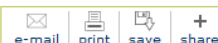


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13 Exciting 2008 Napa Cabernets

New reviews of outstanding Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons from a vintage that continues to surprise

MaryAnn Worobiec

Posted: August 22, 2011



Tasting Highlights bring the best of the past week's tastings of California wines to WineSpectator.com members.

As with last week, we're looking at Cabernet Sauvignons that wowed us in recent tastings from the 2008 vintage. We have another baker's dozen of outstanding wines that demonstrate how tricky vintages can turn out impressive, concentrated wines.

One of the top scorers in this report comes from Bernard Magrez, a French wine magnate with dozens of properties all over the world. He recently released his first Napa Cabernets, and the 2008 is the most smooth and harmonious. The grapes are destemmed by hand, a method Magrez is fond of.

Take note also of Orin Swift's Papillon, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Winemaker Dave Phinney—who is also responsible for the well-known The Prisoner bottling—has a knack for blending together grapes. With The Prisoner, six different grapes go into that Zinfandel-based wine. Here with Papillon, he sticks with a more traditional blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc, from four different regions of Napa Valley.

BERNARD MAGREZ Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2008

Score: 92 | \$120

Smooth and harmonious, with ripe, plush layers of plum, black cherry and blackberry fruit that's pure and focused, full-bodied and deep, ending with a long, layered finish. Drink now through 2022. 165 cases made. —J.L.

LOUIS M. MARTINI Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2008

Score: 92 | \$145

Ripe, plump and generous, with supple spice, currant, blackberry and cedar flavors. Full-bodied and smooth-textured, with the fruit flavors building gracefully. Drink now through 2020. 500 cases made. —J.L.

NEYERS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Neyers Ranch-Conn Valley 2008

Score: 92 | \$55

Wonderful aromatics turn pure, rich and juicy on the palate, with ripe, supple blackberry, wild berry, cherry and plum jam flavors. Full-bodied and well-balanced, firming on the finish, where this takes on a mineral and cedary edge. Drink now through 2020. 374 cases made. —J.L.

OPUS ONE Napa Valley 2008

Score: 92 | \$210

Graceful and elegant, very understated and delicate, with floral, spice, mint, bay leaf, currant, cedar and tobacco notes that are complex and vibrant. Full-bodied, gaining on the finish, then firming and drying. Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec. Drink now through 2021. 16,500 cases made. —J.L.

ORIN SWIFT Papillon Napa Valley 2008

Score: 91 | \$55

Fragrant, ripe and grapey, with floral berry, plum and blackberry jam notes. Full-bodied and intense, yet elegant and supple, with the tannins building on the finish, yet this ends on a fruity note. Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Drink now through 2019. 4,100 cases made. —J.L.



Kevin A. Fox

Winemaker Dave Phinney made the Orin Swift winery's intense yet elegant Papillon bottling.

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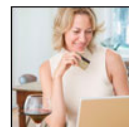
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SNOWDEN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2008

Score: 91 | \$80

Sleek and refined, with a tart edge to the currant and wild berry flavors. Medium- to full-bodied, this is a wine of finesse and grace, finishing with a watermelon candy edge. A good bet to improve. Best from 2012 through 2022. 1,075 cases made. —J.L.

STANTON Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2008 Score: 91 | \$75

Fresh and vibrant, with a cedar-dill edge to the ripe plum, cherry and currant flavors that are intense and racy, focused and persistent through the finish. Firmly tannic. Drink now through 2018. 307 cases made. —J.L.

FRANK FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2008 Score: 90 | \$50

Supple-textured, with ripe plum, cherry and currant notes that are open-knit and easy-drinking. Complex on a modest scale, ending with an elegant spice, cedar and light mineral edge. Drink now through 2018. 9,700 cases made. —J.L.

KAMEN Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley 2008 Score: 90 | \$75

Tight and structured, with firm mineral, cedar, dried berry, sage and anise flavors. Slow to unfold, but does so gracefully, ending with a black tea and mineral aftertaste. Drink now through 2019. 1,500 cases made. —J.L.

KNIGHTS BRIDGE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2008

Score: 90 | \$135

Fresh aromas of ripe plum, black cherry and blueberry are supple and complex, full-bodied and fleshy. Firms nicely and ends on a delicate mineral note. Drink now through 2020. 110 cases made. —J.L.

THE MAIDEN Napa Valley 2008 Score: 90 | \$150

Loamy earth notes and mouthcoating tannins provide the baseline for this rich, layered effort, which is full-bodied, with toned-down dried currant, mocha, spice, cedar and sage notes. Drink now through 2020. 988 cases made. —J.L.

MATRIARCH Napa Valley 2008 Score: 90 | \$95

Rich and loamy, with mocha, dried currant, blueberry and espresso flavors. Full-bodied, offering a nice lift in aroma, with touches of roasted plum. Drink now through 2022. 1,044 cases made. —J.L.

REVANA Cabernet Sauvignon St. Helena 2008 Score: 90 | \$150

Aromas of roasted herb, dried currant, sage and underbrush are full-bodied and complex, savory and alluring, approachable already. Drink now through 2019. 1,400 cases made. —J.L.

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