



WINE & RATINGS

The 2013 Napa Valley Vintage as told in 10 Cabs

Consistent temperatures and a calm growing season have led to bold, big tannins and gems meant to cellar. Here are 10 Cabernet Sauvignon bottlings to try.

BY VIRGINIE BOONE

To Jean Hoefliger, winemaker of Alpha Omega Winery in Rutherford, Napa Valley is the most consistent climate he's seen in the world.

It's true. The climate in Northern California has been remarkably consistent and generous over the last several years. The stretch of vintages from 2012 through 2016 is a run of warm, relatively calm grape-growing years the likes of which even longtime Napers say they've never seen before.

Many winemakers will tell you the 2013 vintage is particularly stunning, though not always immediately approachable. Unlike 2012 and 2014, 2013 is a boldly structured, big-tannin year, speaking as much to California's tenacious drought as the warmth of the sun.

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So far, the highest scoring wines tend to come from the southern end of the Napa Valley, up through the Oakville and Stags Leap District AVAs. This may be because they were able to retain more acidity in the warm, dry year and feel more pleurably balanced in their youth.

That said, my top-rated Cabernet from the vintage up to now is from Spottswoode (98 points), an estate-grown beauty from St. Helena, one of the warmest appellations of all. Despite concentrated fruit and ample tannin, it retains rose-garden grace. It should age well for decades.

While 2012–2016 looks to be a string of serious successes for Napa Cabernet, other varieties tell a similar tale. Merlot makes its case in 2013 bottlings from Venge Vineyards, La Jota Vineyard and Pahlmeyer, while Robert Biale Vineyards is allowing Winemaker Tres Goetting to try new things with old vineyards, resulting in a lineup of dialed-in single-site Zinfandels; Biale's 2013 Royal Punishers Petite Sirah is also worth a look.

So don't be shy about picking up all the Napa reds from 2013 you can find—though they may not be drinking at peak now, they show the stuff that cellaring dreams are made of.

Priest Ranch 2013 Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley); \$48, 92 points. Pencil shavings and leather aromas mark the entry of this robustly full-bodied wine. It has a pronounced forest floor character, while blackberry and black cherry flavors combine with licorice and dark chocolate, filling out the richer notes that interweave throughout the palate, leading into a long finish.