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NAPA HEAVYWEIGHTS COME ON STRONG WITH 2019: WEEKLY TASTING REPORT (SEPT 14-20)

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

743 Tasting Notes



Left: The tasting lineup at Robert Mondavi Winery in Oakville. | Right: In the To Kalon vineyards with Mondavi winemaker Kurtis Ogasawara.

Some of Napa Valley's greatest wine producers dominate this weekly report, and rightly so, considering the possibilities for sterling reds in the 2019 vintage from America's most famous wine region. The vintage was the second great one in a row following the exquisitely formidable 2018, which made structured yet refined reds. If producers watched their grape yields in 2019 and didn't go for high-octane wines, they made focused and fruity reds with gorgeous depth and intensity without being heavy. They also have pure and vivid fruit that Napa delivers so wonderfully from a number of the best vineyard areas and sites.

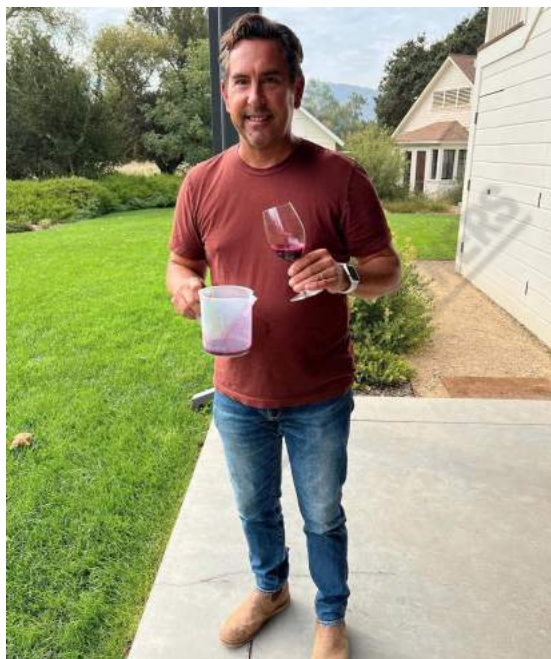
"The 2019 is high energy and has more focus in the wines but similar intensity to 2018," said Andy Erickson, one of the top consulting enologists in Napa, who with his wife, Annie, made some fantastic wines in their winery in Coombsville. "The 2018 made reds that are very broad while 2019s are laser-focused. The great quality is similar to one another. Yields were good in both years."

Erickson's Favia Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Coombsville 2019 is an extraordinary young cabernet with such purity and freshness at the same time. It highlights the growing popularity of Coombsville in recent vintages, which is one of the coolest in Napa due to its southern location and nearness to the bay. I continue to call it the Pauillac of Napa because of this as well as the cabernets that come with loads of blue fruits, graphite and freshness on the palate.

However, it was a wine from Erickson's gig with Constellation Brands, the wine conglomerate that owns Robert Mondavi Vineyards, Schrader and part of Opus One, that delivered a perfect, 100-point wine.

The To Kalon Vineyard Co. is the brainchild of Constellation and was launched to emphasize that Constellation is the biggest owner of what some consider the best vineyards in Napa Valley, and the United States for that matter. The formation of the company was also a legal move made to underline that Constellation owns the brand "To Kalon."

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Andy Erickson of Favia Wines and To Kalon made some sterling reds in 2019.

Constellation owns about 550 acres of the To Kalon Vineyard, including the largest part of the best parcels, out of the nearly 680 acres in total. "They said that I could pick the best parts of To Kalon to make the wines," Erickson only half joked. "How could I say no?"

His first release of his perfect red, the To Kalon Vineyard Co. Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Oakville H.W.C. To Kalon Vineyard 2019, is a small-production bottling of a selected parcel of To Kalon and it really is unique. It is the essence of Napa cabernet and has a balance and purity with an endless finish.



The Schrader California Heritage Clone 2019 shows incredible depth and seamless tannins.

Meanwhile, rockstar winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown also made a perfect wine with the second release from Schrader that comes from a heritage clone of To Kalon cabernet sauvignon and is produced in tiny quantities. I can't remember tasting anything like this single-parcel offering, which has incredible depth and seamless tannins as well as seductive aromas of exotic fruits. It's crunchy and not jammy.

"Every time I taste it, it shows this uniquely exotic fruit character," Brown said during the tasting. He said that the mass-selected clone of cab was developed from the 1970s and some of the best cuttings used for the great Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon Private Reserves of the time.

There are plenty of other top Napa reds from other great winemakers, such as Vine Hill Ranch, Shafer Vineyards, Dalla Valle and Helen Kiplinger, to check out in this report, in addition to hundreds of other reds and whites, so see the tasting notes below.

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James, left, and Senior Editor Zekun Shuai, right, taste with Helen Keplinger of Keplinger Wines in Napa.



The vineyards of Wohlmuth in the Kitzeck sub-area of the Styria, where riesling and sauvignon blanc flourish side by side.

THE FLIP SIDE OF AUSTRIA

After spending a full week of tasting focused on the wines that the world most closely associates with Austria (dry whites from gruner veltliner and riesling grapes) Senior Editor Stuart Pigott headed south to explore the many other sides of Austrian wine.

In Styria, or the Steiermark in Austrian German, Stuart was lucky to be offered a ride in a light aircraft by Reinhard Muster of the Muster-Gamlitz winery, which enabled him to get an overview of this region's undulating hill country and the alternating vineyards, forest and fields. It's an incredibly green landscape thanks to the abundant rainfall that comes from the Adriatic side of the Mediterranean.

"There's no gruner veltliner in Styria and little riesling except in the Kitzeck sub-area, where Wohlmuth shows what the grape can do there," Stuart said. "The real star of Styria is sauvignon blanc, and the leading winemakers have now really mastered it."

No wine shows that more dramatically than the Tement Sauvignon Blanc Südsteiermark Ried Zieregg Vínóthek Reserve 2019, which not only has gigantic concentration and chalky freshness, but is also the best dry white from this grape we ever have tasted from Styria or anywhere else in Austria.

"Armin and Monika Tement run one of Styria's top wineries, but also look out for the best-rated wines from Gross, Lackner-Tinnacher and others," Stuart commented. "With their grapefruit and herbal character they taste totally different from New Zealand, South Africa or even the wines from the grape's homeland in the Loire and Bordeaux."



Monika and Armin Tement of the Tement winery in Styria made our highest-ever rated Austrian sauvignon blanc.

In Burgenland as well as the Leithaberg and Eisenberg regions of Austria, it is the red wines of the 2019 and 2020 vintages that really stand out, particularly those from the blaufrankisch grape. The 2019s are a bit richer and more structured, the 2020s very aromatic and elegant.

"Although Moric once again stunned me with a row of wines that have all the spice and vibrancy we expect from this Austro-Hungarian grape, several other producers, like Schuster in Burgenland plus Sommer in Leithaberg, also wowed me with their new wines," Stuart said. Scroll down to find them.

READ MORE: TOP 100 VALUE WINES OF 2021



The barrel cellar at the Lackner-Tinnacher winery in Styria.

The best of the Eisenberg wines were those of Wachter-Wiesler and the star among them is the spectacularly fresh and mineral Wachter-Wiesler Blaufränkisch Eisenberg Ried Weinberg Reserve 2019.”

Burgenland also impressed with some excellent chardonnays from Kollwentz, with the gigantically concentrated Kolwentz Chardonnay Burgenland Gloria 2020 gaining our highest-ever rating for an Austrian wine from this grape.

Last, but not least, 2019 was an excellent vintage for the dessert wines from the Kracher winery in Illmitz on the eastern shore of Lake Neusiedlersee. “The Kracher Welschriesling Burgenland Trockenbeerenauslese Nummer 6 2019 is probably the best wine Gerhard Kracher ever made,” was Stuart’s assessment.

- James Suckling, Editor/Chairman; Stuart Pigott, Senior Editor

The list of wines below is comprised of bottles tasted and rated during the past week by James Suckling and the other tasters at JamesSuckling.com. They include many latest releases not yet available on the market, but which will be available soon. Some will be included in upcoming tasting reports.

Note: You can sort the wines below by country, vintage, score and alphabetically by winery name. You can also search for specific wines in the search bar.

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SCHRADER NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE HERITAGE CLONE 2019 ▼

TO KALON VINEYARD CO. CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE H.W.C. TO KALON VINEYARD 2019	▼
FAVIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY COOMBSVILLE 2019	▼
KRACHER WELSCHRIESLING BURGENLAND TROCKENBEERENAUSLESE NUMMER 6 2019	▼
SCHRADER CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY BECKSTOFFER TO KALON VINEYARD 2019	▼
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TEMENT SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED ZIEREGG VINOTHEK RESERVE 2019	▼
TO KALON VINEYARD CO. NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE HIGHEST BEAUTY 2018	▼
VINE HILL RANCH CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY 2018	▼
FAVIA NAPA VALLEY LA MAGDALENA 2019	▼
KEPLINGER NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE VINE HILL RANCH 2019	▼
KOLLWENTZ BURGENLAND STEINZEILER 2019	▼
KOLLWENTZ CHARDONNAY BURGENLAND GLORIA 2020	▼
KRACHER BURGENLAND TROCKENBEERENAUSLESE NUMMER 5 GRANDE CUVÉE 2019	▼
LACKNER TINNACHER SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED FLAMBERG GSTK 2020	▼
LACKNER TINNACHER WELSCHRIESLING SÜDSTEIERMARK TROCKENBEERENAUSLESE 2017	▼
MORIC BLAUFRÄNKISCH BURGENLAND LUTZMANNSBURG ALTE REBEN 2020	▼
SCHRADER CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY BECKSTOFFER LAS PIEDRAS VINEYARD COLESWORTHY 2019	▼
SCHRADER CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY BECKSTOFFER TO KALON VINEYARD CCS 2019	▼
SCHRADER CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY CLONE 169, MONASTERY BLOCK 2019	▼
SHAFFER VINEYARDS CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY STAGS LEAP DISTRICT HILLSIDE SELECT 2019	▼
TO KALON VINEYARD CO. NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE ELIZA'S RED WINES TO KALON VINEYARD 2019	▼
TO KALON VINEYARD CO. NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE HIGHEST BEAUTY 2019	▼
VINE HILL RANCH CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY 2019	▼
WOHLMUTH RIESLING SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED EDELSCHUH GSTK 2021	▼
WOHLMUTH SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED EDELSCHUH GSTK 2021	▼
FAVIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY COOMBSVILLE 2020	▼
FAVIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE 2019	▼
FAVIA CHARDONNAY NAPA VALLEY COOMBSVILLE CARBONE 2021	▼

GROSS SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED NUSSBERG FR 2017	▼
KEPLINGER CABERNET FRANC NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE RBK 2019	▼
KEPLINGER NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE OAKVILLE RANCH 2019	▼
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LACKNER TINNACHER MORILLON SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED FLAMBERG GSTK 2020	▼
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SÄTTLERHOF SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK BEERENAUSSLESE 2021	▼
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WOHLMUTH SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED EDELSCHUH GSTK 2020	▼
WOHLMUTH SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED HOCHSTEINRIEGL GSTK 2021	▼
ARIETTA MERLOT NAPA VALLEY ARTISTS' RESERVE ONE ELEVEN 2019	▼
CERVANTES CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY 2019	▼
DALLA VALLE CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY 2020	▼
DALLA VALLE NAPA VALLEY MAYA 2020	▼
FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS NAPA VALLEY RUTHERFORD WINSTON HILL 2019	▼
GROSS SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED SULZ 2017	▼
HEITZ CELLAR CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY LOT C-91 2017	▼
HUDSON CHARDONNAY NAPA VALLEY CARNEROS SEASHELL 2020	▼

KERR CELLARS CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY BECKSTOFFER VINEYARD GEORGES III 2019	▼
KOLLWENTZ CHARDONNAY BURGENLAND RIED TATSCHLER 2020	▼
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