

Wine Spectator Weekly

Internet Only

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GET WINE SPECTATOR RATINGS HERE FIRST—EVERY THURSDAY

Our goal with *Wine Spectator Weekly* is to alert you to exciting, small-production wines early enough that you can find them before they sell out. But sometimes it's equally important to warn you about wines that don't achieve their potential, so that you won't buy them now and regret it later. Look for James Laube's advisory on four new California Cabernets for an example of this more cautionary approach.

But there are, of course, plenty of high-scoring and good-value wines to get excited about. In addition to several California varietals, this issue offers whites and unusual reds from Northeastern Italy and some terrific young wines from Châteauneuf-du-Pape in France's Southern Rhône Valley, including this week's Hot Wines, on page 4.

California

*Consider these reviews of a handful of high-priced Napa Valley Cabernets as advisories rather than endorsements. While all of the wines are rated in the "very good" range (85 to 89 points on our 100-point scale), none merited an outstanding score. The Blankiet 2000 (88, \$100) is the new estate wine from Yountville overseen by Helen Turley, and while it is distinctive, it really didn't unfold to reveal those extra facets that merit a higher score. Ditto with the Groth Reserve 1999 (87, \$150) and Mondavi Reserve 2000 (89, \$125). The \$150-a-bottle Mondavi To Kalon Reserve 1999 (88 points) is elegant and polished, but it would be my advice to buy the 1999 Reserve (94, \$125, reviewed in *Wine Spectator Weekly*, Feb. 28, 2002), which I found vastly superior. All four of these wines were tasted twice in blind tastings, with consistent scores. Given the price/score ratio, I'd pass.—J.L.*

Robert Mondavi

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2000
89 points | \$125 | NA cases made

The firm, tight, tannic foundation for this intense, rich and concentrated young wine is mixed with currant, cedar, sage and dusty berry. Well-balanced, with chewy tannins, it's an elegant, well-crafted wine. Best from 2004 through 2011.—J.L.

Blankiet Estate

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Paradise Hills Vineyard 2000
88 points | \$100 | 220 cases made

Teases with subtle flavor nuances wrapped in a tight, tannic, austere package, with a core of beefy, leathery currant, sage and tobacco flavors. Hard-edged tannins on the finish suggest cellaring, and perhaps with time this will be more compelling, as the finish is quite dry and earthy. Best from 2004 through 2012.—J.L.

Robert Mondavi

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley To Kalon Vineyard Reserve 1999
88 points | \$150 | NA cases made

Pleasantly aromatic, with ripe plum, currant, cedar and olive flavors that are supple and harmonious, yet shy of the richness, depth and complexity typically found in the Mondavi's top wines. Given the choice, the '99 Reserve (94 points) is far superior. Best from 2004 through 2010.—J.L.

Groth

Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Reserve 1999
87 points | \$150 | 1,700 cases made

Elegantly styled, with a trim, somewhat green edge to the cedary currant, spice and herbal-tobacco flavors that offer modest richness and concentration. Ultimately simple for what is usually a rather dramatic, flamboyant wine. At this price, it's a pass. Drink now through 2010.—*J.L.*

Here are a few outstanding California varietals.

Calera

Pinot Noir Mount Harlan Jensen Vineyard 1999
91 points | \$50 | 824 cases made

Red garnet color, with ripe, mature red plum, cherry, earth and a touch of limestone, it exhibits a firm core of tannins that gives it a tight, rich backbone, and the finish lingers, with subtle flavor nuances. Drink now through 2007.—*J.L.*

Rosenblum

Petite Sirah Rockpile Rockpile Road Vineyard 2001
91 points | \$34 | 650 cases made

A brawny Petite, loaded with plush layers of blueberry, violet, coffee bean and chocolate, finishing with firm cedar and vanilla flavors, along with burly tannin that keeps on kicking. Drink now through 2009.—*J.L.*

Siduri

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard 2001
91 points | \$50 | 826 cases made

Dark-colored, rich and intense, with layers of blackberry, black cherry, plum and toasty, mocha-laced oak. Sharply focused, long and rich and concentrated on the finish. Shows a trace of heat. Drink now through 2008.—*J.L.*

France / Rhône

Most of the Southern Rhône's top-gun wineries have now released the late-bottled 2000s, including their special cuvées, and their wines confirm the high quality of this outstanding vintage, which I have rated 93 on the 100-point scale (see Wine Spectator, Dec. 15, 2002). Compared to the '98 vintage (rated 95 points, or "classic"), when the south's leading appellation, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, produced incredibly thick and rich reds, often

high in alcohol, the 2000s are more elegant, blending the fresh character of 1999 (87 points) with the opulence of '98. This combination is highlighted in some of the high-wire wines selected below. During my tasting in the Rhône Valley recently, three of Châteauneuf's most famous collectibles and one new cuvée stood out. All rated 95 or higher, and they make our selection of Hot Wines on page 4.—P.M.

M. Chapoutier

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Barbe Rac 2000
92 points | \$125 | 165 cases imported

Traditional, yet very exotic and gorgeous, it tastes like a spice cake. Medium-bodied, very aromatic, showing chocolate, plum, dried fig, mocha and intense jammy character. Sweet tasting, balanced finish. Terrific aging potential here. Drink now through 2012.—*P.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Croix de Bois 2000
92 points | \$73 | 165 cases imported

Traditional style, but well-done. Rich and ripe, with soft, sweet tannins caressing the palate. Good intensity and concentration, with opulent flavors of spices, coffee, smoke, plum, mineral, leather—it delivers the goods you expect from Châteauneuf while remaining rather elegant. Drink now through 2015.—*P.M.*

Lançon Père & Fils

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Domaine de la Solitude Cuvée Barberini 2000
92 points | \$76 | 300 cases imported

Beautiful. A thick-textured, ripe, full-bodied and black-colored wine with a smooth coating of tannins, delivering mineral, black fruit, mocha, espresso and some smoke, all showcased in a modern package but without overt toasted oak accents—the balance is really impressive here between *terroir* and ripe fruit. So refined, drink it now or hold for a couple of decades. Drink now through 2024.—*P.M.*

Château Rayas

Châteauneuf-du-Pape White Réserve 2000
92 points | \$85 | 60 cases imported

Exotic and opulent, a classy, thick-textured, rich and ripe white. Aromatically reserved, with good mineral backbone, lots of honey, acacia flowers and apricot aromas. Lovely, supple finish. Well done.—*P.M.*

Château de Beaucastel

Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2000

90 points | \$68 | 4,165 cases imported

Clean and fresh, bursting with fruit and spices. Full-bodied, it delivers some game, truffle, vanilla notes. It's distinctive and ought to show wonderful *terroir* with age, but for now it hasn't come together. Needs time. Drink now through 2020.—P.M.

Italy / Northeast

Italy's northeast region is best known for its whites, but my recent tastings here in Tuscany unearthed a number of northeastern reds that are also worthy of mention. Carlo Guerrieri Gonzaga, owner of Tenuta San Leonardo in Trentino, continues to make an outstanding Bordeaux blend in collaboration with Tuscan-based consulting enologist Carlo Ferrini. In the Alto Adige, Martin Foradori of the Hofstätter family estate shows once again that the local red variety Lagrein, which often produces wines that are rather light and rustic, can also turn out an outstanding, full-bodied and concentrated red that can compete on the international stage.

One of my best discoveries in a long time, however, comes from the Movia family estate, which actually straddles the border of Northeast Italy with Slovenia. Over half of the estate is in Slovenia, where the family, with 44 acres of vineyards, has been in operation since 1820. In fact, during the communist years of the former Yugoslavia, it was the only private wine-producing estate in the country. Today they are making some very interesting red and white wines with a very decent price tag. The whites are aged for between two to four years in barrel while the reds are matured for five to six years in the cellar.—J.S.

Movia

Chardonnay Brda 1999

92 points | \$21 | 600 cases made

Very ripe, with melon, dried pineapple and lemon rind character. Full-bodied, with lots of ripe fruit and a crisp, steely, mineral aftertaste. A bright and rich white.—J.S.

Movia

Brda Veliko Bianco 1998

91 points | \$29 | 50 cases imported

A beauty. Intense aromas of lemon rind, apple, mineral and fruit. Full-bodied, with mineral and freshly sliced apple character. Long and superclean finish. A blend of Ribolla, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio.—J.S.

Tenuta San Leonardo

Vallagarina 1999

90 points | \$71 | 900 cases imported

Tight and closed now. Give it time in the bottle. Lots of currants, licorice and cedar on the nose. Full-bodied, with pepper, berry, currant and fresh herbs. Medium-fine tannins. Long finish. This needs time. A serious, well-crafted blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. Best after 2006.—J.S.

La Sansonina

1998

90 points | \$60 | 100 cases imported

An exotic and wild Merlot, with green olives, berries and fruit cake character. Full-bodied, with round and soft tannins and a long finish. So fruity it's almost off-dry. From Veneto. Drink now.—J.S.

J. Hofstätter

Lagrein Alto Adige Steinraffler 2000

90 points | \$40 | 100 cases imported

The undisputed champion of Lagrein. Impressive concentration of blackberries, spices and minerals with hints of grilled meat. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and a long, plummy finish. Best after 2005.—J.S.

Movia

Brda Veliko Rosso 1995

90 points | \$29 | 770 cases made

This is an off-the-wall, but cool wine from Slovenia. Hard to believe that this is a current release, but it's still fresh and refined. Medium- to full-bodied, with silky tannins and a lovely currant, light vanilla aftertaste. A delicious red made from Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. Drink now.—J.S.

Movia

Ribolla Brda 2000

90 points | \$24 | 660 cases made

Fantastic aromas of mineral, lemon and dried orange peel. Full-bodied, with a fresh and clean character and a bright, fruity and long finish.—J.S.

Vie di Romans

Isonzo del Friuli Voos dai Ciamps 1999

90 points | \$43 | 80 cases imported

A delicious red, with meaty, spicy and chocolaty character. Medium-bodied, with well-integrated tannins and a long, flavorful finish. Best after 2004.—J.S.

HOT WINES

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

Lançon Père & Fils

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Domaine de la Solitude Secrète
Réserve 2000
97 points | \$120 | 100 cases imported

Masterful wine. Stunning quality from start to finish in this full-bodied, elegant and refined red. Dark in color, massively tannic, but all the parts are smooth and interlock beautifully—from the sweet black fruit, the slight spicy, mocha and coffee aromas, and above all the velvety texture that caresses the palate and leaves an ethereal sense of greatness on the long finish. Bravissimo! One for drinking now, but also one for the cellar. Drink now through 2025. *From France.—P.M.*

Château de Beaucastel

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Hommage à Jacques Perrin
Grande Cuvée 2000
95 points | \$350 | 100 cases imported

A seducer, this Old World blockbuster dazzles with its class. Ultrarich, pitch-black red remains elegant and refined despite its monster structure, but it's open-knit, delivering earthy, mineral, iron, wet fox fur character along with the plum and blackberries. Long, refined finish. Drink now through 2025. *From France.—P.M.*

Paul Coulon & Fils

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Boisrenard 2001
95 points | \$55 | 330 cases imported

Seductive, ultramodern, dark-purple blockbuster Châteauneuf; oozes rich, ripe flavors, in a silky-caressing texture that's coated by roasted and toasted oak accents ranging from tar to grilled meat, toasted bread to roasted chestnuts and all sorts of spices. A showpiece, this blockbuster is to lay down. But don't expect much Châteauneuf subtlety. Best from 2007 through 2025. *From France.—P.M.*

Domaine Font de Michelle

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Etienne Gonnet 2001
95 points | \$50 | 350 cases imported

One for the collectors, here is a blend of the new and the old. Gorgeous Châteauneuf, with modern texture, but authentically local aromas. Rich and thick, with impressive balance of ripe and concentrated fruit, sweet tannins, and complex smoke, leather, mineral, rose petals, spice notes. The best part is the round, smooth-coating texture in the palate, and the caressing, velvety finish. Drink now through 2015. *From France.—P.M.*

Wine Spectator's Tastings

Wine Spectator reviews more than 10,000 wines each year; our senior editors comprise the most experienced staff of professional wine tasters of any publication in the world. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed.

We always taste wines blind, in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. We score wines using our 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa

Joined Wine Spectator in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Per-Henrik Mansson Senior editor, Switzerland

Joined Wine Spectator in 1987. Tasting beat: Burgundy, Rhône Valley

Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very Good
80-84	Good
70-79	Average
50-69	Not Recommended

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York

Joined Wine Spectator in 1988. Tasting beat: Languedoc-Roussillon/Midi, Portugal

Thomas Matthews Executive editor, New York

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

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York

Joined Wine Spectator in 1993. Tasting beat: Alsace, Austria, Champagne, Germany

Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco

Joined Wine Spectator in 1983. Tasting beat: Australia, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington

James Suckling European bureau chief, Italy

Joined Wine Spectator in 1981. Tasting beat: Bordeaux, Italy, Port

James Molesworth, Daniel Sogg Tasting Staff