



Review Round-Up –| December 2007

Cliff Lede Cabernet Sauvignon Claret Stags Leap District 2005

There seems plenty of intent to this ripe and oaky wine, yet its grasp on clear Cabernet fruit is a little loose, and it lapses into chocolaty ripeness. It unravels as palpable heat and a touch of bitter astringency become obvious on the latter palate, and its coarsening shortcomings are not the sort that are likely to be remedied with time.

85 Points

Etude Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004

Black cherries, a bit of raspberry and creamy oak come together nicely in the concentrated aromas and dense, fairly direct flavors of this rich, and ripe-leaning wine. Fat and fleshy on entry, with a good bit of tannin firming things up at the end, the wine is a bit monochromatic at this point in time and clearly commends time in the cellar. Beneath its ripeness and sweet oak, however, there are signs of complexity to come.

90 Points

Forman Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004

If judged solely on its body, balance and attractive oak, this one would win even higher commendation, but despite all plusses, it is a bit wanting in fruity strength and complexity and falls just a step short of real success.

87 Points

Girard Artistry Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004

Girard's Artistry conveys plenty of solid, well-focused fruit and seasons the mix with both sweet oak and scattered flashes of forest-floor spice. In this outing, however, latter-palate tannins grab and refuse to let go, and obvious acids stiffen its slightly hard finish.

87 Points

Hendry Cabernet Sauvignon Hendry Vineyard Napa Valley 2004

There is so much deep and well-defined curranty fruit at work in this wine that we are willing to forgive, at least in part, the tongue-curing tannins that wash through its dense, but oh-so-tough flavors. Its varietal credentials are impeccable, but this is one that will take its time to come around.

87 Points

Hendry Cabernet Sauvignon Red Wine Hendry Vineyard Napa Valley 2004

Taut and tentative in terms of defined fruit in the nose and similarly stinting on the palate, this painfully tannic effort is both tough and narrow at the same time, and nowhere does it even hint that it has essential stuffing to underwrite the lengthy aging it so clearly requires.

84 Points

J. Davis Cabernet Sauvignon Diamond Mountain District Napa Valley 2004

There is plenty of richness here and all the structure one could want in a wine grown on a mountaintop above the Napa Valley. Missing, however, is the dominant fruit needed to fill in the wine's musculature, and in its shortfall, the wine, regardless of its genuine attractions, is less than it might have been.

87 Points

Lancaster Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley 2004

A balanced bit of mildly vanillin oak works as a complement to slightly dense, well-extracted, young fruit in both the nose and flavors of this solid effort. Slightly supple to start with varietally appropriate tannins toughening its finish, it shows good length despite its tag-end astringency.

89 Points

Lewelling Cabernet Sauvignon St. Helena Napa Valley 2004

Vanilla-bean oak and a dash of milk chocolate are married to themes of plums and sweet cherries in the nose of this forward young wine, and, on the palate, it is accordingly open and easy to taste. It is fit with soft tannins and fairly rounded in feel, and, if its slightly hot finish serves as a reminder of its ready ripeness, there is richness enough to make this a recommendable wine for service with savory short ribs.

87 Points

Miner The Oracle Red Wine Napa Valley 2004

Clean and a bit mild given its ripeness and complex blend of varieties, this wine is full on the palate and sports a bit of curranty fruit along with hints of toasted herbs and chocolate. Its finishing tannins are firm but not aggressive or abrasive.

86 points

Pride Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon Napa County/Sonoma County Reserve 2004

Enormously rich oak may lead the way here, yet beneath its sweet veneer of vanilla, caramel and cream, this very deep and impressively stuffed wine shows plenty of optimally ripened currants and black cherries along with deft touches of loamy earth and lightly peppery spice.

94 Points

Pride Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon Napa County/Sonoma County Reserve 2005

We are unabashed fans of Pride Mountain wines and generally find in them plenty of fruity muscle and extravagant oak. However, this particular wine is over the top in both its ripeness and its tongue-numbing tannins, and its early teases of richness are lost to astringency, heat and off-putting bitterness.

84 Points

Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon St. Helena Napa Valley 2004

There is no dearth of richness and fruity depth to be found here, and the wine offers up loads of incisive curranty fruit backed by a broad sweep of creamy oak. From its aromas of root beer, cola and cassis to its long and unwaveringly fruity flavors, it shows a seamless fit of its many pieces, and, while sporting sufficient tannin to develop famously for a decade or more, it is remarkably seductive even in its youth.

95 Points

Shafer Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select Stages Leap District 2003

Its outgoing black-cherry fruit scents gain complexity from notes of boysenberry, loam, cola and caramel, and there is not much hidden or brooding about it. Full and fleshy at entry, then plush, viscous yet balanced and full of energy across the palate, the wine has proven that it can age despite its size and forward flavors. It has the tannins to last for ten years.

92 Points

Summers Cabernet Sauvignon Andriana's Cuvee Napa Valley 2005

A bit tentative in fruit yet marked by enough cherries and sweet oak to be counted a modest success in the nose, this bottling draws up a bit short in the mouth with modest tannins cutting into its direct, cherry-and-oak flavors. It is not built for the long haul, but another year or two in the cellar seem likely to smooth it out.

86 Points

Dierberg Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley 2004

Its lovely combination of ripeness and brightness catapults this fairly full-bodied wine upward in the list of desirable bottlings. Its energetic Fuji apple fruit aromas are complemented gracefully by notes of creme brulee and sweet blossoms, and the wine is equally vital, tasty and rich on the palate. Balance and finesse are the keywords with this beauty.

90 Points

Gainey Chardonnay Limited Selection Santa Rita Hills 2005

The Sta. Rita Hills blend of lean and ripe, of minerals and wholly expressed fruit is featured in this fairly full-sized yet remarkably svelte offering. Its aromas of apples and toasty oak are held back a bit at this point by a citrusy, slightly narrow streak, and things are much the same in the mouth where wholly promising notes of fruit and oak are tightened and ultimately restrained by rising acidity at the finish.

87 Points

Morgan Chardonnay Metallico Monterey 2006

Chardonnay can produce very likeable wines without need of oak aging, but this particular working is surprisingly low in the fruitiness that the "no oak" style is, in fact, supposed to promote, and its combination of crisping acidity and palatal hardness becomes far too dissuasive in light of its evident fruity deficit.

84 Points

Ramey Chardonnay Hudson Vineyard Napa Valley 2005

Ramey's Hudson Vineyard bottling wins top honors among the winery's three new single-site offerings by virtue of its perfect marriage of richness, refinement and balance. It leads with lots of optimally ripened apple fruit while showing a good bit of sweet oak and top-notes of flowers and spice. Always intense, yet never out of control, it is at once both rich and extracted yet also light on its feet. It delivers plenty to like now.

95 Points

Ramey Chardonnay Hyde Vineyard Carneros Napa Valley 2005

If perhaps a little more direct in its fruitiness than Chardonnays from this important vineyard are typically wont to be, this deep and oh so generously filled effort suffers no shortfall in richness. Its intense and long-lasting themes of ripe apples are underlain by lovely oak from beginning to end, and its keenly fit acidity provides just the right degree of snap without compromising its fine, fleshy feel. It is thoroughly delicious even now.

94 Points

Ramey Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley 2005

This comparatively tight and firmly built working simply fails to keep pace with its two far more interesting cellarmates, and, if reasonable fruity and enriched with a nice dollop of oak, it is on the lean and narrow side and displays neither the richness nor the depth of its siblings. Its cool-climate provenance is manifest throughout, and its crispness commends service with richer sea-food fare.

87 Points