

# Cabernet Sauvignon

quality is getting better with each passing vintage. During the economic downturn some ten years back, we were inundated with dire, hand-wringing laments that Cabernet had somehow lost its sheen and that high-ticket versions were gathering dust on retailer's shelves and being abandoned by restaurant goers. but, if there were undoubtedly a few kernels of truth in such observations, those times and trends now seem but a distant memory. The truth is, even with a steady rise in the cost of Cabernet grapes and resultant increases in the prices of finished wines, better bottlings are still being snapped up by thirsty consumers, and Cabernet Sauvignon's place as California's defining red wine is secure.

As it turns out, recent statistics about new Cabernet plantings in recent years point to a significant increase. According to a report by Allied Grape Growers, a California wine-grape marketing cooperative with nearly 600 grower-members located throughout major growing regions in the state, Cabernet now accounts for over thirty percent of total varietal acreage in the state, up from but thirteen percent in 2009. While such a dramatic increase raises questions that future years might see a Cabernet glut and a decline in prices, most every observer agrees that the iconic names and places – read Napa Valley – will be unlikely affected, and we see little reason to disagree.

## 86 ANCIENT PEAKS Santa Margarita Ranch 2016

14% Petit Verdot; 3% Petite Sirah. Although not without its fair share of fruit, this wine favors the woodsier traits of Cabernet first with elements of dried herbs, black tea and a smattering of forest floor spice set before a comparatively quiet backdrop of dark berries and cherries. It shows a brief bit of succulence before acid and tannin conspire to cramp its flavors, and, if not all that astringent, it gets a bit bony as it goes.    \$22.00

## 84 BALDACCI Brenda's Vineyard 2015

**Stags Leap District.** Made from a selection of what the winery considers its best barrels and, indeed, a Cabernet that is lavishly appointed with sweet oak, this lovely offering is first and foremost a wine that is bursting with a wealth of curranty fruit. It hints at black olives here and at loam and graphite there, but if already complex, it is underpinned by ample tannin and is clearly built for the long haul. It is not hard to see that polish and grace lie in its future, but both will have to wait for its youthful astringency to ease. It is gorgeous stuff, to be sure, but it is not near ready, and it will not disappoint if it is hidden away until it approaches its tenth anniversary.    \$150.00

## 91 BALDACCI Stags Leap District 2015

A bit tight and brooding at first but impressively concentrated and revealing a little more richness and depth with each sniff and sip and showing a careful winemaking manifest in its tactile polish and very fine balance, Baldacci's Stags Leap bottling is a sizeable yet keenly focused working that is starting to show a lovely sense of discreet layering. It is insistently fruity with currants and sweet oak to spare and slow-to-emerge highlights of black olives and caramel, but, even if it unfolds as it sits in the glass, it has the finishing grip to warrant no less than a half-decade of additional cellar time.    \$90.00

## 90 BALDACCI Calistoga 2015

Ripe cherries and sweet oak abound in this wine's deep and very outgoing aromas, and its similarly forthright, fully packed flavors are long on sustained fruity vigor and richness. It is both weighty and slightly supple in feel with glimmers of developing plushness signaling that protracted cellaring is not required, yet it is tannic enough to warn off overly hasty drinking, and four or five years of aging is recommended.    \$90.00

## 86 BALDACCI Oakville 2015

A bit of an outlier in the Baldacci clan in that it comes with a slight shortfall of fruit, the Oakville bottling is a bit dry and dusty in tone with an herbal trim to its hesitant theme of cherries. It is ripe and it is tough with aggressive tannins working to truncate its flavors, but there is simply less about it that raises optimism that its lot will be significantly bettered as those tannins diminish over time.    \$90.00

## 89 BLUE ROCK Best Barrels Alexander Valley 2016

Plentiful sweet oak plays a prominent role in the juicy, fully ripe aromas of this immediately engaging young Cabernet, but it does not do so to the exclusion of well-defined red currant fruit, and the wine's flavors reflect the same mix of parts with fruit getting a little more emphasis. There are still-obvious tannins in play as is hardly surprising given its tender years, yet, while the wine is fairly tight, it is never tough, and its entirely acceptable level of astringency does nothing to interfere with its clear and lasting message of lively young fruit.    \$95.00

## 88 BUEHLER Estate Napa Valley 2016

Redolent of red cherries and ripe plum with a wee touch of cocoa to its mid-density aromas and moderately full-bodied with a good sense of fruity ripeness carried on into its relatively accessible and

and amazingly deep aromas of blackcurrants, cola, sweet loam and creamy oak, and, in all ways living up to promise once in the mouth, this is Cabernet Sauvignon on a grand scale that is as impeccably balanced as it is layered and so very rich. It is full-bodied but never once hints at heaviness or inclines to excess of any kind, and it shows remarkable length and stamina to its beautifully composed flavors. It is moderately tannic as should not be unexpected of an ambitious Cabernet of its age, but its tannins are more than matched by extracted fruit, Drink in five years or ten or fifteen as you chose, but know that it will only get better with time.    \$135.00



*Baldacci*  
FAMILY VINEYARDS

## 95 BALDACCI Ruppert Napa Valley 2015

Announcing itself as a wine of real seriousness with very intense