

28th
BEST
of The
BEST



California Cabernet Sauvignon

QRW TASTING TEAM

We've attempted to assemble the best possible list of available Cabernet Sauvignon for our 28th annual Best of The Best. Available is the operative word: at *Quarterly Review of Wines* it means "readily" available, either at retail or at restaurants or easily available through the winery, not "trophy wines" that can be purchased only by private subscription or wines that are heavily allocated. This year we blind tasted 70 Cabernet Sauvignon chiefly from Napa Valley and largely from the 2009 vintage, and found them generally quite fine and several outstanding. Initially, the word was that the 2009 Cabernet vintage was bountiful and that quality was good but not great. We've found this not to be true: the 2009s have quantity and quality, with good levels of alcohol averaging 14.5%. Consumers would be wise to buy and collect. It's also fortunate that we tasted later this year than usual because a few more months of cellaring added to their quality. "Best of Best" wines are, of course, expensive, but excellence always is.

Note about ratings: We have always preferred adjectives to numbers, but we know that numbers mean more than words to the wine buying public, so we offer both. Numerical ratings are only guideposts. Wine is an art, and, like any art, it is subjective. While most Cabs have similar flavors — blackberry, chocolate, spice, plum and so forth — we strive to discover the wine's poetry, its grace. And for us finish is the essence of any wine's poetry. It isn't easy and subjectivity obviously plays a major role. All the wines below have outstanding character, and are in a class by themselves. With medium tannins, they can be cellared for several years. If drinking now, it is important to decant. (Suggested retail prices below are provided by the wineries.)

— Richard L. Elia

BEST OF SHOW

- **2009 CAYMUS SPECIAL SELECTION, NAPA VALLEY, \$130**

BEST VALUE

- **2007 FERRARI CARANO PREVAIL WEST FACE,
ALEXANDER VALLEY, \$55**

CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON

- **2009 CAYMUS SPECIAL SELECTION, NAPA VALLEY, \$130.** Ripe, voluptuous, with a typical Caymus hint of sweetness. Silky, rich, deep blackberry. Elegant. **96 points** **BEST OF SHOW**
* * *
- **2008 JOSEPHS PHELPS INSIGNIA, NAPA VALLEY, \$200.** Complex, enormous, and deep. Blackberry, big tannins, blackberry and chocolate (mocha), plum, cedar. **94 points**
- **2009 HALL JACK'S MASTERPIECE, NAPA VALLEY, \$110.** Big. Inky, rich, jammy, dark chocolate-mocha, with blackberry and cherry flavors. Substantial alcohol — 15.5%. Decant. Excellent. **94 points**
- **2009 HALL SAGASSIA VINEYARD (MT. VEEDER/NAPA VALLEY), \$150.** Outstanding. Juicy, massive, well constructed, with hefty alcohol — 15.5%. Plush and velvety with black fruit and mocha. **94 points**
- **2009 PINE RIDGE FORTIS, NAPA VALLEY, \$140.** Black fruit and raspberry, nutty oak and vanillin notes, ripe, big and beautiful texture. Delicious. **94 points**
* * *
- **2008 MERRYVALE "PROFILE," NAPA VALLEY, \$165.** Red blend. Ripe, blackberry, anise notes, vanilla spice, fine generous finish. Opulent. **93 points**
- **2009 PARALLEL BLACK DIAMOND, NAPA VALLEY, \$125.** Softly sweet, rich blackberry and plum. Sumptuous, cedar-oak. Soft tannins, elegant texture, and delicious. **93 points**
- **2009 VIADER, NAPA VALLEY, \$115.** Red proprietary blend of Cabernet (70%) and Cabernet Franc (30%). Bordeaux-like. Blackberry, cedar, and plum. Smooth, soft, elegant, and lush. **93 points**
- **2009 RIDGE ESTATE MONTE BELLO VINEYARD, \$140.** Big. Long-lived. Black fruit, volatile tannins, jammy, olive notes. Decant. **93 points**
- **2007 ST. SUPERY ELU, NAPA VALLEY, \$65.** The 07 is an exceptional Cabernet vintage. This is a red blend with a Bordeaux soul and a California richness. Plum, black cherry and blackberry, spicy cedar notes. Superb! **93 points**
* * *
- **2009 CORLEY RESERVE, NAPA VALLEY, \$80.** Coffee, roasted nuts, blackberry/mocha notes. Ripe. Well knitted. **92 points**
- **2007 FERRARI CARANO PREVAIL WEST FACE, ALEXANDER VALLEY, \$55.** Excellent vintage. Red blend (61% Cab, 39% Syrah). Blackberry, coffee, cassis, and cedar. A great "best buy." **BEST VALUE**

OTHER CABS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **2009 BOYANCI RED BLEND, NAPA VALLEY, \$110.** Big. Blackberry, chocolate, spice, and plum. Lace of anise. Decant. Impressive. **91 points**
- **2009 CAYMUS NAPA VALLEY, \$72.** Fine textured, elegant, soft, seductive sweetness, berry and oak. Excellent. **91 points**
- **2008 FERRARI CARANO RESERVE MOUNTAIN VINEYARDS, ALEXANDER VALLEY, \$46.** Cherry, blackberry, toasty, spice and oak. Give it time. Powerful stuff. **91 points**
- **2008 KULETO, NAPA VALLEY, \$50.** Black fruit, plum, cedar, and chocolate. Good concentration. Fine texture. Mouthfilling. **91 points**
- **2007 PEJU CABERNET SAUVIGNON, NAPA VALLEY, \$50.** The 2007 was a fine vintage. Raspberry, plum, and blackberry. Nice jam flavor, oak-spice, elegant and stylish finish. **91 points**
- **2009 SHAFER 1.5, NAPA VALLEY, \$70.** Big with 15.5% alcohol. Blackberry, plum and oak spice and hint of mint. Decant. Delicious. **91 points**
- **2008 CORLEY STATE LANE VINEYARD, NAPA VALLEY, \$65.** Dark chocolate, berry, oak, earthy. Well knitted. **90 points**
- **2008 HELLER ESTATE MERITAGE (DANCER), CARMEL VALLEY, \$25.** Blackberry, plum, cassis, dark chocolate and mocha notes, rounded and well focused. **90 points**
- **2009 HELLER ESTATE CACHAGUA, CARMEL VALLEY, \$22.** (Best value wine of the tasting.) Big. Blackberry, toasty oak notes, mocha, anise. Well made. **90 points** ☞