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## EWS Tastings

### 2008 California Cabernets

March 12, 2012

Coming on the heels of the ever-popular 2007 vintage for California Cabernets, the 2008s were slow to gain consumer's attention. However, the professional critics seemed to have reached the conclusion that the best 2008s are comparable to the best 2007s, and the 2008s in general are great successes on their own terms.

Last year, we tasted the 2007 Cabs and that turned out to be an epic tasting, as the wines were fabulous across the board. Our notes were never posted on eRP, but we'll now reveal that the runaway first place winner was Blankiet, followed by Phelps "Insignia" and Beau Vigne "Reserve."

We wondered if it could be true that the best 2008s are comparable to the best 2007s, despite dramatically different vintage conditions. We had to put this question to a test. For this blind tasting, the EWS team has assembled 13 of the most coveted Cabernets from the 2008 vintage. Contestants either had a huge score from the wine press and/or are a longtime EWS favorite. Our lineup included a combination of established producers and highly publicized newcomers.

Recognizing that it's neither easy nor fair to draw conclusions about one vintage versus another based on a small sample size of only 13 wines, everyone still concluded that the 2007s as a group were several notches better than this group of 2008s. That is not to say we didn't taste some stunning wines, because we did. But the general consensus was that only our top three wines were 95 point quality level, with many coming in closer to the 90 marker. We guarantee that a similar group of 2007s scored higher and were received more favorably.

There seems to be a plethora of really good 2008 Cabernets in the \$20 - \$50 range, so we're not really down on the vintage. As to these 13 wines, our consensus notes tell the story.

Wines were poured in three flights from numbered bags (1 - 13) and are listed below in the order they were poured. Participants were asked to vote (by number) for their three favorite wines. We award three points for every first place vote, two for every second place vote, and one point for every third, allowing for ties. Data is based on 20 voters. Rating is more reflective of the "here and now" rather than future development. Wines were double decanted at least three hours before being poured. Voting tallies: 1st/2nd/3rd

#	Wine (20 voters)	1st Place	2nd Place	3rd Place	Total Points
13	Continuum Proprietary Red (Napa)	7	1	2	25
3	Blankiet Estate Proprietary Red "Paradise Hills Vineyard" (Napa)	5	3	1	22
9	GTS Cabernet Sauvignon "Diamond Mountain - Seaver Family Vineyards" (Napa)	3	4	3	20

2	Lewelling Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)	0	4	1	9
10	Ramey Cabernet Sauvignon "Pedregal Vineyard" (Oakville - Napa)	2	0	3	9
4	Joseph Phelps Proprietary Red "Insignia" (Napa)	0	3	1	7
6	Araujo Estate Cabernet Sauvignon "Eisele Vineyard" (Napa)	2	0	1	7
11	Maybach Cabernet Sauvignon "Materium - Weitz Vineyard" (Napa)	0	1	4	6
5	Bevan Proprietary Red "Showket Vineyard - Double E's Cuvée" (Oakville - Napa)	0	1	3	5
8	Hundred Acre Cabernet Sauvignon "Ark Vineyard" (Napa)	1	1	0	5
12	Schrader Cabernet Sauvignon "Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard - Old Sparky" (Napa)	0	1	2	4
7	Favia Proprietary Red "La Magdalena" (Napa)	0	1	0	2
1	Bialla Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)	0	0	0	0

**1) Bialla Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa) - \$125 - 0 points - no rating**

Medium saturated color. Musty, rustic, slightly corked nose. We pick up soft scents of cherry, earth, tobacco, and bubble gum. Fairly light and dull on the palate with prominent biting tannins. Again, we question if this is a good bottle. It's a medium-bodied wine, showing some heat and coarseness. The less said, the better. Previous vintages of Bialla have been crowd-pleasers, but this was not a good way to start the tasting.

**2) Lewelling Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa) - \$65 - 9 points (0/4/1) - 93 rating**

Fairly deep color. Open, penetrating, modern bouquet is attractive with ripe black cherry fruit, spice, chocolate, and smoke. Big and voluptuous on the palate with prevalent ripe tannins. We're impressed with this wine's structure, intensity, and density. It really improves in the glass, displaying nice yeasty, wood, and earth flavors. There was one disgruntled soul who claimed #2 was out of balance in favor of its alcohol, but this was a minority opinion. Extremely long finish.

**3) Blankiet Estate Proprietary Red "Paradise Hills Vineyard" (Napa) - \$200 - 22 points (5/3/1) - 95 rating**

Deep color. Open, expansive, sexy, modern nose features leather, plum, cassis, minerals, earth, and new oak. Follows through flawlessly on the palate; sweet, seductive, and velvety. This is a complex, layered, chocolatey wine with particularly wonderful acidity. It is youthful for sure, but is drinking beautifully right now, especially with aeration. Above all, the finish is extra long, consistent, and dare we say delicious. Great follow-up performance by the same people who produced the 2007 Cabernet champion!

**4) Joseph Phelps Proprietary Red "Insignia" (Napa) - \$150 - 7 points (0/3/1) - 92 rating**

Fairly deep color. Deep, rich, penetrating, "aristocratic" aromas of blackberry, plum, spice, tar, and oak. We like it. Youthful on entry with a nice core of sweet fruit and wood-influenced flavors. This is a rich, chewy wine with noticeable tannin; probably the most backward wine in the first flight of five. As it sits in the glass, it becomes softer and more accessible. Very long, penetrating finish. A really good candidate for the cellar.

**5) Bevan Proprietary Red "Showket Vineyard - Double E's Cuvée" (Oakville - Napa) - \$200 - 5 points (0/1/3) - 91 rating**

Very deep color. Rather restrained aromas never fully evolve beyond sweet blackberry and plum scents with leather and tar. Much more impressive on the palate as wine #5 offers terrific intensity and thrust; nothing shy about this powerful wine. There's spicy sweetness to balance against the tannins. Critics suggest that the wine lacks elegance or finesse, but fans counter with a plea for patience. Very long, enjoyable finish. We're sure we'd rate this wine

higher when it reaches full maturity.

**6) Araujo Estate Cabernet Sauvignon “Eisele Vineyard” (Napa) - \$300 - 7 points (2/0/1) - 92 rating**

Medium-deep color. Attractive, rich bouquet features scents of ripe plums, violet, licorice, and chocolate. As it sits, a smoky note becomes more apparent. Sweet dark berry fruit on entry; juicy and chewy in the mouth with a lot going on. This youthful, full-bodied wine gets high marks for the quality of the extracted fruit, balance, depth, complexity, and superb texture. Modest finish with a little heat at the end. There’s a bright future here.

**7) Favia Proprietary Red “La Magdalena” (Napa) - \$150 - 2 points (0/1/0) - 89 rating**

Fairly deep color. Tight, high-toned aromas eventually reveal ripe cherry and cassis fruit, but the alcohol seems to dominate. Additional notes include violet, licorice, and spice. The sweetness and heat continue on the palate and through the finish, with a medicinal flavor in the background. Most participants are not happy with #7, complaining that it’s “too extracted and over-the-top.” This wine is composed of ¾ Cabernet Franc and ¼ Cabernet Sauvignon, but that wasn’t a problem. We just weren’t crazy about this bottle.

**8) Hundred Acre Cabernet Sauvignon “Ark Vineyard” (Napa) - \$300 - 5 points (1/1/0) - 91 rating**

Medium saturated color. Attractive, ripe cherry and red currant fruit nose with earth, tobacco, and spice in supporting roles. This is another sweet, high alcohol wine in the mouth, but it’s more refined and harmonious than #7. Youthful and tannic, #8 is a candidate for the cellar. It’s leathery and green with undeveloped fruit, however, there are clues suggesting a bright future. We love the mid-palate presence; this is serious juice. Long, intense finish.

**9) GTS Cabernet Sauvignon “Diamond Mountain - Seaver Family Vineyards” (Napa) - \$175 - 20 points (3/4/3) - 95 rating**

Fairly deep color. Sexy, inviting, Bordeaux-like nose features lovely cherry, red currant, violet, spice, minerals, and coffee scents. Sweet and complex on entry with lively acidity moving everything along. Medium-bodied (especially next to #8) with soft tannins. The seductive ripe fruit at the core is the best feature. Good length, consistent, harmonious, and enjoyable. Everybody loved this Cab. Like a Tom Seaver fastball, it made a notable impression.

**10) Ramey Cabernet Sauvignon “Pedregal Vineyard” (Oakville - Napa) - \$150 - 9 points (2/0/3) - 93 rating**

Medium-deep color. Soft, sweet bouquet is leathery and jammy with ripe dark berry fruit, licorice, and spice. Interesting sweet / tart on the palate. This voluptuous wine has good impact, acidity, weight, and overall balance. While quite drinkable now, we get the feeling that wine #10 is holding back. Sweetness and alcohol take center stage, but cellaring will add nuance. Really good length.

**11) Maybach Cabernet Sauvignon “Materium – Weitz Vineyard” (Napa) - \$200 - 6 points (0/1/4) - 92 rating**

Deep color, darkest in the last flight of four. Dramatic, open, ripe, powerful Port-like scents emerge, led by dark berry fruit and kerosene. Impressive follow-through on the palate! This wine is sweet, complex, thick, creamy, juicy, dense, and very fresh. There’s a tannic bite and plenty of stuffing for us to declare #11 cellar-worthy. Long, penetrating finish. We really like this wine.

**12) Schrader Cabernet Sauvignon “Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard – Old Sparky” (Napa) - \$2,700 magnum - 4 points (0/1/2) - 91 rating**

Medium-deep color. Softer, sweet, attractive nose has wonderful dark berry fruit with some oak and spice. Follows through nicely on the palate. This medium-bodied wine has all of its components in balance and seems to be drinking beautifully right now. On the other hand, wine #12 doesn’t quite have the drama or complexity to match some of the other wines. Very long, consistent finish. We love Schrader, but this “100 pointer” didn’t do it for us. That’s why we taste them blind.

**13) Continuum Proprietary Red (Napa) - \$150 - 25 points (7/1/2) - 96 rating**

Fairly deep color. Knockout nose offers seductive dark berry fruit with notes of violet, chocolate, graphite, and leather. Similar character on entry; this is the only wine in the tasting that gets unanimous love in the room. It’s big, sweet, chewy, fairly weighty, and well structured. The tannins and acidity are well integrated into the whole package. We give #13 high marks for focus and purity. Outstanding length, with sweet fruit bringing smiles throughout the room.

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