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2014 Napa Reds signal a new era of classicism Friday, January 27, 2017

Im November verbrachten wir eine konzentrierte Woche im Napa Valley und Sonoma County, um eine große Anzahl 2013er und 2014er Kalifornier zu verkosten. Fazit: 2012 und 2013 sind sehr fruchtige, mächtige und dichte Weine. Aber die 2014er faszinieren durch ihre Frische, Eleganz und Balance. Ein großer Jahrgang in total anderer Stilistik. Nun veröffentlichte auch James Suckling seine Eindrücke mit ähnlichem Ergebnis.

James Suckling: "...Last week I drank a bottle of 1979 Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve with Robert Mondavi Jr., the grandson of the late Robert Mondavi, the world-famous vintner. The wine was striking, and it immediately reminded me of the some of my experiences earlier in the month when I tasted more than 250 Napa reds — mostly cabernet sauvignon from the excellent 2014 vintage. It's a year that proves Napa is now entrenched in a new era of classicism, whereby wines expand on the linear definition of reds of the past while drawing on the precision and fruitiness of today. I've been watching (and tasting) this change unfold over the last few vintages, but maybe now, at last, we can finally proclaim that Napa Valley jam — most evident in the high-octane and overly fruity, sweet reds of the 2000s — is a thing of the past.

I like the way Helen Keplinger, a young and dynamic winemaker who also consults for a number of wineries in the Valley, describes her 2014 Grace Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley: "It's like a knife edge. The wine has focus."

Indeed, this is an excellent summary of many of the top-scoring wines in my tastings so far. Winemakers say that they benefited from a very warm but constant growing season. In the words of Cathy Corison, one of the veteran winemakers of the region, "Our hand was not forced by heat spikes in 2014."

The 2014 Napa Valley reds have wonderful fruit character in aroma and flavor, yet there's always a freshness, firmness and linear edge to the wines to give them focus and figure. They are less opulent than the bold and structured 2013s, perhaps the greatest vintage ever for Napa Valley. Even so, at the moment they tend to be more complex and approachable than the 2013s, which makes them extremely attractive to taste and drink now. "The 2014s are really ethereal, whereas the 2013s are concentrated and structured," explained Tod Mostero, the head winemaker of Dominus and Ulysses. "The 2012s are more juicy."

I am sure we will debate which vintage is the best for a long time, and this itself adds to the attraction of the three vintages. I would rank them today as follows: 2013, 2014 and 2012. If ageability is your thing, then 2013 is hard to beat, but don't believe that the bright and sophisticated 2014s or luscious 2012s won't age.

Perhaps what distinguishes 2014 above all is that all the reds show their true character driven by respective terroirs and microclimates. In other words, the wines are not dominated by a particular character of the vintage — namely late ripening and high sugar levels. It's interesting to note that the 2014 vintage was also marked by a massive earthquake in the valley on August 24 that caused some serious damage. Some winemakers believe it had an almost magical effect by releasing groundwater in many areas not seen for years, event decades. "Many of the vineyards had green leaves through the harvest, and dry creeks of the past rain with water," said one winemaker.

It's hard to say if the earthquake made a difference, but certainly 2014 is turning out to be a special vintage for the region. Below are my first set of tasting notes. Stay tuned for more very soon. —James Suckling, CEO/Editor



REALM, Napa Valley

<https://www.realmcellars.com>



Zu Realm habe ich eine besondere Beziehung. Das hat vor allem mit dem Gründer Juan Mercado zu tun. Als Mediziner im Golfkrieg. Dann eher zufällig zum Wein gekommen aber die richtigen Leute kennengelernt, die damals noch Wein-Youngsters waren und heute das große Rad im Napa Valley drehen (Thomas Brown, John Kongsgaard, Christian Moueix, Fred Schrader.....). Angefressen vom Valley und Wein und alles auf eine Karte gesetzt. Eine komplette Ernte durch Feuer verloren aber nicht aufgeben.....lesen Sie seine Geschichte auf der website.



Wie bei so vielen großen Namen im Napa Valley, gab es zwar Weine von REALM aber kein Weingut dazu. Ausgebaut wurde in einem fremden Keller. Seit 2016 hat Realm ein Zuhause. Im Stag's Leap District gegenüber von Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Und hier trafen wir Juan und verkosteten. Uff – ganz groß!!

3982 2014 Bard – Cabernet based blend 0,75 159,00

Michael Grimm (19+-19,5): "...90% Cabernet + 10% Merlot, intensive, schwarzbeerige Frucht, spicy, feine Röstnoten, Lakritze, frisch, dann in blaubeerig übergehend, tolle Säure, Frische und Tannine.

James Suckling (97): "...The aromas of oysters and peaches combine beautifully with the blackberry and blackcurrant character. Black olives, too. Full-bodied, layered and very intense with chocolate, black fruit and an intense, savory finish. Best Bard ever. Try in 2020, but already so pretty."

Robert Parker (95): "...The 2014 The Bard is a blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Petit Verdot and Merlot. This is their largest cuvée of 2,000 cases. The wine shows exciting elegance, purity, a dense purple color, sweet black currant and blackberry fruit intermixed with licorice and charcoal. It is full-bodied, showing nice loamy forest floor notes. It also possesses a layered mouthfeel and terrific purity, texture and length. Drink it over the next 20+ years"

4574 2014 Tempest – Merlot based blend 0,75 117,00

James Suckling (95): "...Wonderful aromas of blackberries, blueberries, tar and walnuts. Full-bodied yet tight and focused with lots of polished tannins. Extremely well-crafted wine. Sexy. Black velvet. Better in 2020"

Robert Parker (95): "...The 2014 The Tempest, a blend of 62% Merlot, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot is a 500-case cuvée aged in about 65% new Taransaud and Darnajou French oak cooperage. A beautiful nose of cedar wood, chocolate, spice box, forest floor and black and red fruits jumps from the glass of this dense, opulent, voluptuously textured and full-bodied wine with terrific purity, can be drunk now, or cellared for up to another 15 or more years"

7785 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer Dr. Crane 0,75 355,00

James Suckling (98): "...An exquisitely complete wine reminiscent of a tightly wound ball of silk. Medium to full body and mind-blowing flavors of iodine, blackberries and blueberries. It seems to open up beautifully. Goes on for minutes"

Robert Parker (99): "... There are 400 cases of the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard, which is 96% Cabernet Sauvignon and 4% Petit Verdot. This comes from the backstreets of St. Helena and the site basically looks like a quarry with its extreme gravelly soils. The wine is made from clone 337, which may be my favorite of the Cabernet clones. As I have said before, this is a Mission Haut-Brion on steroids – an incredibly fabulous wine with notes of scorched earth, charcoal embers, blackberry and blueberry fruit, an almost endless mouthfeel with powerful fruit, but elegance as well as purity. A thoroughly flawless and seamless full-bodied wine with 30 years of upside, this is pure perfection. If you have the patience, try to hold off for a couple of years, as this is one of the more structured of the 2014s"



James Suckling (98): "...Intense stone and blackberry character. A kaleidoscope of flowers and berries. Herbs, too. Blueberries, blackberries and licorice. Lead pencil, too. Medium-to full-bodied, savory and juicy with big tannins. Gorgeous. To Kalon grandeur. Yes! Give it three to four years"

Robert Parker (97+): "... Another 100% Cabernet Sauvignon is the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer to Kalon Vineyard, coming from clones 4 and 337 from that famous first-growth Oakville vineyard of 90 acres. Remarkably, the Robert Mondavi winery still owns even larger portion of the To Kalon Vineyard, but certainly doesn't exploit it to the extent that most purchasers of Beckstoffer To Kalon fruit do. This

cuvée of 450 cases is closer to a Château Latour in a great vintage than you might believe, since it's from Napa Valley. Notes of graphite, charcoal, blackcurrant liqueur and cedar wood are followed by a muscular, full-bodied wine with fabulous purity, a skyscraper-like texture and a long, long finish, with moderately sweet, ripe tannin. Give it several years of cellaring and drink it over the following three decades, as it is a fabulous effort"

5979 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Farella Combsville

0,75

229,00

James Suckling (99): "...Dark berries, sliced mushrooms wet earth and fascinating intensity. Iodine undertones. Full-bodied, velvety and layered. Incredible depth and length. Truly fantastic. Shows the Coombsville magic. Pure cabernet. Napa's answer to 1975 La Mission? Beautiful now but better in 2022

Robert Parker (96): "... Their 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Farella Vineyard (425 cases), is made from a vineyard planted in red volcanic tufa soils. The irony is that just about everybody that buys fruit from this vineyard makes better wine than the owner. This is a terrific, almost Bordeaux-inspired wine with loads of minerality and structure, but intense chocolaty, charcoal notes intermixed with blackcurrant, licorice and forest floor. It is dense, full-bodied, stunningly rich and can be drunk now or cellared for another two decades"

6045 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Houyi Vineyard Pritchard Hill

0,75

298,00

James Suckling (98): "...Powerful aromas of slate, stones, blueberries and blackberries. Full-bodied and dense with blackcurrants and shaved pencil. Fruity yet toned. Polished and so beautiful. Gorgeous now but better in 2022."

Robert Parker (97): "... From Pritchard Hill, the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Houyi Vineyard Pritchard Hill is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from the iron-rich, red soils of that famous hill above the Oakville crossroads. There are 425 cases of this wine made from Cabernet Sauvignon clones 4, 7 and 337. The Houyi Vineyard, owned by the Changs, is in an expensive neighborhood of superstars, including Brand, David Arthur and Colgin. Well above the fog-line, this area gets very warm days with plenty of UV sunshine and cool nights, which give this wine great acidity to go along with its stunning display of chocolaty, blackcurrant fruit intermixed with blackberry, graphite and forest floor. There are some spring flowers as well. A full-bodied, stunning wine, very much in the Realm style, it should drink well for 20+ years"

8773 2014 ABSURD

0,75

498,00

Michael Grimm (19,5+): "...BEST OF THE BEST. Klare frische Frucht, spicy, am Gaumen vollreif und warm, Charme und Schmelz, dicht aber nicht zu fett, dichtes, kompaktes Finish. Spannend ist die Komplexität der großartigen Frische in der Nase und der warmen Frucht am Gaumen. Ganz groß!"

James Suckling (97): "...Blackberries, blueberries, pretty florals and cherries. Extremely aromatic. Full-bodied, layered and powerful. Delightful depth and sexiness. Juicy and entrancing. Moreish. You want to drink it. Better in 2022"

Robert Parker (100): "... A blend of 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc and the rest Petit Verdot, is the 2014 The Absurd, basically a choice of their finest barrels, or as winemaker and owner Benoit Touquette says, "The crème de la crème." This is another perfect wine equaling their incredible 2013. Yet the 2014 is slightly more forward and showy, as many 2013s are just beginning to shut down. There are 250 cases of this majestic wine that has an opaque purple color, extraordinary nose of spring flowers, blueberry, blackberry, creosote, charcoal, toast and spice. The wine has unbelievable fruit on the attack, midpalate and finish, compelling purity, texture and a finish of close to a full minute. It is (as advertised by the winery) a "showcase of the best of Napa Valley with the freedom of expression that results from no rules." Drink now-2035"

Schrader Cellars, Napa Valley

Schrader



Robert Parker: „...After the remarkable performance of the 2012s, I would be hard-pressed to believe that Schrader could equal or eclipse that vintage, but they seem to have certainly equaled the quality of the 2012s. The 2013s are slightly more coiled and more tightly knit and with probably greater definition. That said, they all possess fabulous concentration and palate presence. Any of these will make a spectacular elixir/vinous treat to serve and consume over the next 25-30+ years. First-time readers may need to do a little research, but this is essentially a clonal study with micro-blends from the famous Oakville vineyard, the Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard, and more recently, a look at several other vineyards – the Beckstoffer George III Vineyard in Rutherford and the Beckstoffer Las Piedras Vineyard. Essentially, all of the wines are treated identically – aged in mostly Darnajou with some Taransaud barrels, they tend to always come in around 14.5%-14.7% natural alcohol, spend 20 months in all new oak and are bottled unfiltered. Since the beginning, they have been made by none other than the famed Napa consultant, Thomas Rivers Brown.

The wines are more similar than dissimilar, but I'll do my best to catalog the subtle differences that can be found. However, at this pinnacle of quality, they are few and far between. Production ranges from a low of 110 cases for the Colesworthy and 186 cases for the George III, to as much as 608 cases for the RBS and 650 cases for the LPV.“

8199 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon "G III"

0,75

445,00

Robert Parker (95): “... The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon GIII is a 213-case cuvée aged in the same manner as the other wines, for 20 months, but in this case in 90% new Darnajou and 10% new Taransaud barrels. Readers will note that the percentage of the coopers varies depending on the vineyard selection. This is an inky blue/purple wine with fabulous crème de cassis notes, spring flowers, a medium to full body, supple tannins and a more fruit-forward, luscious and precocious style than usual. This is probably best consumed in its first 16-20 years of life“

James Suckling (97): “...Aromas of walnuts and dried fruit as well as violets and forest floor. Full body, velvety tannins and a flavorful finish. This is layered and very rich yet remains vibrant and velvety. A solid and powerful Napa cab. Drink in 2019”

1794 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon "Las Piedras“

0,75

445,00

Robert Parker (99): “... The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon LPV is from clone 337 from the Las Piedras Vineyard in St. Helena. This shows Mission Haut-Brion-like characteristics as it has in the past, with crushed rock, wet gravel, scorched earth, blackberry and blueberry fruit. It is clearly one of my favorites of this entire tasting. It has 14.5% natural alcohol and was aged in 90% new Darnajou and 10% new Taransaud barrels. This is a killer effort.“

James Suckling (97): “...A profound nose of crushed blueberries, blackberries and minerals. Licorice, too. Full body, superfine tannins and a long, long finish. Linear and racy. Wonderful balance and structure. Leave it until at least 2020.”

6299 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer "To Kalon“ – T6

0,75

498,00

Robert Parker (98): “... The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon T6 was one of my super-favorites of the 2014s. Slightly higher in alcohol at 14.7%, compared to the RBS at 14.4% and the GIII at 14.3%, it is a kick-ass Cabernet Sauvignon, with a sexy display of black fruits, licorice, camphor, graphite and background oak. This is from clone 6 of the To Kalon Vineyard aged in 95% new Darnajou and 5% Taransaud barrels. So, as readers can see, the differences are minor, indeed. However, they are slightly different wines. This is a bold, opulent wine and one of my favorites of the 2014s. Drink it over the next 20 years“

James Suckling (95): “...Aromas of blackberries, minerals, licorice and dried violets follow through to a full body, big and juicy tannins and loads of fruit. Dense and powerful. Lightly austere finish. Shows power and muscle. Try in 2022.”

3754 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer "RBS" 0,75 445,00
Robert Parker (96): "... The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon RBS is made from the same clone (337) as the Georges III, but comes from the To Kalon Vineyard in Oakville and not the Rutherford Georges III. This was aged in 85% new Darnajou and 15% new Taransaud. It has fabulous concentration, notes of incense, licorice, blackcurrants, blackberries, as well as spring flowers. The wine is juicy, savory and full-bodied, with wonderful underlying energy and freshness. This wine is a more forward style than we saw with the 2013s, and is best drunk over the next 16-20 years"
James Suckling (96): "...Lots of plum and walnut character in addition to hints of mushrooms and violets. Full-bodied, rich and layered with blueberry and blackberry flavors. Give it a few years to soften. Better in 2019"

1007 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon „Old Sparky“ 1,5 798,00
Robert Parker (98): "... The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Old Sparky, Fred Schrader's favorite selection, is clone 4 from the To Kalon Vineyard aged in 100% new Darnajou and seems closest in personality and overall style to the CCS. This is a beautiful wine with great intensity and seems to be one of the superstars of this vintage. Smoky barbecue notes intermix with charcoal embers, blackberry, cassis, Christmas fruitcake, licorice and camphor. This is a complex 2014 that is showing beautifully at the moment and will continue to drink well for another 20 years""

6255 2014 Pinot Noir „Boar's View“ 0,75 255,00
Robert Parker (94): "... The production of the Pinot Noir is much higher. The 2014 Pinot Noir was aged 11 months in 60% new French oak after 100% destemming and a cold soak prior to fermentation. It offers up deep, dark raspberry fruit along with black cherry, forest floor, clove and cinnamon. There is plenty of spice, a medium to full body, outstanding ripeness, purity and overall balance. Drink t over the next 10-12 years"



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