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## THE WILDER SIDE OF CALIFORNIA

Welcome to the inaugural edition of Doug Wilder's *The Wilder Side of California*—a bi-monthly wine letter in which you'll find commentary on the wine I've tasted, the trends I'm watching, and the producers I visit.

My presence in the heart of California Wine Country gives me un-paralleled access to the best small production, boutique producers in the state which I, in turn, can share with you. I hope you'll be inspired to try something unfamiliar.

### DOUG WILDER'S TOP 20 OF 2004

Early every year, I publish a list of the best wine I tasted during the previous year. This list of twenty wines represents a compendium of twelve months of tasting over 3000 wines, and recognizes those producers making what I consider to be the state's most extraordinary wine. The wine discussed here is truly something special and may be relatively unknown outside of Napa Valley. Throughout my career, my clients have used my early wine recommendations to acquire exceptional wine months before it is recognized or rated elsewhere.

### REVIEWS AND RATINGS

California differs from Europe with new small producers emerging constantly. From our office base in the village of St. Helena, I will be acquiring and reporting on new releases, offering them to members essentially within days of tasting. Therefore, the reviews and ratings noted are my own. Reviews are designated Doug Wilder – Vinfolio, and ratings are shown as VF. When a commercial rating exists, it is appended to the end of a review.

### CALIFORNIA WINEMAKERS TO WATCH IN 2005

Here is a short list of winemakers that are introducing profound new wines. Their personal projects are listed within parenthesis.

Mike Hirby – (Relic), Realm

Celia Masyczek – Husic, Cornerstone, D R Stephens, Rocca, 2480, Keever

Jamie Whetstone – (Whetstone)

Mark Herold – (Merus), Hestan, Buccella, Kobalt, Kamen

Bob Egelhoff – (Egelhoff), David Arthur, Phelan

Romel Rivera – (Corte Riva)

### TRENDS TO WATCH

With consolidations occurring at some of the larger wineries over the past 18 months, some very talented people found themselves looking for new projects. Inevitably, some of these individuals will make wine. I would not be surprised that if in the next two years we'll see this talent migration resulting in more exciting boutique wineries coming online.

### CONTACT DOUG WILDER

I will be splitting time between our San Francisco office and St. Helena through the month of March. Beginning in April, I will be working out of our St. Helena office.

At any time, you can reach me via email at [doug@vinfo.com](mailto:doug@vinfo.com) or toll free at 800-969-4557. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any comments, suggestions, or questions regarding the contents of *The Wilder Side of California*.

## DOUG WILDER'S TOP 20 LIST OF 2004 CALIFORNIA WINE

This list includes wine where high demand and small production have created scarce supply. Wine marked with an asterisk (\*) has extremely limited availability due to phenomenal response to the release offering in 2004.

If you are interested in purchasing any of the wine listed, please contact me directly at [doug@vinfolio.com](mailto:doug@vinfolio.com) or by calling 800-969-4557.

VINTAGE	WINE	DRINK DATES	RATING
2002	Bucella – Cabernet Sauvignon	2005 - 2015	VF 100
2002	Hundred Acre – Cabernet Sauvignon	2007 – 2020	VF 99
2002	Drinkward Peschon – Cabernet Sauvignon Entre Deux Mers*	2007 – 2015	VF 98
2002	DuMOL - Chardonnay Russian River Valley	2005 – 2010	VF 98
2003	Garettson – Roussanne The Taistelai	2005 – 2007	VF 98
2002	Maldonado - Chardonnay	2005 – 2010	VF 97
1999	Parador - Reserva	2005 – 2012	VF 97
2001	Husic – Cabernet Sauvignon*	2005 – 2015	VF 96
2001	Kamen – Cabernet Sauvignon	2005 – 2015	VF 96
2002	DuMOL – Chardonnay <i>isobel</i>	2005 – 2010	VF 95
2001	DuMOL – Pinot Noir <i>ryan</i>	2005 – 2015	VF 95
2001	Dyer - Cabernet Sauvignon	2005 – 2015	VF 95
2001	Portfolio – Limited Edition	2009 – 2025	VF 95
2002	Patz & Hall – Chardonnay Alder Springs Vineyard	2005 - 2010	VF 95
2001	Ridge – Monte Bello	2007 – 2030	VF 95
2001	Spottswoode – Cabernet Sauvignon	2008 - 2018	VF 95
1996	Iron Horse – Brut LD	2005 – 2010	VF 94
2003	Margerum – Sauvignon Blanc Westerly Vineyard*	2005 – 2008	VF 94
2001	Derbes – Chardonnay	2005 - 2010	VF 93
2001	Ladera – Cabernet Sauvignon*	2007 – 2014	VF 93

\* Due to phenomenal response to the release offering in 2004 availability is very limited on this wine.

## DOUG WILDER – VINFOLIO REVIEWS

Prices shown are retail release. Current market prices may be higher.

### **Bucella 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley \$100. VF 100 points premiere release**

Here is the premiere release from Bill and Alicia Deem, who I have known for several years. Mark Herold of Merus is the winemaker, and as his other projects show, greatness is merely a starting point. A nose of crushed currants, cigar box, dark, macerated cherry and vanilla pod. The mouth entry, showing flavors of tobacco, rich, spicy flower blossom and chocolate dust is exquisite. The lush tannins make me wish I had a magnum. The finish is liquid blackberry jam, and blueberries. This wine reminds me so much of the premiere release of Portfolio that debuted with a duo of perfect 1998 and 1999 vintages. 92 points – Robert Parker

**Hundred Acre 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley \$225. VF 99 points**

This is the third vintage of Jayson Woodbridge's uncompromising quest to make the ultimate California Cabernet. With winemaker Philippe Melka (Vineyard 29, Bryant, Lail) as his winemaker, there seems to be no stopping on the road to the top. This wine possesses soaring aromatics, gobs of richness, body and thickness. It is pure hedonistic pleasure. In the realm of wines I review at the pinnacle of perfection, this is arguably the most extreme. 98 points – Robert Parker

**Drinkward Peschon 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon Entre Deux Mers Napa Valley \$50. VF 98 points**

The underground favorite! I dubbed this wine "Drinkward Phenomenon" two years ago. This is the third vintage from Lisa Drinkward and Francoise Peschon. The color is inky purple-black with a ruby rim. The nose is full of cherries, dusty plum, black figs and lead pencil. Hints of smoky olive and creamy vanilla are evident as well. On the palate, there is exceptional polish, length and concentration with a bit more acidity than previous vintages.

**DuMOL 2002 Chardonnay Russian River Valley \$46. VF 98 points**

Is there nobody in control here? Andy Smith is unstoppable! From the first vintage in 1996, these wines have never disappointed. The color is gossamer amber gold in the glass, the nose shows mint-washed vanilla bean and jasmine, imbued with nuances of dried lemon and toast leading to delicately balanced flavors of citrus, jasmine and complex mint and crème brûlée richness that gains in the glass with air. This is a classic trait of Smith's winemaking at DuMOL! Give this wine up to five years in the cellar for maximum enjoyment. 92 points – Robert Parker

**Garettson 2003 Roussanne The Taistelai California \$30. VF 98 points premiere release**

Mat Garettson is the wizard of Rhone varieties. In 2003, he placed his luscious 2002 Viognier Vogelzang Vineyard in the Top20 list. Where the Viognier showed pristine elegance, the Roussanne is fat and rich, oozing with butter cream and zesty key lime in the nose. On the palate, the smoky, spicy flavors are complemented by white peach and refreshing lime. If you ever wanted to kick the Chardonnay habit, here you have your justification.

**Maldonado 2002 Chardonnay Los Olivos Vineyard Napa Valley \$45. VF 97 points premiere release**

Once upon a time in the 1980's, on the slopes of the Mayacamas Mountains above St. Helena, a man named Lupe Maldonado managed the vineyards of Newton. At the time Newton's winemaker was John Kongsgaard, responsible for developing the lavish style connected with Newton Chardonnay and its continuing success among astute collectors. Lupe came to the United States in 1962 and worked many years at Newton. After turning over his responsibilities at Newton to his son Hugo, Lupe developed his own vineyard in Jamison Canyon in the early 90's. During this time, Kongsgaard was busy at Luna Winery as owner and winemaker, where he trained his eventual winemaking successor, Abe Schoener. It was through Kongsgaard that Schoener met Lupe Maldonado, and became his winemaker. Lupe's plan is to emulate the rich style of Newton. He and Hugo planted the vineyard to select clones; Ruud, Wentz and Hyde, thinning the closely spaced vines to one cluster per shoot. Once picked, the grapes receive virtually zero intervention, a hallmark of the Schoener style. The wine is 100% barrel fermented using native yeasts and aged in all French Oak (25% new). The wine is never racked and seldom stirred or topped. This active "neglect" exposes the wine to micro-oxygenation, which inoculates it against later oxidation.

I am impressed by the dense ripeness showing in the nose. It is not something that is easy to describe except to say the senses light up immediately; lemon zest, smooth vanilla bean, a plump core of silky textured spice and mineral. The result is a wine generous in a lavish, forward way on the nose and the palate, but finishing with impeccable acidity and length. The wine is bottled unfiltered. 320 cases produced.

**Parador 1999 Reserva Napa Valley \$50. VF 97 points**

Made from an unusual combination of Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese and Tempranillo, selected from the best barrels. Steve Ventrello's Reserva Red reaches new heights in complexity, power and finesse, showing bottomless richness, with dense aromas of currant, plum, cherry and spicy nuances. On the palate you will find ripe, smooth black cherry, currant and anise. Only 200 cases produced

**Husic 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley \$95. VF 96 points premiere release**

Frank Husic scored a coup by hiring Celia Masyczek as his winemaker. Her previous work for Staglin and Hartwell has created incredible demand for her services. Planted in the hills high above the valley floor, Husic is something special. A combination of Clones 7 and 337 planted to two distinctive soil strata. Recent tastings have revealed a compelling creature... A color of magenta and ruby gives way to attractive lavender and black cherry aromas. There are underlying nuances of loam and licorice. On the palate, the flavors are focused with the main flavors being ripe black cherry and spicy blackberry with excellent acidity and weight. The wine is a superb first release.

**Kamen 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon \$75. VF 96 points**

Owner Robert Kamen has recently hired winemaker Mark Herold of Merus to make his wine. I find a beautiful nose of freshly crushed blackberries, and hints of anise and currant. The palate shows a fully formed beauty, riveting in focus with soft cedary notes and good structure for midterm cellaring.

**DuMOL 2002 Chardonnay Russian River isobel \$63. VF 95 points premiere release**

This is the debut release for yet another DuMOL designated Chardonnay now joining chloé. I find delicate toasty aromas in the nose with smooth, textured palate entry, with flavors of citrus, pear and spice shadings, along with anise, pineapple and crème brûlée. 95 points – Robert Parker

**DuMOL 2002 Pinot Noir Russian River ryan \$75. VF 95 points premiere release**

Joining finn is a the newest DuMOL Pinot Noir entry. The nose is full of rich black cherry, orange spice, cola, and saffras. On the palate, it is all elegance and subtlety with dusty spice peeking in and out of the sublime finish. All of the DuMOL designates are named after children or grand-children of the winemaker or the owners. I hope they intend on enlarging their families. 91 points – Robert Parker

**Dyer 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Diamond Mountain \$70. VF 95 points**

With 2001, Bill and Dawnine Dyer have produced one of the best ever from their tiny 2.2 acre vineyard. A dark garnet color leads to firmly packed nose of black olives, figs, cocoa and plum. On the palate the flavors show great intensity with complex shadings of black cherry, currant and spice. Their new Meteor Vineyard was one of my favorite at Premiere Napa Valley 2005.

**Portfolio 2001 Limited Edition Napa Valley \$130. VF 95 points**

The fourth release from Genéviève Janssens. The color is velvet-black, with a supple nose of sandalwood, vanilla pod, black plum and figs. Also I get the unmistakable whiff of the Hendry Blackberry Jam, grown on the same property as the majority of the grapes (Block 8). On the palate, the flavors are still wound tightly, revealing little of the underlying proportions that become apparent after four hours of airing. This wine will benefit from four years of patient cellaring.

**Patz & Hall 2002 Chardonnay Mendocino Alder Springs Vineyard VF 95 points**

Alder Springs is always a treat among the high quality lineup from Patz & Hall's winemaking team of James Hall and Anne Moses. The wine from this vineyard has the exotic fruit and nut aromas not found often: lime, and melon/mango with a whiff of refreshing ginger and hazelnut. The flavors have a profound depth and get more integrated with some air. Drink it through 2010. 92 points - Robert Parker.

**Ridge 2001 Monte Bello Santa Cruz Mountains \$125. VF 95 points**

A magnificent wine by any measure - Monte Bello is the epitome of not trying to make a wine better by making more of it. The yields from this historic property are usually in the realm of a half ton per acre. The 2001 may rival the legendary 1970 Monte Bello (a Wine Spectator 96 point wine), for excellence. The nose shows the textbook mineral and anise, accompanied by smooth flavors of caramel, cedar, dark cherry and lush currant. 96 points – Robert Parker

**Spottswoode 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate Napa Valley \$100. VF 95 points**

Spottswoode is one of the legends of the valley, producing a steady stream of outstanding wines. This vintage shows why it is one of my favorites. Aromas of dark chocolate, blackberry and cigar box spice. Concentrated yet elegant on the palate with spicy nuances to the black fruit centered flavors. The oak is polished and integrated.

**Iron Horse 1996 Brut LD Estate Green Valley \$56. VF 94 points**

Following six long years on the yeast, this tête de cuvée surpasses virtually all other domestic sparkling wine for the sheer pleasure of drinking it. Produced from 25 year old vines, it is all free run juice (50/50 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir). LD (late disgorged) impresses with the richness that is inextricably bound to an ethereal weightlessness on the palate. Every sip of this wine is a stolen moment of pure joy. 92 points – Robert Parker

**Margerum 2003 Sauvignon Blanc Westerly Vineyard Santa Ynez Valley \$20. VF 94 points**

One would think Doug Margerum's Sauvignon Blanc, along with his bodacious Pinot Gris were Napa Valley allocated "first growth" Cabernet by how few I get. Who can stop themselves when confronted with such a pristine, utterly flawless Sauvignon Blanc? From the golden straw color, to the rich, honey, and citrus laced nose and the splendid palate concentration of citrus, stone fruits and crisp acidity. You can spend nearly three times as much if so inclined on a Sauvignon Blanc from California and still fall short of this masterpiece.

**Derbès 2001 Chardonnay Russian River Valley \$50. VF 93 points**

A new release made by Cécile Lemerle-Derbès, formerly of Opus One. The wine shows developed texture and complexity. I find smooth pear and citrus on the nose, with smoky richness on the palate.

**Ladera 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain \$67. VF 93 points**

Winemaker Karen Culler has quickly developed a reputation for making magical wines, and Ladera is no exception. Owners Pat and Ann Stotesberry have restored a masterpiece at a Howell mountain ghost winery, and they are producing richly textured, focused wines of superb character and great pedigree. Howell Mountain can thank Culler for helping shed the reputation of the appellation as the tannic monoliths of the past. Recent barrel tasting at the winery of 2003 Howell Mountain, and Ladera's other site, Lone Canyon show remarkable flavors.

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