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THE WILDER SIDE OF CALIFORNIA

Doug Wilder, Issue 23

Red October returns

St. Helena, CA - October 28, 2005

Nearly a dozen 90+ point Cabernet Sauvignon

The Napa Valley is a great place to be during autumn—the leaves are changing, the weather is getting cooler, and the gentle showers are beginning. October is one of the banner months for Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varietals in California. Out of the many wines I tasted throughout the week, here is an extensive collection of those I found superior.

VINTAGE	WINE	PRODUCTION	750ml	RATING
2002	York Creek - Meritage, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley	< 1,000 cases	\$39	VF 90
2002	Frog's Leap - Rutherford, Rutherford, Napa Valley	976 cases	\$60	VF 91
2002	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars - Cabernet Sauvignon Fay Vineyard, Estate, Stag's Leap District, Napa Valley	2,000 cases	\$70	VF 91
2001	Arbios - Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley	2,900 cases	\$25	VF 92
2002	Dyer - Cabernet Sauvignon, Diamond Mountain District, Napa Valley	246 cases	\$70	VF 92
2002	Honig - Cabernet Sauvignon Bartolucci Vineyard, Napa Valley	250 cases	\$60	VF 92
2003	Titus - Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley	< 2,000 cases	\$34	VF 92
2002	Bugay - Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma Valley	112 cases	\$65	VF 93
2002	Darioush - Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley	6,000 cases	\$60	VF 93
2002	Emilio's Terrace - Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, Oakville, Napa Valley	500 cases	\$50	VF 93
2002	D R Stephens - Cabernet Sauvignon Moose Valley Vineyard, Napa Valley	1,000 cases	\$100	VF 93

All wines are prearrival and ship within two weeks of order.

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VINFOLIO REVIEWS

2002 York Creek - Meritage, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 90 points

Fritz Maytag of Anchor Brewing Co. owns this picturesque vineyard high on Spring Mountain. His Meritage is consistently magnificent every year.

Pretty nose of mixed black fruits with supple feel. I always love the bit of mintiness I find here. Very good balance; elegant and easy drinking. Drink: 2005-2012.



2002 Frog's Leap - Rutherford, Rutherford, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 91 points

This prototypical Rutherford Bench blend from Frog's Leap is delicious. Frog's Leap follows the Bordelais tradition of identifying a wine by its place of origin rather than varietal. Their approach to making wine is the same as their approach to life—a respectful balance of humor, responsibility, and passion.

The Rutherford blend is comprised of 89% Cabernet Sauvignon and 11% Cabernet Franc. The nose is rich and sweet with some sappy briar notes. The palate shows understated elegant flavors of blackberry peeking out around the edges with smooth lavender and boysenberry hints. Drink: 2005-2009.

2002 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars - Cabernet Sauvignon Fay Vineyard, Estate, Stag's Leap District, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 91 points

Warren Winiarski's 1973 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon helped shape California's wine industry forever. It was the top-rated Cabernet Sauvignon in the much discussed Paris tasting of 1976. Although he is

no longer involved in the daily tasks of winemaking, his legacy is secured by the vineyards that have made the winery famous. Originally planted in 1961, Fay Vineyard was the first Cabernet Sauvignon planted in what is now recognized as Stags Leap District. The location is optimal due to its proximity to the San Pablo Bay which helps alleviate the heat of the summer and keeps air circulating around the vines, preventing any springtime frost. What a great achievement this wine turned out to be.

Smooth structure, with briar, cherry, and blackberry fruit, laced with lavender and exotic spice. Needs time. Drink: 2008-2020.



2001 Arbios - Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley; Vinfolio rating: 92 points

Bill Arbios has been making wine in California for over 30 years. As one of the first winemakers for Lyeth in Sonoma (now the site of Silver Oak's Alexander Valley winery) he made some of the top wines coming out of the area at the time. He was part of the movement that introduced to us the Meritage style—an American blend of Bordeaux varietals. After a short stint as winemaker at Jarvis Winery, he founded Arbios in 1993. The 2001 is his eighth successful vintage with his own label.

Dark purple to black in color with a rich nose of black cherry, ripe currant, and a hint of herb. The palate shows excellent structure with firm tannins wrapped around dark cherry and tar with full mouth feel. It's a great value for the money. Drink: 2005-2012.

2002 Dyer - Cabernet Sauvignon, Diamond Mountain District, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 92 points

As reported in Vinfolio's "Top 20 list of 2004" (WSC Issue 1), Bill and Dawnine Dyer share over 50 years of winemaking experience (Sterling Vineyards, Domaine Chandon). Their cozy 12-acre vineyard site on Diamond Mountain—2.2 acres of which are planted—consistently produces excellent wines.

Unlike previous vintages the nose is softer showing less of the dark olive and fig qualities. What I get is more luscious and forward with enticing violet, vanilla and cocoa dust. The palate still has the un-mistakable violet, black cherry profile. There is nice mineral and cocoa on the finish. Drink: 2005-2010.

2002 Honig - Cabernet Sauvignon Bartolucci Vineyard, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 92 points

Kristen Belair is one of my favorite winemakers of yore. She made the mind-blowing 1987 Johnson Turnbull Lot 67 Cabernet Sauvignon (a benchmark of stellar winemaking in the Napa Valley). Her efforts at Honig have garnered her and the winery a great reputation for a diverse range of well-made wines. The Bartolucci Vineyard is full of tradition and has been farmed by three generations of the Bartolucci family. Now, it is making history as the first vineyard-designated wine made at Honig. The property is tucked away in St. Helena and reaps all the benefits of its prized location, an ideal microclimate for Cabernet Sauvignon.

This is very dense, very rich Cabernet. It has a supple, black cherry and cocoa lushness to the nose. Abundant dark fruits on the palate with firm, dusty tannins, and hints of mineral. Drink: 2005-2014.

2003 Titus - Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 92 points

Phil and Eric Titus have created a niche by producing exceptional wines that remain under the radar, only found by those in the know. Phil's experience as winemaker at Chappellet has paid off. This is a first-class effort from the Titus family.

Produced from valley floor vineyards in St. Helena, the Cabernet has aromas of smooth black cherry, toasted oak, and elegant floral blossom notes. The palate delivers full-throttle flavors of black currant and blackberry with a smooth chocolate undercurrent. A touch of smoke on the finish completes the experience. Drink: 2005-2011.



2002 Bugay - Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma Valley; Vinfolio rating: 93 points

I received an e-mail recently from a client who recommended that I taste his neighbor John Bugay's wine. I took the advice I was given and scheduled a visit with him. I was interested to see if my client had sent me on a wild goose chase. Let me assure you, it wasn't a waste of time. The Bugays have hired Tom Montgomery (former winemaker at Conn Creek) to make the wines from the insanely steep vineyards around their Mayacamas Mountain Range villa. I tasted with John and his wife Reta, and was amazed at the evolution in my glass over the course of the afternoon. This wine needs time to open but when it does, it is glorious. It will definitely age well.

The nose is quite dense at first, but with time it fleshes out to show some alluring, aromatic Asian spices with a spray of sea salt and mocha. The lush smoothness on the palate is evident early with a solid profile of chocolate and black fruit character merging into the long finish. It develops flavors of bright red cherry and pomegranate with an hour of air. Drink: 2005-2012.

2002 Darioush - Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 93 points

Winemaker Steve Devitt has released a steady stream of excellent wines from Darioush since the first vintage in 1997. Proprietor Darioush Khaledi completed his neo-Persian classic temple on the Silverado Trail in August, 2004, and since then the wines are no longer the hidden gems they once were. For years, Devitt had been the winemaker for the neighboring Signorello Winery. He is very familiar with the land in that part of the valley and helps bring it to its full potential.

Like all the vintages tasted from this winery, the 2002 shows nice concentration in the nose, with densely packed black fruit and hints of cocoa and java. The palate is centered on pure blackberry and dark cherry flavors with smooth tannins that suggest notes of spicy citrus and mineral on the finish. Drink: 2005-2013.

**2002 Emilio's Terrace - Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, Oakville, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 93 points**

In 1977, Phil Schlein purchased a 48-acre parcel of land that now contains what is known as Emilio's Terrace, 4.5 acres that were planted in 1990. The vineyard was named to honor Emilio Perez, the vineyard manager for over three decades. It is a very special spot because of its unique growing conditions. The grapes on these steep slopes ripen at different times due to the varying sun exposure, and they are hand-harvested accordingly. This in turn adds layers of complexity to the wine. Winemaker Joe Cafaro (Cafaro, Chappellet, Keenan, Acacia) has been on-site since 1996 quietly developing the reputation of this tiny jewel.

I find over a period of 30 minutes the wine evolves in tantalizing ways. The nose develops smooth chocolate dustiness, and rich blackberry with hints of peppermint. The palate opens with supple blackberry creme brulee and anise/herb with great concentration and acidity. Drink: 2005-2015.

2002 D R Stephens - Cabernet Sauvignon Moose Valley Vineyard, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 93 points

Celia Masyczek (Hartwell, Staglin Family Vineyard, Rocca, Keever, Hollywood & Vine) is at it again, producing another great wine for Don and Trish Stephens off the Jim Barbour-tended vines.

A nose of sweet black fruits, mocha and soft toasty essences of blue and black fruits merge seamlessly with the rich flavors of black currant and spicy plum. It's a nice wine as usual. Drink: 2005-2010.

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