

Winophilia



A Taste of the IWC

Napa Valley wine porn, version 2.013

This year's collection of the most alluring and extravagantly rich

cabernet- and merlot-based wines I tasted on my annual late-winter tour of Napa Valley comes mostly from the consistently outstanding season of 2010. This cool, late year produced aromatically complex, sharply focused wines with suave tannins and outstanding aging potential—a near-perfect vintage for inveterate Europhiles who typically find California wines a bit, well, pornographic. Note that most of these wines will not be released until this fall or next year.

The wines highlighted below are very expensive, made mostly in very small quantities, and sold mainly to mailing-list customers. So if you can't get your hands on a bottle or two, at least you can drool over them here. I should note that all of these wines rated 96 points or higher (“extraordinary”) in the current issue of the *International Wine Cellar*. It's also worth pointing out that two talented winemakers were responsible for five of the wines in this article: Cory Empting makes the Harlan Estate and Bond wines, while Denis Malbec is the winemaker at both Blankiet and Kapcsandy Family Winery.

Blankiet's 2010 Proprietary Red Wine Paradise Hills Vineyard Napa Valley (\$200), a Bordeaux blend based on 84% cabernet sauvignon, is the relative bargain in this year's group of beauties. Its knockout nose seduces with perfumed scents of cassis, graphite, licorice, spices and bitter chocolate. In the mouth, it's wonderfully suave and fine-grained, with harmonious acidity giving brilliant definition to its dark raspberry, spice, mineral and menthol flavors. This juicy, classy, ripely tannic wine has a perfect balance for a graceful evolution in bottle.

The **Bond 2010 Vecina Red Wine Napa Valley** (\$375), also made mostly of cabernet sauvignon, leads off with expressive aromas of blueberry, black cherry, menthol, graphite and licorice. It's plush, ripe, deep and utterly seamless without coming across as overly sweet. This wonderfully broad, rich wine saturates every square millimeter of the palate on the bright, extremely long finish. Fine-grained tannins contribute to the impression of early balance but it would be a crime to open this beauty too early.

The **Dalla Valle Vineyards Maya Proprietary Red Wine Napa Valley** has been a favorite of mine going back 20 years, and the 2010 version (\$300) is another stunner. This blend of two-thirds cabernet sauvignon and one-third cabernet franc exudes highly perfumed crushed blueberry and violet aromas. It's densely packed and wonderfully aromatic in the mouth, displaying terrific floral lift to its sharply delineated dark berry flavors. Almost painfully young today, this Maya should turn out to be one of the monuments of its superb vintage.

Hundred Acre made a set of stunning 2010s and my favorite of the collection is the **Cabernet Sauvignon Kayli Morgan Vineyard Napa Valley** (\$250), from the cabernet vineyard that originally put Jayson Woodbridge's label on the radar of collectors. The wine's aromas of black raspberry, licorice, graphite and flowers are complicated by exotic spices. It's densely packed and remarkably deep, at once thick and penetrating, with velvety black fruit and mineral flavors taking on red cherry and floral qualities as the wine opens in the mouth. The finish boasts outstanding echoing persistence and energy.

Pierre Seillan's **Verité** wines have also been consistently remarkable in recent years, and the **2009 Le Desir Red Wine Sonoma County** (\$390), a "Saint-Emilion blend" based on 74% cabernet franc, is so good that I had no choice but to include it with its Napa Valley cousins. The vibrant, highly nuanced nose offers cassis, blackberry, licorice, minerals, tobacco leaf and violet. It's rich, tactile and deep, offering a rare combination of explosive fruit intensity and elegance. This wonderfully energetic wine builds and echoes dramatically on the vibrant finish, saturating the palate with dark fruits and minerals.

The **Harlan Estate 2010 Red Wine Napa Valley** (\$750), which tied Kapcsandy's Roberta's Reserve for the highest rating (98+?) of nearly 1,800 wines in the [International Wine Cellar's](#) spring coverage of Napa and Sonoma, has a knockout nose combining black raspberry, smoke, minerals and hints of forest floor. At once silky and high-pitched, dense and vibrant, it offers superb concentration of fruit and inner-palate saline energy even if it's an infant today. Its endless building finish must be experienced to be believed.

The **Kapcsandy Family Winery 2010 Roberta's Reserve State Lane Vineyard Yountville** (\$395) a Château Pétrus-like blend of 95% merlot and 5% cabernet franc, is perhaps the greatest young merlot I have ever tasted from California. Its high-pitched aromas of blackberry, blueberry, minerals and licorice lead to a wonderfully intense but youthfully imploded palate featuring electric flavors of black fruits, cocoa powder, bitter chocolate and minerals. It's utterly seamless considering that it's so backward today. The finish features noble tannins, great class and energy and endless lingering perfume. The steely structure of this great merlot suggests that it will evolve gracefully in bottle for two or three decades.

Kapcsandy's top cabernet bottling, the **2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Grand Vin State Lane Vineyard Yountville** (\$375), is in the same exalted class as the Roberta's Reserve. Its deep aromas of cassis, blackberry, licorice, bitter chocolate and crushed rock are sexed up by a suggestion of candied fruit. It's amazingly precise and pure on the palate, with outstanding mineral cut and inner-mouth perfume to the flavors of black fruits, graphite, cedar and lavender. This beauty is best today on the expanding, slowly mounting finish, which is shaped by noble tannins and leaves behind captivating mineral and violet perfume. If the Roberta's Blend resembles a top vintage of Pétrus, this one is Latour-like—and I don't make those comparisons lightly.

Finally, the **Screaming Eagle 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley** (\$850), a blend of 75% cabernet sauvignon, 16% merlot and 9% cabernet franc, boasts urgent aromas of crushed boysenberry, wild herbs, licorice and spearmint complemented by sexy oak tones. It's densely packed and electric, with great verve to its highly concentrated, pliant flavors of black fruits, cocoa powder and flowers. The wine's inexorable, slowly mounting finish and big but noble tannins foretell a long and glorious evolution in bottle.

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