

Wine Spectator Insider

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WINE SPECTATOR INSIDER SPECIAL REPORT: CALIFORNIA CABERNET

If you're a California Cabernet aficionado, or aspire to be, this week's *Wine Spectator Insider* gives you some building blocks for adding to your cellar or getting it started. This report is composed mostly of 2009 Napa Valley Cabs. This is a tremendous vintage, and one of the best of the decade from the state's best Cabernet appellation. Winemakers describe 2009 as taking the best from 2007, a ripe, opulent vintage, and 2008, perhaps a shade denser. It's a ringing endorsement.

This selection includes some of the year's top-rated efforts, such as Screaming Eagle, Harlan, Bryant, Bond, Scarecrow and Hundred Acre. It taps some established, ageworthy wines such as Diamond Creek, Opus One and Joseph Phelps' Insignia, along with relative newcomers such as Pott, Favia, Knights Bridge and Brand. It even includes a couple of turnarounds from old achievers like Constant and Pine Ridge. There are also a few Cabs here from 2008, highlighted by GTS (George Thomas Seaver's label), Dunn Howell Mountain, The Hess Collection Mount Veeder and Rodney Strong's single-vineyard Rockaway bottling from the Alexander Valley, which offers a glimpse for what lies ahead with Sonoma Cabernet in the upper reaches of the Alexander Valley. Be sure to check out the six classic-rated Hot Wines, up to 97 points, on page 6. —James Laube



The vineyards at Harlan Estate yielded a star wine in the 2009 vintage.

CALIFORNIA

BOND

St. Eden Napa Valley 2009

95 points | \$285 | 410 cases made | Red

Openly showy, this offers an inviting mix of flavors, with rich red and black fruit, currant, cherry and pomegranate flavors that build on the finish, where the tannins are fine-grained and integrated. Best from 2014 through 2028.—J.L.

BRYANT FAMILY

Bettina Napa Valley 2009

95 points | \$295 | 800 cases made | Red

Shares the plush texture and savory herb, spice and lavender notes of the Cabernet, presented in a tight mix of dried currant, mineral, crushed rock and tobacco flavors. Half Cabernet, half other Bordeaux varietals. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Best from 2013 through 2026.—J.L.

OID

Napa Valley 2009

95 points | \$195 | 550 cases made | Red

Gorgeous aromas, plump and generous, lead to ripe, rich, juicy plum and black cherry flavors that show touches of cedar, fresh earth, black licorice and spice. Gains momentum and finesse, ending with a long, subtle, detailed finish. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Best from 2014 through 2026.—*J.L.*

BOND

Quella Napa Valley 2009

94 points | \$285 | 460 cases made | Red

This is perhaps the tightest of the new Bonds; nonetheless, it offers a dense, focused core of dried berry, black licorice, crushed rock and dried herb flavors. Most impressive on the finish, where the flavors fan out. Best from 2014 through 2026.—*J.L.*

FUTO

Oakville 2009

94 points | \$250 | 525 cases made | Red

Pointedly rich and concentrated, this weaves intense blackberry, dark berry fruit and plum notes, with gutsy tannins that impart a chewy edge. Seems to be a more-restrained Futo, true to the milder vintage. Ends with a fresh cigar box taste. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. Best from 2014 through 2026.—*J.L.*

HUNDRED ACRE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Ark Vineyard 2009

94 points | \$350 | 900 cases made | Red

This elegant style displays backbone and vibrancy, offering fresh, ripe, generous black cherry and blackberry fruit, with silky tannins. Drink now through 2026.—*J.L.*

MELKA

Métisse Jumping Goat Vineyard Napa Valley 2009

94 points | \$155 | 400 cases made | Red

Another striking, well-made Cabernet blend from Philippe Melka, who continues to evolve as a winemaker, with better and better efforts. This red is tight and firm, with a cedary oak touch to the dried currant, black licorice, sage and underbrush notes. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Best from 2014 through 2026.—*J.L.*

PAHLMAYER

Napa Valley 2009

94 points | \$140 | 4,200 cases made | Red

This Bordeaux-like expression offers a mix of cedar-laced tobacco, dried berry, loamy earth and herbal notes. Young and tightly wound, this unfolds slowly and gracefully, and looks like an ideal choice to lay down. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

RUDD

Estate Oakville 2008

94 points | \$185 | 1,000 cases made | Red

The best red I've tasted from Rudd, this is pure, deep, rich and concentrated, with firm, spicy currant and creamy mocha-laced oak. Firms nicely on the finish, where the tannins are grainy and add traction. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

SCARECROW

Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2009

94 points | \$250 | 980 cases made | Red

A riveting expression of complex Cabernet, this is rich, loamy and layered, with pure, detailed currant, blackberry and black licorice flavors and firm, gripping tannins. Gains and sustains on the finish. Cellar-worthy. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

ALPHA OMEGA

Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Beckstoffer To Kalon 2009

93 points | \$140 | 225 cases made | Red

High-toned and ripe, showing snappy, pure flavors of vivid black cherry and wild berry, with a gentle mix of loamy earth and fine-grained tannins. Drink now through 2024.—*J.L.*

BOND

Melbury Napa Valley 2009

93 points | \$285 | 490 cases made | Red

Firmly tannic, with gutsy earth-laced tannins and a generous mix of red and black licorice notes. Builds momentum and fans out on the finish, where this reveals more nuances of detailed flavor. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

BOND

Vecina Napa Valley 2009

93 points | \$285 | 455 cases made | Red

Dark, rich, dry and savory, this muscular effort boasts extracted tannin-laced notes of currant, earth, cedar, mocha and tobacco. Mouthcoating through the finish, where thick tannins gain traction. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

CHIARELLO FAMILY

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Bambino 2009

93 points | \$47 | 593 cases made | Red

Fresh and snappy, showing a shade more richness and intensity than the Eileen bottling, this zeros in on raspberry, spice, black licorice and huckleberry flavors. Long, pure, structured finish. Drink now through 2023.—*J.L.*

DIAMOND CREEK

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Gravelly Meadow 2009

93 points | \$175 | 413 cases made | Red

Pleasantly earthy, with a complex, fresh loaminess underlying the dried currant and herb notes, gaining a cedary edge. The finish is tightly focused, showing touches of black olive and cigar box. Excellent length. Best from 2014 through 2030.—*J.L.*

DIAMOND CREEK

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Volcanic Hill 2009
93 points | \$175 | 511 cases made | Red

Very dense and backward, yet promising for its tight dried currant, herb, sage and cedar notes. An appealing earthiness gives the flavors a firm foundation. Wait. Best from 2015 through 2030.—J.L.

GANDONA

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
93 points | \$190 | 125 cases made | Red

Flexes its muscle, with a dense, firm core of loamy earth, dark berry, black licorice, wild flowers and mocha. All in all, an impressive tour de force. The debut wine from a vineyard on Pritchard Hill. Best from 2014 through 2025.—J.L.

HALL

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Kathryn Hall 2009
93 points | \$110 | 3,400 cases made | Red

Ultrarich and multiflavored, with a range of deep, baked berry notes. Intense and focused, balanced and persistent, this ends with touches of red and black licorice and subtle, grainy earth accents and tannins. Drink now through 2022.—J.L.

KNIGHTS BRIDGE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard 2009
93 points | \$135 | 198 cases made | Red

Exhibits rich, juicy, vivid black cherry and blackberry fruit that's well-centered and nicely proportioned. The finish shows a hint of red and black licorice, with a crushed-rock earthiness. Drink now through 2024.—J.L.

KNIGHTS BRIDGE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2009
93 points | \$135 | 196 cases made | Red

This seamless, graceful effort is pure, rich and supple, featuring subtle currant, cherry and plum notes that are pure and focused. Long, lingering finish. Drink now through 2024.—J.L.

LAIL

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley J. Daniel Cuvée 2009
93 points | \$150 | 470 cases made | Red

Pure and well-focused on bright, rich plum, blackberry and black cherry fruit, leading to mixed flavors of crushed rock and fresh earth. Ends with fine-grained tannins. Best from 2013 through 2026.—J.L.

MATRIARCH

Napa Valley 2009
93 points | \$NA | 1,000 cases made | Red

Rich and dense, chewy too, this red offers a dense core of dried currant, dark berry, fresh-turned earth, black licorice and roasted herb notes. Ends with grainy tannins. Drink now through 2028.—J.L.

MERUS

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
93 points | \$145 | 1,117 cases made | Red

Intense and concentrated, with a rich array of dark berry built around currant, blackberry, mineral, cedar and spice. Most impressive on the finish, where the flavors push through in style. Best from 2014 through 2028.—J.L.

ORIN SWIFT

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Mercury Head 2009
93 points | \$75 | 2,000 cases made | Red

Another showy Mercury Head, this is highlighted by aromatic candied apple and spice, joined by flavors of red fruit, red licorice, cherry and plum. Maintains its elegant posture and finish. Drink now through 2026.—J.L.

PINE RIDGE

Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain 2009
93 points | \$90 | 492 cases made | Red

Another impressive Pine Ridge bottling, featuring ripe dark berry, green olive, tobacco leaf, cigar box, smoke and cedar flavors, all neatly proportioned and identifiable. Ends with chewy tannins. Best from 2014 through 2028.—J.L.

PINE RIDGE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Fortis 2009
93 points | \$150 | 790 cases made | Red

Muscle-bound, with a firm, tight core of dried berry, crushed rock, graphite and cedar notes. Very Bordeaux-like in its structure and body. Best from 2014 through 2026.—J.L.

POTT

Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford The Arsenal Greer Vineyard 2009
93 points | \$120 | 61 cases made | Red

The most complex, supple and graceful of the new Potts, this delivers a rich, stretched mix of refined currant, blackberry and cherry flavors that gets better and better. Fine length. Drink now through 2027.—J.L.

RUDD

Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Samantha's 2009
93 points | \$125 | 600 cases made | Red

Another exciting Rudd, this is plush, rich and extracted, featuring a dense mix of dark berry, black licorice, currant, tobacco and cigar box touches, firming before ending with fine-grained tannins. Best from 2013 through 2028.—J.L.

TOR

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To Kalon Clone 4 2009
93 points | \$150 | 150 cases made | Red

Combines intensity and a firm tannic backbone, dialed in on vivid red fruits, with black cherry, raspberry and pomegranate. All neatly tapered on the finish, where red and black licorice fold in. Drink now through 2028.—J.L.

VENGE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Family Reserve 2009
93 points | \$135 | 350 cases made | Red

Dark, dense and extracted, offering chewy tannins and flavors of exotic spices, mineral and crushed rock, with deeply perfumed currant and blackberry fruit that requires patience. Like many 2009s, this is an immense wine with a distinctive structure. Best from 2014 through 2029.—*J.L.*

ARIETTA

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
92 points | \$125 | 270 cases made | Red

Marked by dry, loamy earth and espresso notes, this well-built red unfolds to dark berry and cedar flavors. Ends with a distinctive game meat and herbal edge. Firm, fine-grained tannins. Best from 2013 through 2023.—*J.L.*

DAVID ARTHUR

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Three Acre 2009
92 points | \$95 | 338 cases made | Red

An earthier, more rustic and extracted style, dense, potent and very tannic, but also complex and focused. Requires patience. Best from 2014 through 2026.—*J.L.*

BRAND NAPA VALLEY

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
92 points | \$175 | 218 cases made | Red

Muscle-bound and chewy, with a wealth of detailed flavors built around dried currant, cedar, mineral and black licorice, ending with gripping tannins. A dense, gusty debut made from estate vineyards on Pritchard Hill. Best from 2014 through 2024.—*J.L.*

CARTER

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Coliseum Block 2009
92 points | \$125 | 109 cases made | Red

A rich, extracted, layered expression of dark berry, fresh espresso, roasted herb and savory notes, this remains ruggedly tannic and in need of cellaring. May always be on the rustic, muscular side. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

CASA PIENA

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
92 points | \$150 | 525 cases made | Red

A muscular red that's rich and dense, with layers of dark fruit, currant, blackberry, loamy earth and cedar. Should only get better and better. Best from 2014 through 2026.—*J.L.*

CONSTANT

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Diamond Mountain Vineyard 2009
92 points | \$130 | 777 cases made | Red

This well-built Cabernet is pure and focused on vivid, snappy red and black fruit, with hints of mineral, wildflowers and cedar. Persistent finish. Drink now through 2022.—*J.L.*



Screaming Eagle capitalized on a great 2009 vintage with an excellent wine.

CONSTANT

Claret Napa-Sonoma Counties 2009
92 points | \$105 | 317 cases made | Red

The best Constant in some time, demonstrating that the vineyard can produce excellent wines. Tight and easy to drink, with firm, fine-grained tannins and snappy red and black berry fruit, all shaded by spice and fresh earth notes. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. Drink now through 2022.—*J.L.*

ETUDE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
92 points | \$100 | 1,840 cases made | Red

A firm, sturdy, at times rustic effort, with crushed rock and loamy earth woven with dried currant and dark berry. Intense and persistent, this is chunky now, built for cellaring. Best from 2014 through 2024.—*J.L.*

FUTO

OV Oakville 2009
92 points | \$90 | 500 cases made | Red

Notably elegant, rich and appealing, with spicy ripe plum and black cherry flavors, turning supple and polished, long and persistent. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Merlot. Futo's second label is less opulent than its flagship bottling. Drink now through 2022.—*J.L.*

GTS

Cabernet Sauvignon Diamond Mountain District Seaver Family Vineyards 2009
92 points | \$95 | 325 cases made | Red

Packs in lots of rich, dense flavors, with firm cedar, black licorice, blackberry, herb, olive and vanilla bean flavors. Supple in texture, this tightens on the finish. Best from 2014 through 2026.—*J.L.*

THE HESS COLLECTION

Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder 2008
92 points | \$48 | 5,097 cases made | Red

Sturdy, intense, extracted and complex, with dense earthy currant, sage, cedar and mint flavors. Mount Veeder reds can be rugged, and even with an added year in bottle this is open-throttle. Very nicely done in a classic Mount Veeder style. Begs for more time. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

JANZEN

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2009
92 points | \$135 | 243 cases made | Red

Delightfully rich and polished, with a tight focus on red currant and blackberry flavors, with light toasty, cedary oak. Notable for its caressing tannins. Best from 2014 through 2028.—*J.L.*

THE MAIDEN

Napa Valley 2009
92 points | \$200 | 1,400 cases made | Red

Intense and richly tannic, with notes of dried currant, smoke, dried flowers, licorice and graphite. Impressive for its density and concentration, both of which bode well for the future. Best from 2014 through 2025.—*J.L.*

OPUS ONE

Napa Valley 2009
92 points | \$225 | 22,500 cases made | Red

This bold, rich and assertive Opus is firm and concentrated, displaying a mix of dried currant, blackberry, wild berry and spice flavors, ending with loamy earth and melted black licorice notes. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Merlot and Malbec. Best from 2014 through 2025.—*J.L.*

POTT

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Her Majesty's Secret Service Stagecoach Vineyard 2009
92 points | \$110 | 195 cases made | Red

Attractive floral, perfumed dark berry, red berry and red licorice aromas lead to an elegant stylish effort, with touches of fresh-cut flowers and fine-grained tannins. Drink now through 2026.—*J.L.*

POTT

Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Actaeon Quixote Vineyard 2009
92 points | \$110 | 45 cases made | Red

Fragrant, elegant perfumed red berry and cherry flavors are graceful and supple, showing a subtle intensity that builds. Fans of understated refinement, this should serve you well. Drink now through 2022.—*J.L.*

STAGLIN

Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2009
92 points | \$185 | 2,614 cases made | Red

This pure, elegant red delivers supple, refined red berry, black cherry and subtle spicy-floral scents. Offers less richness than some Staglins, yet shows delicacy and finesse. Drink now through 2024.—*J.L.*

RODNEY STRONG

Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley Rockaway Single Vineyard 2008
92 points | \$75 | 1,757 cases made | Red

Impressive for its richness, focus, depth and finesse, with a mix of black fruit, black licorice, spice and road tar flavors. For all its apparent size, this is graceful, elegant and imminently approachable. Drink now through 2024.—*J.L.*

VINEYARD 29

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Cru 2009
92 points | \$54 | 5,844 cases made | Red

Tight and well-done, featuring complex dried currant, dried herb, cedar and tobacco notes. Most impressive for its elegance and balance. Moreover, 5,844 cases of wine this good at \$54 a bottle is a notable accomplishment. Worth buying a handful or more. Drink now through 2022.—*J.L.*

CHIARELLO FAMILY

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Eileen 2009
91 points | \$65 | 448 cases made | Red

This sleek effort features a core of fresh, vivid red berry, raspberry and cherry notes. Juicy and lively, pure and persistent, ending with fine-grained tannins. Drink now through 2021.—*J.L.*

DUNN

Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain 2008
91 points | \$90 | 2,500 cases made | Red

Firm, rich and concentrated, this offers tight tannins enriched by loamy earth. Dried currant, spice, floral and underbrush flavors impart a savory profile. Should benefit from cellaring. Best from 2013 through 2024.—*J.L.*

FAVIA

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
91 points | \$145 | 136 cases made | Red

A more rustic, dense and chewy expression of cool-climate Cabernet, this is sturdy yet well-built. Rich and extracted, this offers tiers of chewy flavors and tannins that have enough charm to merit cellaring. Best from 2014 through 2024.—*J.L.*

JOSEPH PHELPS

Insignia Napa Valley 2009
91 points | \$200 | 10,540 cases made | Red

Combines deep, ripe dark berry fruit with crushed rock, cedar and lead pencil notes. A step back in richness and complexity for Insignia, this is built for cellaring. Tannins have a green, bitter edge. Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Best from 2014 through 2024.—*J.L.*

RED STITCH

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
91 points | \$75 | 200 cases made | Red

This red features subtle aromas of fresh earth, mineral, juicy black cherry and plum. Firm, with ripe, gripping tannins and an underlying sense of elegance and finesse. Best from 2014 through 2025.—*J.L.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

SCREAMING EAGLE

Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2009
97 points | \$750 | 750 cases made | Red

A stunningly seamless effort, rich and elegant, this delivers perfumed currant-cassis aromas that are supple and graceful, building and gaining with subtle tannins, laced with loamy earth. A dash of black licorice marks the long finish. Drink now through 2028. *From California.—J.L.*

BOND

Pluribus Napa Valley 2009
96 points | \$285 | 420 cases made | Red

Amazing, complex and elegant, with a pure, rich, spicy mix of dark berry, plum and black cherry flavors. Supple and harmonious, elegant and persistent, this is the best of the 2009 Bonds. Drink now through 2028. *From California.—J.L.*

HARLAN ESTATE

Napa Valley 2009
96 points | \$750 | 1,900 cases made | Red

Offering a Pomerol-like silkiness, this is very rich and layered, with ripe dark berry, roasted plum and cassis flavors. Yet what's striking is the texture, which has the density of the proverbial iron fist in a velvet glove. Best from 2014 through 2026. *From California.—J.L.*

HUNDRED ACRE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Few and Far Between Vineyard 2009
96 points | \$400 | 300 cases made | Red

Defined by rich, plush, silky flavors of dark berry and mocha, this is remarkably elegant and polished, deep and persistent. This glides along with a seamless texture and a long, saturating finish. Drink now through 2030. *From California.—J.L.*

SHAFER

Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Hillside Select 2008
96 points | \$230 | 2,400 cases made | Red

Muscular and tightly wound, yet beautifully focused and proportioned, dense and chewy, with rich layers of dried currant, black-berry, spice and licorice flavors. Demands cellaring. Best from 2014 through 2028. *From California.—J.L.*

BRYANT FAMILY

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2009
95 points | \$335 | 965 cases made | Red

A real beauty, exhibiting riveting aromatics that touch a range of dark berry, green olive and herb flavors, with cedar, mocha and espresso notes. Yet for all the size and density of this Cabernet, the tannins are fine and silky. Best from 2014 through 2030. *From California.—J.L.*

WINE SPECTATOR'S TASTERS

The Most Experienced Team of Wine Journalists in the World

Wine Spectator's tasting staff includes 12 people in two offices. They work together to review more than 18,000 wines each year, more than any other publication. Together, our six senior tasters count more than 140 years of tasting experience.

We always taste wine blind in our offices in Napa and New York. This is your guarantee that our reviews are fair and objective, and that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed. We score wines using the 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: Austria, Greece, Port, Portugal, Southern France

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Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: New York, Spain

James Molesworth Senior editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Bordeaux, Chile, Finger Lakes, Loire Valley, Rhône Valley, South Africa

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York
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Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco
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Tim Fish (California)
Alison Napjus (Alsace, Champagne, Italy)
Nathan Wesley (Argentina, Italy)
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Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended