Vineyard in Napa Valley, who observes that, "2005 may be more of a Bordeaux vintage than a typical Napa vintage."

Similarly, the 2005 Joseph Phelps Cabernet Sauvignon, (blended with 6 percent merlot and 3 percent petit verdot), is characterized by its winemaker, Craig Williams, as "resembling a classic Bordeaux both in aromatics and flavor." (Williams left Joseph Phelps in May following a compensation dispute).

The last time California experienced a harvest similar to 2005 was in 1997, which was also a huge, highly rated crop year. It, too, allowed those who were so inclined to drop fruit and declassify wines to ultimately achieve the highest possible quality level that a vineyard could yield.

At this point, the 2005 California Cabernets generally offer consumers richness, elegance, refinement and focus, with a higher percentage than usual of good- to very good-quality wines in the value-price category, thanks to declassification. While the 2005s don't evidence the across-the-board plushness and depth of the 2004s at the same stage of bottle development, they don't lack for these elements either, offering finesse, gracefulness and balance, coupled with excellent acidity and nicely integrated tannins. In short, the 2005 vintage is superb.

The format of this report departs from those of the past eleven, in that the notes and ratings have largely been assembled from both BuyLine panel reviews and West Coast Case features I authored through the June/July issue, together with culling select wines from various 2008 feature articles.

Beginning in May, my personal wine reviewing was severely curtailed by a medical diagnosis that required aggressive treatment, but has since resulted in a successful outcome. I anticipate that its temporary adverse effects will not be evident in 2009.

### The Criteria

All wines were evaluated on the BuyLine 100-point scale purely in terms of quality, regardless of price or case production. There is a separate, first-place position for a varietal or blend of the year, which stands alone because of the extraordinary character that lifted it above the field. An accompanying "Top Ten" section follows with each wine listed alphabetically along with its description. The Top Ten wines are in the high-quality range of "Outstanding" to "Superb" which is covered by the 90-and-above point range. Wines listed without description are only slightly eclipsed in quality by the described Top Ten wines.

Publication deadlines precluded consideration of any wines not tasted by October 1. Case quantities appear in instances where they have been provided by the winery.

Here, then, on the pages that follow, is a roundup of the top-scoring California wines selected by the editors.

### Cabernet Sauvignon

#### Cabernet Sauvignon of the Year

Far Niente, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley - Deep ruby with a fuchsia rim. Aromas of new oak, plum and ripe cherry display a kirsch-like intensity. Supple, accessible plum and blueberry fruit framed by well-integrated tannins. A flinty, mineral-like influence in the close balances and

supports the generous fruit. A top-drawer California Cab that is showing quite well in its youth.

\$125 / 11,800 cases

#### Top Ten Cabernets of the Year

2480, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley - Dusty aromas of blackberry and baker's chocolate. Deftly balanced with fine-grain tannins, mouth-watering acidity and generous raspberry and red currant fruit. Bold and elegant from front to back with a juicy, lingering close. \$83

Amapola Creek, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Unfined & Unfiltered, Sonoma Valley - Forward, ripe bouquet of licorice, plum and clove. Layers of lush blackberry fruit with a spicy edge of bell pepper. A tempting, delicious wine in its youth with great depth, length and alternating flavors of dark fruit, minerals and spice. Inaugural effort by veteran winemaker Richard Arrowood under his new label. \$100

Barnett, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Rattlesnake Hill, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley - Ripe bouquet of plum, mocha and cassis. Thick and juicy with black fruit, chalky tannins and smoky oak. Lengthy, spicy finish packed with fruit, oak, minerals and muscle. Great potential and, like the Cyrus-Ryan offering, there's more to come with age. \$120

Grace Family, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Estate Grown, Napa Valley - Excellent color: purple to the rim. Fresh aromas of cherry fruit, glove leather and new oak. Wild berry-cherry flavors are imbued with fine-grain tannins and subtle French oak. The streamlined, balanced finish resonates with vibrant, promising fruit. This serious, well-structured wine may prove to be Grace's best effort (so far) this decade. \$220 / 700 cases

Marston Family, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley - Very dark, inky hue. Uplifting cherry and plum aromas with hints of mocha, ginger and clove. Mouth-filling black fruit, chocolate and drying mineral flavors with rustic, rough-hewn tannins that support, rather than diminish, the mountain fruit. A fabulous, fruit-driven wine that will continue to improve. \$100 / 500 cases

Pina, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Buckeye Vineyard, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley - Minty maraschino cherry aromas with hints of resin and cinnamon. Supple strawberry preserve flavors with a thick, nearly chewy texture. There is a richness front to back in this Cabernet with the wood tannins, fruit and minerals meshing nicely in the close. Drinking nicely right now and should continue to improve. \$78

Robert Mondavi, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Reserve, Napa Valley - Black-garnet hue. Ripe cherry, graphite and oak aromas. Lush texture emitting cherry, mocha and tea flavors. Prevailing mineral nuances join the cherry fruit along with firm tannins that grip and add structure, but don't bite. A complete wine with all the stuffing for long life. \$135

Shafer, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon, Hillside Select, Stags Leap District/Napa Valley - Healthy black garnet hue. Thick and viscous with ripe plum and black cherry aromas with notes vanilla, wax, oak and a whiff of cocoa. There is a defined lush quality from the outset, emitting layers of black fruit, dark chocolate and lightly charred oak with the supple tannins hardly surfacing at all. An extremely forward-drinking Shafer that is expressive and satisfying in its youth. \$215

Tom Eddy, 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley - Black garnet hue. Aromas of ripe cherry, mint and new oak. Lovely black cherry fruit with chalky tannins and drying minerals. A well-built, serious wine packed with layers of fruit and promising great aging potential. \$90 / 544 cases

Vine Cliff, 2005 16 Rows Cabernet Sauvignon, Private Stock, Oakville, Napa Valley - Black garnet hue. A reluctant, slow-developing bouquet of leather and graphite opening to opulent black fruit and mocha. Remarkable richness from the first sip with layers of black cherry, plum, mint and chocolate flavors. While ripe black fruit is the general theme, supporting tannins, charcoal and flint accents temper the ultimate rush of sweetness in the seemingly endless finish. \$150 / 300 cases

#### Other Outstanding Cabernets

Beringer, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Private Reserve, Napa Valley, \$119

Cakebread, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Dancing Bear Ranch, Howell Mtn, Napa Vly, \$105

Caymus, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Napa Valley, \$70

Clos du Val, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Reserve, Napa Valley, \$95

Corison, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Napa Valley, \$70

Etude, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Oakville, Napa Valley, \$100

Etude, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Rutherford, Napa Valley, \$100

Grgich Hills, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Yountville Selections, Napa Valley, \$135

Groth, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Oakville, Napa Valley, \$58

Hall, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Bergfeld, St. Helena, \$100

Ilisley, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Single Vnyd Estate, Stags Leap, Napa Valley, \$55

Joseph Phelps, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Napa Valley, \$54

Lancaster, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Estate, Alexander Valley, \$70

Louis M. Martini 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Lot No. 1, Napa Valley, \$100

Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
John C. Sullenger Vineyard, Oakville, \$90

Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Martin Stelling Vineyard, Oakville, \$140

Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Vogt Vineyard, Howell Mountain, \$90

Oakville Ranch, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Napa Valley, \$60

Pine Ridge, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Stags Leap District, Napa Valley, \$80

Sbragia, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Wall Vineyard, Mt. Veeder, \$75 / 476 cases

Signorello, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Unfiltered, Napa Valley, \$45

Silverado, 2004 Solo Cabernet Sauvignon  
Stags Leap District, Napa Valley, \$79

Silver Oak, 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Napa Valley, \$100

Soñador, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Napa Valley, \$56

Sterling, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Reserve, Napa Valley, \$65

Robert Mondavi, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon  
Oakville, Napa Valley, \$45

Whitehall Lane, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon

## Napa Valley, \$40

### Proprietary Blends

#### Proprietary Blend of the Year

Joseph Phelps, 2005 Insignia, Napa Valley - Showing more opulent Napa Cabernet character than past vintages with but 7% merlot and 1% petit verdot in the blend. Deeply saturated purple and opaque in appearance. Forward, enticing nose of violets, anise and black currant-black cherry fruit with notes of mocha fudge and shy dried herbs. Smooth and luscious with well-balanced, supple tannins and a classic structure, it delivers amazing depth and concentrated, layered, extracted flavors of exquisitely ripe black fruits and dried, minced black cherry, subtle spice and well-integrated oak that persist a full minute or more in the finish. A masterpiece that deserves a minimum of 4 to 5 years of cellaring and will certainly gain more complexity over the next 5 to 10 years. \$200 / 12,000 cases

#### Top Ten Proprietary Blends of the Year

Beaulieu, 2005 Dulcet, Reserve, Napa Valley - Medium crimson hue. Heady bouquet with rich red fruit, baker's chocolate and light oaky scents. Velvety texture on entry with black cherry along with a laser beam of focused, berry-infused acidity and a kiss of sweetness. Excellent balance of fruit, acid and oak tannins on the finish. \$35

Chimney Rock, 2005 Elevage, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley - Garnet hue that hugs the glass. Warm, full aromas of cherries jubilee, glove leather and maple. Layers of cherry and plum fruit with youthful wood tannins. Dry finish with age-worthy fruit that needs to shed some of the aggressive tannic structure. \$78

Ilseley, 2004 Seis Primas, Napa Valley - Complex scents of tar, menthol and blackberry. Syrupy flavors of black cherry and raspberry compote. Big, velvety tannins and layers of blueberry, blackberry and mocha in the endless close. \$45

Mount Veeder, 2004 Red Wine, Reserve, Napa Valley - Solid garnet hue with a ruby rim. Forward aromas of mocha joined by vanilla wafer, black cherry and charred oak scents. A well-structured mountain Cab ripe with cherry-chocolate flavors, sweet oak and obvious, youthful tannins. Lengthy fruit-driven finish with plenty of heft for the long haul. \$80

Portfolio, 2005 Red Wine, Napa Valley - Brooding, inky hue. Enticing aromas of coffee bean, black cherry and Hershey's chocolate. Creamy texture with a lush meld of flinty, tempered tannins, kirsch and plum. Mocha and caramel-like sweetness build in the finish, which displays incredible length and depth of fruit. \$125

Ridge, 2005 Monte Bello, Santa Cruz Mountains - Soft, velvety aromas with the precise smell of cabernet sauvignon dominant. Remarkably approachable

with smooth tannins and rich, deep, chewy flavors of dark black fruit, including damson plum. Hints of spice and dried meadow flowers on the lengthy finish. (70% cabernet sauvignon/22% merlot/6% petit verdot/2% cab franc) \$145

Rodney Strong, 2005 Symmetry, Alexander Valley - Deep crimson hue. Powerful scents of black cherry and cedar with undertones of leather and sweet tobacco. Sweet flavors of blackberry and raspberry pie. Plush tannins and lingering impressions of raspberry and black cherry liqueur drive the finish. \$60

Signorello, 2005 Padrone, Unfiltered, Napa Valley - Intense inky hue. Mixed aromas of smoked meat, leather, pencil shavings, black cherry and vanilla extract. Substantial and well-made, offering a tsunami of rich fruit, toasted oak and minerals with a promise of a long life. Intensely rich right now; cellared properly, it will easily age for a decade-plus. \$110

Vérité, 2003 La Joie, Alexander Valley/ Knights Valley - A muscular, Paulliac-like cabernet sauvignon-based (72%) blend that is sturdy and exceptionally balanced. The nose exudes cedar, toasted hazelnut and toffee. Multifaceted, mouth-filling flavors of black fruit and cassis with youthful tannins and sturdy phenolics. At least ten years of cellar time will richly reward the patient. \$150

Vinoce, 2005 Proprietary Red, Mt. Veeder - 58% cabernet franc, 27% cabernet sauvignon, 15% merlot yields a wonderfully balanced, elegant wine, offering enticing scents of dried straw, red currant and a hint of blueberry. Lush, generous, round and velvety with medium-full tannins; the distinctive wine's flavors echo the nose and finish long with a flourish of white pepper. \$60 / 450 cases

#### Other Outstanding Proprietary Blends

Beaulieu, 2005 Tapestry  
Reserve, Napa Valley, \$50

Benziger Estate, 2005 Tribute  
Sonoma Mountain, \$80

Bernardus, 2004 Marinus  
Red Wine, Carmel Valley, \$36

Girard, 2005 Artistry  
Napa Valley, \$40

Murrieta's Well, 2004 Meritage  
Livermore Valley, \$36

Peju, 2005 Fifty-Fifty  
Napa Valley, \$85

Pininfarina Winery, 2005 Vino Rosso  
Napa Valley, \$95

Rubicon Estate, 2004 RC Reserve  
Rutherford, \$62

Robert Hall, 2005 Meritage  
Hall Ranch, Paso Robles, \$40

Steltzner Vineyards, 2006 Claret  
Napa Valley, \$20

Thomas Fogarty, 2003 Lexington Meritage  
Camel Hill Vnyd, Santa Cruz Mountains, \$45

Vérité, 2003 La Muse, Alexander Valley/  
Knights Valley / Bennett Valley, \$150

Merlot

Merlot of the Year

Sterling, 2005 Merlot, Three Palms Vineyard, Napa Valley - Vibrant black-garnet hue. Heady aromas of new leather, Hershey's dark chocolate syrup, black cherry and peppermint. Lovely plum and cherry-chocolate flavors impart a defined mintiness. Lasting fruit impressions accented by a lingering menthol nuance. \$60 / 6,142 cases

Top Ten Merlots of the Year

Adastra, 2004 Merlot, Carneros, Napa Valley - Heady black cherry, vanilla coffee bean and charred oak aromas. Soft, accessible black fruit flavors with secondary brown spice notes that add opulence. Tannins kick up in the finish and provide welcome structure. \$40

Barnett Vineyards, 2005 Merlot, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley - Fresh raspberry, violet and vanilla aromas. Black cherry and blueberry fruit with a spicy, peppery edge. A high-octane Merlot stuffed with black fruit, lively acids and well-integrated tannins. Its energy continues in the finish with new oak, clove and a lick of vanilla. \$45

Chalk Hill, 2005 Merlot, Chalk Hill, Sonoma County - Forward aromas of black cherry, charred oak and pencil shavings. Tasty cherry and light chocolate flavors laced with wood tannins. Dominant toasted oak in the finish with a surplus of youthful black fruit waiting to come forward. \$51

Duckhorn, 2005 Merlot, Estate Grown, Napa Valley - Intense garnet hue with a ruby rim. Lovely cherry-chocolate scents with a slight aromatic glow of menthol. Rich cooked cherry with an ever-present chocolate note that balances and melds nicely with dark fruit flavors. Lengthy finish and staying power with a good lick of clove, sweet tannins and a bit of graphite in the finish. \$85 / 2,105 cases

Duckhorn, 2005 Merlot, Three Palms Vineyard, Napa Valley - Black-garnet hue

with a fuchsia rim. Forward aromas of plum, cherry compote and warm caramel. Classic Three Palms fruit with a combination of power and finesse emitting layers of black cherry, plum, sweet oak and cedar accents. Youthful tannins surface in the finish, giving apt support to the lingering sweetness. \$85

Ehlers Estate, 2005 Merlot, St. Helena, Napa Valley - Purple to the rim. An uplifting bouquet of black cherry, chocolate and mint. Ripe plum and blueberry fruit with tempered, well-integrated tannins. A lushness in this Merlot is clearly defined in the sweet, lengthy close. \$45

Picazo Vineyards, 2004 Merlot, Reserve, Livermore Valley - Deep garnet hue with a fuchsia rim. Ripe aromas of plum, kirsch and cream. This seductive, lush Merlot offers flavors of blueberry and plum with hints of cinnamon, toasted oak and graphite. What strikes the match here is purity of fruit and perfectly melded tannins. A seamless finish delivers a hefty wine. \$80 / 64 cases

Sterling, 2005 Merlot, Reserve, Napa Valley - Bright garnet hue. Ripe blueberry aromas laced with licorice, mint and clove with a note of cinnamon. Black and red fruit flavors with chocolate, graphite and a light dusting of chalkiness. An age-worthy titan still somewhat compact and slow to show off its opulent side; however, it is packed with fruit and will only get better. \$65

Swanson, 2005 Merlot, Oakville, Napa Valley - Dense purple to the rim. Fresh plum and blueberry aromas with vanillin oak accents. Juicy and thick with ripe blueberry flavors and fine, dusty tannins. Excellent weight with lingering, sweet fruit. \$36

Thomas Fogarty, 2004 Merlot, Santa Cruz Mountains - Ripe aromas of blueberry and date. Minty blueberry and plum flavors offer a drying mineral influence. Youthful, dusty tannins temper the overall sweetness in the finish, yet there's plenty of underlying fruit. \$32

#### Other Outstanding Merlots

Barlow, 2005 Merlot  
Unfiltered, Napa Valley, \$32

Franciscan, 2005 Merlot  
Napa Valley, \$22

Frei Brothers, 2006 Merlot  
Reserve, Dry Creek Valley, \$20

Peju, 2005 Merlot  
Napa Valley, \$35

Sbragia Family, 2005 Merlot, Home Ranch  
Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County, \$25

Pinot Noir

## Pinot Noir of the Year

J Vineyards & Winery, 2006 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast - Light, feathered garnet hue. Lovely aromas of black cherry with hints of rose water and brown spice. Sweet-tart cherry fruit laced with graphite, dusty tannins and youthful acidity. The seamless finish is noticeably light in terms of weight, with red fruit and smoky oak melding nicely. A wine with ample charm and finesse. \$70 / 389 cases

## Top Ten Pinot Noirs of the Year

Barnett Vineyards, 2006 Pinot Noir, Savoy Vineyard, Anderson Valley - A grocery list of aromas including cranberry, rhubarb, clove and pekoe tea with whiffs of glove leather. Friendly, light and airy cherry fruit, clove and new oak flavors. Lengthy finish with an exotic anise and licorice sweetness combined with a smoky oak nuance curling its way through the palate. \$52

Belle Glos, 2006 Pinot Noir, Clark & Telephone Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley - A rich bouquet of black cherry, ripe plum and clove. Intense, jammy flavors of licorice and black cherry with a peppery edge. A nice combination of fruit and a bell pepper-like spiciness in this wine will do well with a variety of food. This youthful, energized Pinot will continue to improve. \$50

Drew, 2006 Fog-Eater Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley - From one of the chilliest microclimates in Anderson Valley's Deep End, this exciting Pinot offers very fragrant, appealing aromas of violets, red raspberry-strawberry fruit plus a touch of dark plum. Plush and deep on the palate with generous, quite ripe red fruit and a touch of spice, with violets peeking through the long close; complex and delicious. \$42 / 495 cases

Etude, 2005 Pinot Noir, Heirloom, Carneros, Napa Valley - Youthful, atypical hue: purple to the rim. Smoky blueberry and plum aromas with a good whiff of eucalyptus. Plump, juicy flavors of black cherry and plum with a lively menthol buzz. Muscles up in the close with youthful tannins, drying minerals and fresh acidity. \$90

Gary Farrell, 2005 Pinot Noir, Russian River Selection, Russian River Valley - Garden aromas ranging from fresh strawberry to basil, rhubarb and a whiff of tomato leaf. Mixed fruit flavors accompany smoky oak, cedar and mineral notes. Lively, fresh close with a nice balance between tannins, crisp acids and minerals. \$42

Goldeneye, 2005 Pinot Noir, Gowan Creek Vineyard, Anderson Valley - Premier release from the newest Goldeneye estate vineyard, this Pinot is nearly off the charts with forward, very fragrant aromas of wild ripe strawberry and mushroom duxelle. Ultrasmooth, round and elegant with fine-grain, medium tannins, the palate is awash with superbly balanced ripe strawberry-like fruit that's profoundly deep. The finish seems to last forever. \$75 / 280 cases

La Crema, 2006 Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley - Black-garnet hue. Uplifting aromas of glove leather, sweet cherry and toasted oak. Spicy flavors of red fruit and smoked deli meat with front-to-back mintiness. Lasting impressions of cooked cherry, drying minerals and mixed oak, redwood and cedar. \$35

Rochioli, 2006 Pinot Noir, Estate Grown, Russian River Valley - Candied black cherry aromas with heady menthol accents. Delicious black cherry fruit with a youthful, tart edge. Fine, well-integrated tannins highlight spicy black fruit. Lengthy, intense close offers a lingering, charred oak note. \$58

Sea Smoke, 2006 Ten Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills - Pale garnet hue. Heady menthol aromas mingle with cherry fruit and delicate rose petal scents. Toothsome flavors of red licorice and Bing cherry with youthful wood tannins and an acidic, orange zest-like nuance. Intense finish showcases a seemingly endless exchange of toasted oak, minerals and red fruit. \$70 / 1,500 cases

Talley, 2005 Pinot Noir, Rincon Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley - Forward, deeply fragrant aromas of strawberry, rose petals, cinnamon and subtle vanilla. Full bodied with medium-full tannins and a velvety texture, this bold Pinot is densely packed with ripe black cherry-strawberry fruit tinged with brown spice. Finishes long and smooth. \$58 / 536 cases

#### Other Outstanding Pinots

Acacia, 2006 Pinot Noir  
Horseshoe Bend Vnyd, Russian River Vly, \$65

Acacia, 2006 Pinot Noir  
St. Clair Vineyard, Napa Valley, \$75

Adastra, 2005 Proximus Pinot Noir  
Carneros, Napa Valley, \$56

Adastra, 2005 Regulus Pinot Noir  
Carneros, Napa Valley, \$40

Baxter, 2006 Pinot Noir, Oppenlander Vineyard  
Mendocino, \$60 / 140 cases

Belle Glos, 2006 Pinot Noir  
Taylor Lane Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, \$60

Clos LaChance, 2005 Pinot Noir  
Biagini Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains, \$50

Calera, 2005 30th Anniversary Pinot Noir  
Reed Vnyd, Mt. Harlan, \$50

Calera, 2005 30th Anniversary Pinot Noir  
Selleck Vineyard, Mt. Harlan, \$75

Etude, 2006 Pinot Noir

Carneros, \$42

Freeman Vineyard, 2006 Pinot Noir  
Russian River Valley, \$44

Gary Farrell, 2005 Pinot Noir  
Ramal Vineyard, Carneros, \$50

Gary Farrell, 2005 Pinot Noir  
Bien Nacido Vnyd, Santa Barbara County, \$50

Gary Farrell, 2005 Pinot Noir  
Rochioli-Allen Vnyds, Russian River Valley, \$70

Gary Farrell, 2005 Pinot Noir  
Starr Ridge Vineyard, Russian River Valley, \$38

Goldeneye, 2005 Pinot Noir, Confluence Vineyard  
Anderson Valley, \$75 / 350 cases

J Vineyards & Winery, 2006 Pinot Noir  
Robert Thomas Vnyd, Russian River Valley, \$65

Sea Smoke, 2006 Pinot Noir  
Southing, Sta. Rita Hills, \$50

Talley, 2005 Pinot Noir, Rosemary's Vineyard  
Arroyo Grande Valley, \$70 / 546 cases

Marimar Estate, 2005 Pinot Noir  
Doña Margarita Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, \$45

Orogeny, 2006 Pinot Noir  
Redding Ranch Vineyard, Marin County, \$60

Sea Smoke, 2005 Pinot Noir  
Botella, Sta. Rita Hills, \$40 / 1,250 cases >

Syrah & Petite Sirah

Syrah of the Year

Paras Vineyard, 2005 Syrah, Mt. Veeder - Rhône-like aromatics of hot stone, raw meat, mocha and blackberry liqueur, plus a haunting floral note from the 6% viognier and a touch of dried herbs. Copious, extracted blackberry-cassis fruit is deep and profound; seamless, velvety texture framed by supple, yet firm, tannins; long, liqueur-like finish. \$45 / 382 cases

Top Ten Syrahs & Petites of the Year

Dutton Goldfield, 2005 Syrah, Dutton Ranch, Cherry Ridge Vineyard, Russian River Valley - Garnet hue with a fuchsia rim. Shy clove and evergreen aromas

with notes of red and black licorice. Rhône-like spiciness with cherry fruit, mint and Worcestershire sauce. Crisp, acidic finish with a lingering toasted nuance. \$35

EOS Estate, 2004 Cupa Grandis Petite Sirah, Grand Barrel Reserve, Paso Robles - India ink hue. A burst of graphite and plum aromas with maraschino cherry-like richness. Still somewhat coiled and compact, this P.S. offers layers of black fruit, minerals, peppery tannins and steely acids that lead to a lengthy, lip-smacking close. \$55

Figge Cellars, 2006 Syrah, Sycamore Flat Vineyard, Arroyo Seco - Deep ruby color. Closed bouquet just hints at the ripe black fruit that is readily apparent on the palate. It clearly has great fruit in reserve that will emerge with more time in the bottle. At the moment, it is unbalanced on entry with a lean attack that emphasizes the wine's acidity; the fruit balance emerges slowly on the palate, gradually unveiling marvelous black cherry and blackberry notes. Awesome, velvety texture and exceptional length on the palate, promising great things for the future. \$42

EOS Estate, 2005 Petite Sirah, Reserve, Paso Robles - Inky hue with a fuchsia rim. Heady blueberry and licorice aromas with flint and fresh oak accents. Spicy black cherry and graphite flavors. Youthful, dusty finish with crisp acids, chalky tannins and plenty of promising fruit. \$25

Joseph Phelps Vineyards, 2005 Syrah, Napa Valley - Deep garnet hue. Ripe blueberry and plum aromas with a note of black earth. Thick and juicy with cherry-chocolate, raspberry and sweet oak notes. There is a richness front to back in the flavor; however, it finishes on a dry note. \$45

Lolonis, 2005 Orpheus Petite Sirah, Heritage Vineyards, Redwood Valley - Inky, purple to the rim. Shy aromas of blackberry, coffee bean and graphite. Compact raspberry flavors with drying tannins and crisp acids. A contemplative, slowly unfolding close that needs time to open. \$30

Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Syrah, Darien Vineyard, Russian River Valley - Dense purple to the rim. Heady black cherry aromas with hints of flint and graphite. Friendly and supple with flavors of plum and cooked cherry. Lengthy finish with soft, sweet tannins and tempered acidity. \$48

Rocca Family Vineyards, 2004 Syrah, Yountville, Napa Valley - Brooding, deep garnet hue. Ripe plum, blueberry, clove and mocha aromas. Fat and juicy with minty plum fruit and a velvet-like texture. Lengthy close with well-integrated tannins that mesh nicely with the creamy fruit. \$45

Rosenblum Cellars, 2006 Syrah, Rominger Vineyard, Yolo County - Deep garnet hue to the rim. Fresh cherry-chocolate and glove leather aromas. Velvet texture with rich Black Forest cake and cooked cherry flavors. Tannins are well integrated and meld perfectly into a creamy, fruit-driven finish. \$25

Rosenblum Cellars, 2006 Petite Sirah, Pickett Road, Napa Valley - Inky hue with a fuchsia rim. Fresh blueberry aromas with hints of charred oak, rose

water and whetstone. Lush black fruit with a minty nuance clinging to the flavor. A lick of carignane (2%) is added to the blend to take the edge off the crisp acids and rough-hewn tannins. Spicy, fruit-driven finish. \$35

#### Other Outstanding Syrahs, Petites & Blends

Figge Cellars, 2005 Syrah  
Sycamore Flat Vineyard, Arroyo Seco, \$38

Lolonis, 2005 Petite Sirah  
Chase Vineyard, Redwood Valley, \$28

Lolonis, 2005 Petite Sirah  
Golden Vineyard, Redwood Valley, \$28

Mettler Family, 2005 Petite Sirah  
Lodi, \$25

Morgan, 2006 Syrah  
Monterey, \$24

#### Zinfandel

##### Zinfandel of the Year

Grgich Hills, 2005 Zinfandel, Miljenko's Old Vines, Napa Valley - Uplifting aromas flush with ripe blueberry, plum and vanilla extract. Pure black cherry and blueberry fruit display an edge of mintiness. Sculpted, well-integrated tannins meld nicely with the thick black fruit, imparting a Port-like intensity front to back. \$79 / 453 cases

##### Top Ten Zinfandels of the Year

Amapola Creek, 2005 Zinfandel, Viñas Antiguas, Monte Rosso Vineyard, Sonoma County - Lovely blueberry jam scents underpinned by licorice and graphite aromas. Core flavors of red licorice and black fruit display a dusty, mineral nuance. Lengthy, tasty finish with cinnamon and a zing of clove joining the mix. This delicious Zin is a first release from veteran winemaker Richard Arrowood under his new label. \$55

Ballantine Vineyards, 2004 Zinfandel, Block 9, Reserve, Napa Valley - Attractive bouquet of cherry, glove leather and cedar. Accessible and supple, packed with cherry, plum and dusty mineral flavors. A small amount of syrah tempers the overall sweetness and imparts a rustic, woody flavor to the long close. \$29

DeLoach, 2005 Zinfandel, Lake County - Powerful scents of blackberry, pepper and thistle. Ripe, generous flavors of black cherry and mocha. Refined tannins and continued impressions of black cherry and mocha in the juicy close. \$29

Dry Creek Vineyard, 2005 Zinfandel, Beeson Ranch, Dry Creek Valley - An inviting bouquet of black cherry and violets with a hint of graphite. There is a

defined richness in this Zin with layers of black, jammy fruit and well-integrated tannins. Notes of chalk, white pepper and crisp acidity join the fresh fruit in the finish. \$34

Kunde, 2004 Century Vines Zinfandel, Reserve, Shaw Vineyard, Sonoma Valley - Minty cherry aromas with coffee bean and cedar accents. Piquant and zesty with tart cherry and raspberry fruit, and lip-smacking tannins. Flinty, dusty close with lingering toasted oak. \$35

Mazzocco Winery, 2005 Zinfandel, Reserve, Maple, Dry Creek Valley - Forward aromas of mint, plum, cherry cola and maple. Lavish, jammy flavors of blackberry and plum with hints of pecan and shredded coconut. The sweetness builds in the close with a formidable richness and texture, offering spicy red and black fruit flavors. \$60

Mazzocco Winery, 2005 Matrix Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley - An attractive bouquet of fruit compote, evergreen and mint. Ripe and jammy with plum, black cherry and anise laced up nicely with prominent tannins. A spice box of a Zin with a range of brown spices, as well as a drying flintiness in the finish. \$45

Peter Franus, 2005 Zinfandel, Brandlin Vineyard, Mount Veeder - Rich, heady, spicy Zin exhibiting a warm, inviting nose of ripe, brambly sour cherry-black raspberry fruit with a high note of red clover. Ultraplush and kirsch-like on the palate, this exciting Zin offers up copious, quite-ripe (but not raisiny) dark berry fruit laced with peppery spice. The finish goes on and on. \$35 / 668 cases

Rosenblum Cellars, 2006 Zinfandel, Reserve, Monte Rosso Vnyd, Sonoma Vly - Dense garnet hue. Complex scents of black cherry, allspice and vanilla with secondary nuances of menthol and licorice. Creamy flavors of black cherry and blackberry. Velvety tannins and layers of blueberry, vanilla and mocha in the close. \$45

Sebastiani, 2006 Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley - Dense garnet hue. Intense aromas of black plum, wintergreen and thistle with secondary nuances of mocha and vanilla. Velvety tannins and creamy flavors of cherry cola and blueberry with hints of maple. Layers of blueberry, black cherry and baker's chocolate in the endless close. \$24

#### Other Outstanding Zinfandels

Adobe Road, 2005 Zinfandel  
Sonoma County, \$34

Dry Creek Vineyard, 2005 Zinfandel  
Old Vine, Dry Creek Valley, \$28

Dry Creek Vineyard, 2005 Zinfandel  
Somers Ranch, Dry Creek Valley, \$34

Dry Creek Vineyard, 2006 Zinfandel  
Heritage, Sonoma County, \$17

Dutton Goldfield, 2006 Zinfandel  
Dutton Ranch, Morelli Lane Vnyd, RRV, \$40

Mazzocco Winery, 2005 Zinfandel  
Reserve, West Dry Creek, Dry Creek Valley, \$40

Girard, 2006 Zinfandel  
Old Vine, Napa Valley, \$24

Mazzocco Winery, 2005 Zinfandel  
Reserve, Pony, Dry Creek Valley, \$50

Mazzocco Winery, 2005 Zinfandel  
Reserve, Smith Orchard, Dry Creek Valley, \$40

Rosenblum Cellars, 2006 Zinfandel  
Kontrabecki Vineyard, Livermore Valley, \$25

Rosenblum Cellars, 2006 Zinfandel  
Richard Sauret Vineyards, Paso Robles, \$25

Sidejob Cellars, 2006 C5 Zinfandel  
Stefani Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley, \$30

Side Job Cellars, 2005 C5 Zinfandel  
Dry Creek Valley, \$30

Sbragia Family, 2005 Zinfandel  
Gino's Vnyd, Dry Creek Vly, Sonoma County, \$28

Z-52, 2005 Zinfandel, Old Vine  
Agnes' Vineyard, Lodi, \$16 / 2,039 cases

Chardonnay

Chardonnay of the Year

Patz & Hall, 2006 Chardonnay, Hyde Vineyard, Carneros - Bright gold hue. A mixed nose of apple, sweet oak, clove and banana peel. Soft, juicy mouth-feel with layers of caramel, peach and apple butter flavors. An opulent, fruit-driven finish with well-integrated toasted oak. \$55 / 2,690 cases

Top Ten Chardonnays of the Year

7 & 8 Vineyard, 2006 "8" Chardonnay, Reserve, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley - Fresh apple aromas with notes of orange zest, new oak and a whiff of coconut. Layers of apple, apricot and peach flavors with a tasty mix of sweetening brown spices. Excellent length with a combination of toasted oak, fresh acidity and tropical fruit. \$50

Barnett Vineyards, 2006 Chardonnay, Sangiacomo Vineyard, Carneros - Glazed pineapple and vanilla aromas with hints of apricot and singed butter. Peach and apricot lead the way in terms of fruit with secondary clove and lightly charred oak notes. A creamy texture and fresh stone fruit come together for a memorable close. A hedonistic Chard that is also well structured and should age nicely. \$32

Beringer, 2006 Chardonnay, Sbragia Limited-Release, Napa Valley - Slow-opening bouquet of pineapple and ripe peach scents. Grilled pineapple and ham flavors with a weighty, supple texture. Butterscotch and nutmeg punctuate the finish with notes of charred oak and clove. \$40

C. Donatiello Winery, 2006 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley - Gold with a flash of green. An enticing bouquet of butterscotch, grilled pineapple and brown spice with lightly toasted oak. A delicious, well-made wine offering layers of opulent peach and caramel flavors laced with vanillin oak. Excellent length with apple, cinnamon and lingering caramel notes. \$28

C. Donatiello Winery, 2006 Chardonnay, Orsi Vineyard, Russian River Valley - Solid gold hue. Lovely pineapple, banana and butterscotch aromas. Layers of creamy, tropical fruit with hints of chalk, minerals and toasted oak. The finish is laced with fresh, youthful acidity balancing the overall sweetness. \$38

Chateau St. Jean, 2006 Chardonnay, Robert Young Vineyard, Alexander Valley - Luminous gold hue. Peach and pineapple aromas infused with lightly toasted oak. A well-structured wine packed with tasty pineapple, banana and butterscotch flavors. A light mineral nuance joins oak and buttery fruit in the lengthy, enjoyable finish. \$25

Gary Farrell, 2006 Chardonnay, Russian River Selection, Russian River Valley - Ripe peach and vanilla aromas followed by clove, caramel and charred oak. Balanced flavors of nectarine and apricot with a touch of wood and a buttery note. Dry close with white peach, fresh acidity and an oak nuance. \$32

Morgan, 2006 Hat Trick Chardonnay, Double L Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands - Burnished gold hue. Sweet aromas of grilled pineapple and toasted oak with hints of nutmeg. Soft entry emitting layered flavors of caramel, butterscotch and peach laced with toasted oak and minerals. Fruit, oak and minerals seamlessly mesh in the lengthy finish. \$65 / 149 cases

Nickel & Nickel, 2006 Chardonnay, Medina Vineyard, Russian River Valley - Ripe aromas of grilled pineapple, peach nectar and dark honey. Fat and juicy with a mix of peach, pear and apricot flavors. A keen balance between rich tropical fruit and crisp acids that enliven and extend the close. \$45

Shafer, 2006 Chardonnay, Red Shoulder Ranch, Carneros, Napa Vly - New oak aromas with an applesauce and pear sweetness in the bouquet. Ripe peach with vanilla extract and a perfect amount of toasted oak. Fresh sting of youthful acids joins a flinty, mineral nuance in the close. \$47

## Other Outstanding Chardonnays

2480, 2006 Chardonnay  
Atlas Peak, Napa Valley, \$45

7 & 8 Vineyard, 2005 "8" Chardonnay  
Reserve, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley, \$50

Acacia, 2006 Chardonnay  
Sangiacomo Vineyard, Carneros, \$40

Carmel Road, 2006 Chardonnay  
Clark Ranch, Arroyo Seco, \$35

Clos LaChance, 2005 Chardonnay  
Biagini Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains, \$35

Chalk Hill Estate, 2005 Estate Chardonnay  
Chalk Hill, \$90

Clos du Val, 2006 Chardonnay  
Reserve, Napa Valley, \$42

Clos LaChance, 2005 Chardonnay  
Liebeler Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains, \$35

EOS Estate, 2006 Cupa Grandis Chardonnay  
Brothers Ranch Vineyard, Paso Robles, \$45

Freeman Vineyard, 2006 Chardonnay  
Ryo-fu, Russian River Valley, \$44

Gary Farrell, 2005 Chardonnay  
Rochioli Vineyards, Russian River Valley, \$38

Gary Farrell, 2005 Chardonnay  
Russian River Selection, Russian River Vly, \$32

Landmark, 2006 Overlook Chardonnay  
Sonoma, Santa Barbara, Monterey, \$27

Matanzas Creek, 2006 Chardonnay  
Sonoma Valley, \$29

Merryvale, 2005 Chardonnay  
Carneros, \$35

Morgan, 2006 Chardonnay  
Double L Vnyd, Santa Lucia Highlands, \$44

Nickel & Nickel, 2006 Chardonnay  
Truchard Vnyd, Carneros, Napa Valley, \$45

Oakville Ranch, 2006 Chardonnay  
Vista Block, Napa Valley, \$46

Patz & Hall, 2006 Chardonnay  
Napa Valley, \$36

Rodney Strong, 2006 Chardonnay  
Reserve, Russian River Valley, \$40

Salexis, 2004 Chardonnay  
Carneros Lake Vineyard, Napa Valley, \$36

Sbragia Family, 2006 Chardonnay  
Home Ranch, Dry Creek Valley, \$26

Sterling Vineyards, 2006 Chardonnay  
Reserve, Napa Valley, \$40

Talbott, 2005 Chardonnay  
Sleepy Hollow Vineyard, Monterey County, \$45

Sauvignon Blanc

Sauvignon Blanc of the Year

Merry Edwards, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley - Pale gold hue with a glint of copper. Forward, herbaceous aromas emitting fresh-cut grass and basil with white grapefruit and lime zest undertones. Produced primarily from the sauvignon musqué clone and fully barrel fermented, this Sauv imparts a plethora of bright flavors including fig, cantaloupe, white peach and a lasting white grapefruit impression that resonates on the finish. A masterful offering that fully deserves top billing. \$29 / 3,880 cases

Top Ten Sauvignons of the Year

Bernardus, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Griva Vineyard, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County - Pale gold hue. Mixed fresh aromas of tomato leaf, graphite and citrus peel. Honeydew and grapefruit flavors with a spate of fresh acidity. Excellent weight and length; a tasty summer quaff. \$20 / 1,512 cases

Franciscan, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley - Pale crystal hue. Intense aromas of pineapple and peach with secondary nuances of mineral and slate. Vibrant acidity and juicy flavors of lime and grapefruit. Hints of kiwi in the refreshing close. \$17

Fritz, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Estate Grown, Dry Creek Valley - Very little color, pale gold. Gooseberry and lime aromas with a note of grassiness. Fresh grapefruit with steely-fresh acids. Clean, very fresh close with lemon-lime accents. \$22

Gary Farrell, 2006 Sauvignon Blanc, Redwood Ranch, Sonoma County -

Complex scents of toasted oak, pear and lemon custard. Crisp acidity and creamy flavors of pear and Granny Smith apple. Lemon and lime in the juicy close. \$25

Gary Farrell, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Redwood Ranch, Sonoma Coast - Scents of white peach, paraffin and toasted oak. Juicy flavors of peach and pear. Creamy acidity and lingering impressions of white peach. \$25

Geyser Peak, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, California - Pale straw hue. Fresh scents of honeydew, pear and butterscotch. Crisp acidity and juicy flavors of Granny Smith apple. Hints of tangerine in the juicy close. \$12 / 145,000 cases

Matanzas Creek, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Sonoma County - Pale silvery, spritzzy hue. Fresh garden aromas of sliced cucumbers and mint with a zesty lemon scent. Light and airy with citrus and basil flavors. Very crisp, dry finish with lingering minerals and citrus. \$24

Merry Edwards, 2006 Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley - Green-gold hue. Complex scents of oak, pear and pineapple. Sweet, juicy flavors of peach and pear. Crisp acidity and layers of golden pineapple and nectarine in the finish. \$27 / 2,600 cases

Rochioli, 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, Estate Grown, Russian River Valley - Pale gold hue. Smoky aromas of tropical fruit with hints of fresh-cut grass. Rich peach, apricot, glazed pecan and fig flavors. Excellent length with a mix of ripe fruit and drying mineral notes. \$35 / 2,900 cases

Rodney Strong, 2006 Sauvignon Blanc, Charlotte's Home Estate - Pale straw hue. Tropical aromas of pear and white peach with secondary nuances of pineapple and mango. Creamy flavors of mango and Georgia peach. Hints of oak in the silky close. \$15

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