



2018 REALM Cellars **Napa Valley**

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I could tell you my adventures – beginning from this morning...but it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.

– Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland



Sehr geehrte Kunden, liebe Weinfreunde,

2018 ist ein großartiges Jahr für das Napa Valley. Eher kühl und somit ist die Frucht bei den besten Weinen frisch und blaubeerig und die Weine verfügen über eine großartige Struktur und Finesse.

Und normalerweise ziehe ich den Neid auf mich, weil ich Bilder unserer letzten Kalifornien-Reise mit dem Angebot verschicke. Nicht dieses Mal. Im Jahr 2020 gab es keine Kalifornien-Reise. Aber ich hatte wenigstens die Möglichkeit, im Winter die 2018er von REALM zu verkosten.

REALM hat sich in den letzten Jahren zur absoluten Spitze im Napa Valley entwickelt. Dank der Vision von Scott Becker und dem Genie seines winemakers Benoit Touquette. Die Nachfrage innerhalb der USA ist so groß, dass für den Export eigentlich nichts zur Verfügung steht. REALM hat die ohnehin wenigen Importeure nochmals reduziert. Durch unsere sehr enge und freundschaftliche Beziehung sind wir weiterhin im Boot und ich freue mich, Ihnen heute die 2018er in Subs anbieten zu können.

Wir werden die Flaschen vermutlich im März importieren können und erwarten die Anlieferung bis ca. Ende Mai.

Scott sandte mir heute die Allokation 2018 mit Zitat oben aus Alice im Wunderland und kommentiert:

...Alice's comment to the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle seems to capture perfectly where we find ourselves at the beginning of 2021. It's no use going back to our adventures from the 2020 vintage. Despite the setbacks of the prior year, we emerge more grateful and more determined than ever to continue our journey.

REALM verlor durch die Feuer und vor allen den Rauch der 2020er Brände die komplette Rotweinernte. Keine Flasche REALM 2020 wird es von den legendären Lagen geben. Keinen THE BARD und keinen ABSURD. Aber Scott und sein Team blicken nicht mit Wehmut zurück. Der Blick nach vorne ist typisch für den amerikanischen Geist und vielleicht nirgendwo ausgeprägter als in dem Teil Amerikas, der über Jahrhunderte Ziel und Hoffnung der Pioniere und Siedler war – Kalifornien.

Dieses Angebot ist als Subskription zu verstehen. Die Auslieferung erfolgt voraussichtlich vor dem Sommer 2021.

2018 The Tempest

0,75

18,5-19

135,00



Michael Grimm (18,5-19): „...sehr süße, reife Frucht, schwarz, weich, soft, frisch, kräftige Tannine“

Jeb Dunnuck (96+): „...Another multi-vineyard blend in the lineup, the 2018 The Tempest is based on 75% Merlot and 25% Cabernet Sauvignon brought up all in French oak. It has a Saint-Emilion-like bouquet of chocolate-covered black cherry and currant fruits interwoven with a beautiful, chalky sense of minerality. Damp earth, tobacco, and loads of floral notes all make an appearance, and this full-bodied beauty has wonderful purity of fruit, good acidity, and ripe, polished tannins. It's beautifully done and will evolve for 15+ years“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (94+): „...The 2018 The Tempest was bottled in February 2020. It is a blend of 75% Merlot and 25% Cabernet Sauvignon. Vineyard sources include the Realm Stags Leap District estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot along with Merlot from Orchard vineyard, Upper Range vineyard and Blair vineyard. It sports a deep garnet-purple color and—wow—jumps right out of the glass with vibrant notes of fresh black plums, wild blueberries and Morello cherries plus fragrant hints of candied violets and star anise. The medium to full-bodied palate offers beautiful purity, framed by firm, rounded tannins and a lively backbone, finishing with great length“

James Suckling (97): „...Rich, intense aromas of cassis, stewed blackberries, blueberry jam, cloves, black olives and cocoa. It's full-bodied and mouth-filling with firm, velvety tannins. Impressive depth and fruit extraction. Mostly merlot. Drink from 2022, but already a beauty“

Antonio Galloni (96): „...The 2018 Tempest, Realm's Merlot-based wine, is powerful, inky and quite savory, more so than in the past. The blend of vineyard sources in Calistoga, Oak Knoll and Coombsville works so well here. Inky dark fruit, graphite, bittersweet chocolate, leather, spice and espresso are beautifully delineated. Strong savory and mineral inflections suggest there is quite a bit of fruit from cooler sites in the southern end of the valley in this blend. A

move towards more neutral oak barrels with thicker staves, less racking in aging and earlier bottling yields a Tempest that deftly balances richness and energy. The 2018 is a very serious wine and a terrific start to this tasting of new releases from Realm. In 2018, the blend is 75% Merlot and 25% Cabernet Sauvignon“

Jeb Dunnuck (96+): „...Another multi-vineyard blend in the lineup, the 2018 The Tempest is based on 75% Merlot and 25% Cabernet Sauvignon brought up all in French oak. It has a Saint-Emilion-like bouquet of chocolate-covered black cherry and currant fruits interwoven with a beautiful, chalky sense of minerality. Damp earth, tobacco, and loads of floral notes all make an appearance, and this full-bodied beauty has wonderful purity of fruit, good acidity, and ripe, polished tannins. It's beautifully done and will evolve for 15+ years“

2018 The Bard

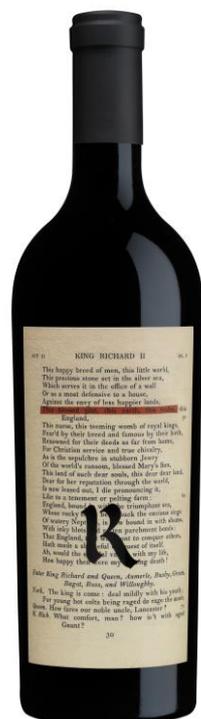
0,75

19,5

149,00

1,5

345,00



Michael Grimm (19,5): „...fleischig, dicht, Schoko, große Struktur, schöne Süße am Gaumen, Charme, Cassis, Schoko, feine Veilchen, lang, dicht, sehr schön, toller Cab“

Jeb Dunnuck (98): „...The 2018 The Bard is beautiful and certainly in the same realm as the 2015 and 2016, both magical wines. This cuvée reveals a deep purple color followed by a beautiful perfume of crème de cassis, blackberries, roasted coffee, spring flowers, and violets. With incredible richness, no hard edges, and a blockbuster finish, this incredible wine offers serious opulence with no sensation of heaviness or weight. It's beautifully done and already complex and nuanced. It will evolve for at least 15+ years. The blend is 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, 5% Merlot, and 2% each of Petit Verdot and Petite Sirah“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (96+): „...A blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, 5% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot and 2% Petite Sirah, the 2018 The Bard comes from 12 different vineyard sources and is composed from 40 separate lots. Deep garnet-purple colored, it soars from the glass with notions of crème de cassis, blueberry pie and plum preserves, giving way to a wave of clove oil, chocolate box, exotic spices and cracked black pepper. Full-bodied, rich and plush in the mouth, it has loads of spice-spiked black fruit layers, lifted by just enough freshness, going long and mineral-laced on the finish“

James Suckling (97): „...Intense and perfumed aromas of cassis, mulberry, lavender, nutmeg and cloves. Praline, walnuts and dark chocolate, too. It's full-bodied, creamy and polished with a precise finish. Firm yet smoothly coating tannins. Very fine. Cabernet sauvignon 85% with merlot, petite verdot, cabernet and petite sirah. Drinkable now, but better from 2023“

Antonio Galloni (98): „...The 2018 The Bard is fabulous and also one of the very finest wines I have ever tasted from Realm. Vertical structure, power and explosive energy infuse the 2018 with tremendous character. Inky dark fruit, chocolate, leather, licorice and lavender are

some of the many notes that run through the 2018. This is the first vintage that includes a dollop of Petite Sirah from Bourn. It is also the first vintage in which a portion of the wine was aged in concrete eggs, which seems to add tension and a palpable sense of vibrancy. The Bard is a blend of 40 different lots, everything from Calistoga to Coombsville, a marriage of elements that works so well. Although none of these wines could be referred to as inexpensive, The Bard is a tremendous relative value within the context of high-end Napa Valley. I loved it. The blend is 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, 5% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot and 2% Petite Sirah“

2018 Moonracer

0,75
1,5

19,5+

339,00
799,00



Michael Grimm (19,5+): „...komplexe Nase, Soja, Cassis, tolle Frucht, tolle Struktur und Finesse, tolle, kräftige Tannine, Sc hoko, Wow, lang, lang...“

Jeb Dunnuck (98+): „...From the estate property around the new winery in Stags Leap, the 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate Moonracer (there are normally small amounts of Merlot and Cabernet Franc in the blend) offers a glorious Napa Cabernet nose of crème de cassis, lead pencil shavings, dried flowers, and chocolate that develops beautifully with time in the glass. It doesn't lose a beat on the palate either and is full-bodied, with a layered, focused texture, building structure, and a great, great finish. It's a serious, age-worthy wine that needs 4-5 years of bottle age yet will evolve like a First Growth from Bordeaux.“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (94+): „...The 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon The Estate-Moonracer is a blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot and 3% Petit Verdot. It comes exclusively from Realm's Stags Leap estate. Deep garnet-purple colored, the nose opens with pure, vibrant cassis, ripe blackberries and black plums followed by touches of bouquet garni, pencil lead, redcurrant jelly and Sichuan pepper. Medium to full-bodied, it has a rock-solid structure of firm, grainy tannins and a lively line of freshness supporting the bright, crunchy black and red fruits, finishing with great length and an invigorating lift. Tightly knit and a little restrained right now, I suspect this will warrant a higher score with 3-4 years of bottle age.“

James Suckling (100): „...A full-bodied, structured red with blackcurrant, violet, dark-chocolate and burnt-orange aromas. Walnut husk, too. Such precision and elegance. Firm, smooth tannins and a long finish. Really complex at the end. A stunning wine from Stags Leap. Drink from 2023.“

Antonio Galloni (97+): „...The 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Moonracer emerges from Realm's estate vineyard in Stags Leap. Inky, opulent and full-throttle, the Moonracer captures the personality of this site and vintage so well. Crème de cassis, licorice, spice, menthol, new French oak and lavender all flesh out as this sumptuous, exotic Cabernet Sauvignon shows off its racy curves. The 2018 needs a bit of time to fully come together, but it was only bottled this past June, which is to say later than most of the wines in Realm's September 2020 release. Patience will be rewarded. For those who can't wait, the 2018 starts to be-

me approachable about 12 hours after opening. When the remainder of the 2018s are released in early 2021 readers will see a new, small bottling from the very top of the estate made from blocks planted with one of the most important legacy Cabernet Sauvignon clones in Napa Valley. But back to Moonracer. It is a wine that captures so much of what makes the Realm wines special and unique. The blend is 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot and 3% Petit Verdot“

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Farella Coombsville

0,75

19-19,5

237,00



Michael Grimm (19-19,5): „...sehr schöne, reife, frische Frucht, Schokolade, feine florale Noten, komplex, sehr elegant, große Struktur, sehr kräftige, passende Tannine, Soja, Schoko und feine spicy Noten im Finish“

Jeb Dunnuck (97): „...Also all Cabernet Sauvignon, and the first vintage where this team has also done the farming, the 2018 Farella Estate spent 16 months in 75% new French oak. More vibrant red and blue fruits, graphite, flowers, and spice notes define this beauty, which is full-bodied and has an elegant, seamless texture, great tannins, and a beautiful, classy style“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (97): „...Realm took over the management of the Farella vineyard from 2018 with a view to eventually assume possession of the property. Made from 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Farella Vineyard is their first "Estate" wine from the vineyard. Deep garnet-purple colored, it comes bounding out of the glass with youthful notes of fresh black plums, Morello cherries, ripe blackcurrants and Black Forest cake plus hints of cumin seed, damp earth and spice box with subtle hints of tobacco and new leather. Medium to full-bodied, it has a solid foundation of fir, grainy tannins and lovely freshness supporting the bright, crunchy fruit, finishing long with a provocative, lifted perfume. Note that no 2017 Farella Vineyard was made“

James Suckling (98): „...An intense nose of ripe blackberry, blueberry, vanilla, clove and sandalwood. It's full-bodied and so juicy with a wealth of ripe black fruit and layers of sweet spices. Ripe, velvety tannins and a long finish. Already impressive, but deserves a few years to develop. Drink from 2022“

Scott Becker (REALM): „...2018 is an exciting vintage for Farella as it's our first estate Cabernet from the vineyard and the first year we had total control over farming. This is a complex site, and as we get to know it better we're learning how to irrigate and call picks more precisely. We drew on a few more blocks than usual in 2018, making this one of the more layered and complex Farella Cabernets Realm has produced“

Benoit Touquette (winemaker REALM): „...Driven by blue-black fruit with an underpinning of beguiling olive tapenade, fresh herbs and Provençal spice. There's a brooding quality to the wine as it moves and then crescendos over the palate to a nice, fresh finish. The deep color and fine grained tannins tell you you're in Coombsville.“

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer Bourn 0,75 19 295,00

Michael Grimm (19): „...vollreif+, mineralisch, Süße, spicy, Dichte am Gaumen, reife Frucht, feine Portweinsüße. Wie das?? Antwort: 10% Petit Syrah im Blend. Aha. Spannend“

Jeb Dunnuck (97): „...A wine that was previous released under the Kata label, the 2018 Beckstoffer Bourn is a gorgeous 2018 that does everything right, offering a vivid purple color, incredible notes of blue fruits, cassis, violets, chocolate, and graphite, full-bodied richness, a sexy, opulent texture, and sweet tannins. Mostly Cabernet Sauvignon yet with 10% Petit Verdot, it's one of the more approachable, ready-to-go wines in the Realm lineup in 2018, yet my money is on this beauty evolving for 20 years or more“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (96): “..This single-vineyard wine wine is new to Realm from this 2018 vintage, although Realm's winemaker, Benoit Touquette, has made wine from Bourn since 2011, under the Kata label (which is no longer made). Bourn vineyard is located next to Levensohn vineyard, to the west of St. Helena, but produces a very different style of wine due to dramatic variations in soil types. Deep garnet-purple in color, the nose of the 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Bourn leaps from the glass with a stunning perfume of violets, dark chocolate, clove oil, star anise and incense over a lifted core of crème de cassis, blueberry pie and stewed black cherries. Medium to full-bodied, the palate has great tension and energy, featuring tightly wound black fruit and spicy layers plus a firm backbone of nice, ripe tannins, finishing long and fragrant. This is a very exciting new vineyard expression from Realm!“

James Suckling (97): „...Lovely, perfumed aromas of blackcurrants, dried blueberries, lavender and licorice. Chocolate orange and praline, too. It's full-bodied, yet fresh and refined. Firm, sleek tannins frame the ripe-fruit flavors. Balanced and relatively restrained. This is a new wine from Realm. A blend of cabernet sauvignon with petit sirah. It used to be Kata from Beckstoffer. Drink from 2023“

Scott Becker (owner REALM): „...Benoit has made wine from the Beckstoffer Bourn Vineyard since 2011 under the Kata label, but with the retirement of that brand and Realm's continuing collaboration with the Beckstoffer family, this is the first vintage he's made from Bourn for Realm. We've become big fans of west St. Helena where Bourn is located; it's an area that reminds us of Burgundy with its mix of vineyards and residential homes. The region is far from homogenous, however, with veins running through it that yield markedly different soil and rock compositions“

Benoit Touquette (winemaker REALM): „...This wine is a paradox, perhaps reflected in its varietal mix. The Cabernet Sauvignon is the spine, with fruit that smacks you up front with a massive, 'big boy' impression on the palate. The Petite Syrah completes the picture, filling out the Cab with flesh and fat. As the wine develops it softens up, with high fruit tone impressions and a silky, smooth texture“

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Houyi Pritchard Hill 0,75 19+ 325,00



Michael Grimm (19+): „...sehr schöne Frische, blaubberig, tolle Frucht, sehr elegant in der Mitte, kräftige, passende Tannine im Finish“

Jeb Dunnuck (96): „...All Cabernet Sauvignon and from a site on Pritchard Hill, the 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Houyi Vineyard sports a deep purple color as well as a perfumed, complex bouquet of red plums, blueberries, chocolate, dried herbs, and violets. It shows more cedary spice with time in the glass and is full-bodied, has a seamless, layered texture, ripe tannins, and a great finish. It has ample upfront fruit yet also sound underlying structure, and it's an age-worthy wine that will benefit from 2-4 years of bottle age“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (97+): “..The 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Houyi Vineyard Pritchard Hill is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from the Nine Suns property . Opaque purple-black in color, it leaps from the glass with exuberant scents of warm cassis, black cherries and boysenberries plus hints of cloves, mocha, lilacs and bay leaves. The medium to full-bodied palate delivers striking purity with well-defined blackcurrant and cherry flavors accented by floral and exotic spice notes. It has a solid foundation of firm, fine-grained tannins and bold freshness, delivering a long, mineral-laced finish. Hold onto this one for a good 3-5 years and then enjoy it over the next 25 years or more“

James Suckling (97): „...Ripe blackberry, plum, cedar, clove and chocolate on the nose with some caramel and pencil lead, too. It's full-bodied and rich with firm, chewy tannins. Intense black-fruit and chocolate layers. So smooth and beautiful. Needs a few years. Drink from 2023“

Scott Becker (owner REALM): „...In 2018 we were able to draw fruit from five distinct blocks in Houyi, allowing us to work with different clones and different passes/picks. This translates to a Single Vineyard wine that is nonetheless a blend, yielding more complexity and depth. The wine is characteristic of the best Cabernets from Pritchard Hill, a seductive expression of site and vintage“

Benoit Touquette (winemaker REALM): „...Highly perfumed and fragrant with fruit leading the charge along with hints of herbes de Provence. There's an intensity to the wine right out of the glass, with vibrancy and a purity of high-tone fruit that is fresh, well-defined and precise. Still, rich flavors penetrate and coat the palate, with this Houyi showing more flesh and baby fat than previous vintages“

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Dr. Crane Vineyard 0,75 19,5+ 555,00

Michael Grimm (19,5+): „...wahnsinns tolle klare, blaubeerige Frucht, extrem viel blaubeerige Frische, am gaumen Schoko, große Komplexität mit Aromen von Cassis, Tabak, Mokka, Kaffee, warme Brotkruste, große Struktur, mächtig mit großer Balance, extrem lang.“

Jeb Dunnuck (98+): „...The 2018 Beckstoffer Dr. Crane is gorgeous, offering classic 2018 purity in its blue fruits, cassis, chocolate, tobacco, cold fireplace, and loamy earth-like aromas and flavors. With full-bodied richness and depth, it has flawless balance, lots of building tannins, and a powerful, backward style that's going to benefit from bottle age. It doesn't have that "je ne sais quoi" quality of the 2015 yet shares similarities with the 2016 given its purity and structure. Hide bottles for 4-5 years and enjoy over the following 25+“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (100): „..Made from 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer Dr Crane Vineyard displays an opaque purple-black color. It saunters confidently out of the glass with compelling notes of warm black plums, blackcurrant cordial, Morello cherries and black raspberries followed by an opulent perfume of exotic spices, dusty soil, rose oil and crushed rocks with a waft of sandalwood. Full-bodied, rich, seductive and so, so spicy, the palate possesses a multitude of savory, earth and preserved fruit layers, framed by an achingly beautiful velvety texture and seamless freshness, finishing long, long, long—truly showing off its latent power. Like a gorgeous intellectual, this is a wine that will absolutely turn heads and create a stir“

James Suckling (97): „...Lots of blackcurrant, blueberry, dark chocolate, burnt orange and licorice on the nose. Ink and tar, too. It's full-bodied with rich, concentrated layers of fruit and spice and firm, smooth tannins. Drink from 2023“

Scott Becker (REALM): „...When we tasted the 2018 Dr. Crane in preparation for writing these notes, we were blown away. But that's actually not uncommon. Dr. Crane is one of those wines that is simply unmistakable. It always stands out in blind tastings; you recognize it in an instant. When we sit down with people and taste Dr. Crane, jaws drop. Our jaws drop! It's an "aha" wine, one that makes you fall in love with wine in the first place, or all over again. It's hard to explain. We work hard on all our wines, but this one transcends anything we do to it. It's been that way since 2012. It's such a profound site, with a clear signature. If you said, "give me an example of a world class Grand Cru vineyard in Napa Valley, we'd say, Dr. Crane“

Benoit Touquette (winemaker REALM): „...“It's a freak show, like fireworks in your mouth.” There are so many layers to this wine: blueberry compote, graphite, the essence of the finest parfum. There's sensuality but also tension: concentrated fruit and mineral, velvety texture and crushed rock“



2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer To Kalon 0,75 19,5+20 459,00

Michael Grimm (19,5+20): „...große, komplexe, würzige Frucht, große Nase, Cassis, Strauss voll Blumen, große Struktur, blaubeerige Frische, sehr langes Finale“

Jeb Dunnuck (98+): „...The 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer To Kalon is beautiful, offering a more backward, reserved expression of this vineyard than usual, although no less impressive. Beautiful crème de cassis, graphite, white chocolate, and floral notes emerge from the glass, and it's deep, full-bodied, and concentrated, with ample tannins and mid-palate depth. Tight, backward, and closed, yet with incredible purity, hide bottles for 4-5 years and it should keep for 20-30 years. It's incredibly well done, and I'd be thrilled to have bottles in the cellar“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (98+): „...The 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, coming from five different blocks, and was harvested "in multiple picks, at a leisurely pace." Deep garnet-purple colored, it rolls sensuously out of the glass with decadent scents of boysenberries, black cherries, redcurrant jelly and blackcurrant pastilles with hints of bouquet garni, black soil and iron ore. Full-bodied, the taut, tightly knit black and red fruit has a firm structure of ripe, grainy tannins and bags of freshness, finishing very long with loads of earth and mineral nuances coming through“

James Suckling (98): „...A full-bodied red with pronounced aromas and flavors of stewed black cherries, plums, blueberries and cassis, as well as cloves, violets and a hint of burnt bark. Dark chocolate and mocha, too. Firm, smooth tannins and rich yet balanced layers of dark fruit and chocolate. Ultra fine tannins. A little dusty. Drink from 2024 and onwards“

Scott Becker (REALM): „...We worked with five different blocks in To Kalon in 2018, the most we've ever been able to access. With a long, stable growing season and harvest we were able to do multiple picks at a leisurely pace, making this one of the most precise To Kalons we've produced. The wine captures the beauty of the 2018 vintage, comparable to 2012 and 2016, but with more flesh and density“

Benoit Touquette (winemaker REALM): „...Richness and freshness, the core elements of our house style, are both on display in this wine. Red and black fruits laced with herbal undertones. A dense wine yet with a perfumed, floral character at the same time“

2018 Cabernet FRANC Beckstoffer To Kalon 1,5 kB 1599,0

Jeb Dunnuck (98): „...Another incredible wine, the 2018 Cabernet Franc Beckstoffer To Kalon is a full-bodied, dense, concentrated expression of the variety that gives up loads of red and blue fruits, graphite, flowers, and chocolate, with a building sense of minerality on the nose and palate. As with all of Realm's 2018s, it's concentrated and powerful, with a backward, age-worthy style. It needs 5-7 years of bottle age, but it's gorgeous all the way“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (100): „...In 2018, Realm was able to pick up a few more rows of the Beckstoffer's To Kalon Cabernet Franc, so it the 2018 Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard Cabernet Franc is 100% of this variety. Deep



garnet-purple colored, the nose is youthfully restrained to begin, slowly unfurling to reveal a very earthy, forest floor and truffles profile with notes of crushed rocks and pencil lead leading to a core of kirsch, black raspberries, blackberry compote and black cherries with wafts of lavender, cedar and wild sage. The full-bodied palate is built like a brick house, featuring very firm, super ripe, grainy tannins and seamless freshness. The finish is so, so layered and minerally with the most gorgeous floral perfume coming through at the very end. Stunning“

James Suckling (97): „...A full-bodied yet elegant red with aromas of black and red cherries, stewed blackcurrants, cassis leaf, cloves, licorice and potpourri. Dried flowers and pine needles on the palate, too. Lightly peppery with ripe, velvety tannins. Pretty fruit intensity and length. Pure cabernet franc. Only available in magnum. Drinkable now, but better from 2022“

Scott Becker (REALM): „...*We picked up a few more rows of Cabernet Franc from Beckstoffer To Kalon in this vintage. So it's the first time this wine is 100% Cabernet Franc. Previous versions of this blend included up to 25% Cabernet Sauvignon. Bottled exclusively in magnum as we find this to be an eminently age-worthy wine“*

Benoit Touquette (winemaker REALM): „...*Richness and freshness, the core elements of our house style, are both on display in this wine. Red and black fruits laced with herbal undertones. A dense wine yet with a perfumed, floral character at the same time“*

2017 THE ABSURD

0,75

kB

859,00

Jeb Dunnuck (97): „...The flagship from this reference point estate, the 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon Absurd is a tiny selection from the top lots in the cellar. While 2017 was a challenging vintage for Napa, don't make the mistake thinking that no great wines were made, and this 2017 is a great example of the best out there. It boasts a deep purple/plum color as well as a complex, almost Bordeaux-like bouquet of blackcurrants, scorched earth, lead pencil, chocolate, tobacco, and gravelly earth. Haut-Brion-like aromatically, this full-bodied beauty is concentrated, has a great mid-palate, building yet silky tannins, and a great finish. As with most great 2017s, it plays in the more backward, elegant end of the spectrum, yet this is flawlessly balanced and an extraordinary wine. Give bottles 4-6 years, count yourself lucky, and enjoy over the following 30 years or more“

Parker/Lisa Perrotti-Brown (98): „... Winemaker Benoit Touquette, owner Scott Becker and consultant Michel Rolland had a debate about whether to make a 2017 The Absurd—the estate's über-blend of the best elements from that vintage. In the end, they made just two barrels. As per usual, they do not declare what the grape varieties or vineyards are that compose this blend. Deep garnet-purple colored, it needs a little swirling to coax out notions of ripe, juicy blackcurrants, black plums and warm blueberries, plus hints of licorice, unsmoked cigars and tilled black soil. Full-bodied, the palate has a solid structure of firm, finely-grained tannins and compelling freshness supporting the tightly wound, earthy layers, finishing long with loads of persistent, soft-spoken nuances. A little restrained and still incredibly youthful, it will need a good 3-5 years in bottle to begin to unfurl and should cellar for at least 30 years after that“

Antonio Galloni (96+): „...The 2017 Absurd is a tiny blend of the best lots in the cellar. Stylistically, The Absurd is a bit lighter than most Realm wines, but that is to be expected for a wine made only from pre-fire fruit. Like many top estates, Realm harvests over a range of ripeness levels and then blends those lots to achieve complexity. In essence, the 2017 Absurd was made only from the first half of the harvest, when ripeness levels were a bit lower than they would have been later on in the season. Wines like this need time in bottle to be at their most expressive. I have no doubt that will be the case here as well, but readers need to be patient, as the 2017 Absurd doesn't have that sort of immediacy and voluptuousness in its youth than Realm fans have come to expect. Even so, it is striking. Realm does not disclose the sites in the Absurd blend, but there are plenty of clues in the red berry fruit, blood orange and floral nuances, all enveloped in a caress of silky tannins“

USA, California, Napa Valley: Spotlight on Realm

- Lisa Perrotti-Brown
- 8th Oct 2020 | The Wine Advocate | *October 2020 Week 1*

Lisa Perrotti-Brown (Parker): „...Realm. On its own, without context, the name conjures images of something vast, something regal, maybe something entitled, probably something pretentious. The name suggests nothing so out-of-place for sometimes chi-chi Napa Valley. What calls into question your possible assumptions are the wines.

“The origin of the name goes back to the concept of ‘the realm of possibility,’” Realm's managing owner, Scott Becker, said. “And I still think that's true today. Is it within the realm of possibility that a fledgling start-up in Napa Valley could one day become one of the icons of the wine world? I often describe ourselves as practical dreamers. We dream big, but we also put in the hard, practical work required to make those dreams come true. Realm to me still carries that sense of meaning.”

On the one hand, like a number of Napa Valley icon brands, Realm was the result of a tried and tested formula: 1) buy some fruit from high-caliber vineyards, 2) don't screw it up in the winery, 3) come up with a clever name and packaging, and 4) sell the hell out of it. It's the formula that's launched a lot of the Valley's start-ups over the last 25 years. Because vineyard land is so prohibitively expensive here, unless you bought into the estate game in the 1980s/early 1990s, inherited a property or have a small fortune to burn, there has just been no other way to get established as a producer. Similar to the negociant model in Burgundy, many of these brands regularly feel the squeeze from escalating fruit prices, made even more frustrating when they have helped to build the reputation for that vineyard. It is easy to see why a lot of these brands crash and burn after just a few years.

On the other hand, Realm was co-founded by Juan Mercado. Mercado is not your typical wealthy businessman turned Napa Valley wine entrepreneur. From relatively humble beginnings, he had been a medic in the army during the Gulf War and then came to work as a nurse at a hospital in Oakland, California, before moving to Napa. His passion for wine became more than just that with the unlikely acquisition in 2002, with the help of friends in the industry, of a few tons of Beckstoffer To Kalon fruit and a little fruit from Dominus. By 2010, production had gone from just a few hundred cases to 2,500 cases.



Still a struggling, fledgling business, in early 2011 a French winemaker named Benoit Touquette came on board. Touquette had studied Chemistry and Oenology at Bordeaux University and worked at several Bordeaux wineries before arriving in California to work with wine consultant Andy Erickson. In the 2000s, he quickly made a name for himself working at cult names such as Screaming Eagle, Ovid and Dalla Valle. Realm was not a cult winery by any stretch of the imagination at this stage, but Touquette was drawn to it like a magnet, and he brought into the Realm fold his friend and mentor Michel Rolland as a consultant.

Come 2011, Realm seemed to be doing everything right, but it all went horribly wrong. Like so many wineries purchasing fruit and living hand to mouth, Realm was one difficult vintage away from disaster. That vintage was the cold, rainy, near wash-out that was 2011.

“In 2012, Realm was on its back.” Scott Becker recalled. “We struggled to make payroll. I remember Benoit and I meeting with a grower in 2012, and they practically laughed us out of the vineyard.”

A few years earlier, Scott Becker had arrived in Napa Valley from out of left field—the Indiana cornfields, to be precise. He’d served in the US Airforce for five years, was stationed in Afghanistan and attended Harvard Business School. “It was another Air Force veteran, Jack Cakebread, who took me under his wing and inspired me to pursue a life in wine,” Scott said. “My early years in Napa were shaped by mentorship from some of the legends in Napa Valley—Jack Cakebread, Bill Harlan, Bart Araujo, Jim Barrett and Frank Farella.” In 2011, Becker happened to strike up a conversation with Juan Mercado in a bar. Becker had been working for Bill Harlan, but was keen to start a project of his own—something like Realm. Before he knew it, that project was Realm.



Realm winemaker Benoit Touquette (left) and managing owner Scott Becker (right)

By the end of 2011, debts at Realm were spiraling out of control. “Juan, Benoit and I essentially re-started Realm in early 2012,” Becker explained. “At the time, the business was bankrupt and we decided it was worth trying to turn things around. I bought out Juan’s old business partner, but that didn’t leave much (any) capital to invest in the company. It was scrappy in 2012, ‘13 and ‘14. Benoit became very active in the vineyards, working with growers to fine-tune farming to our standards. We were making the wines at Chateau Boswell, which was great, but it wasn’t the same as having our own home. Juan and I traveled across the country selling wine to whoever we could—there was a lot of back-vintage wine to move, which in theory was good for cash flow, but it was older wines not made by Benoit and wines that didn’t necessarily show the future. I could tell stories for days about what it was like to try to turnaround a brand: lots of heartache, holding onto hope, cleaning up an old mess, repairing relationships with vendors who weren’t paid, earning back trust from consumers who were promised something that never materialized. But through those scrappy years, the thing that kept us going was tasting the wines in barrel from 2012. We thought if we could just hold on until we put those 2012 wines onto the market, there was a chance Realm could turn into something special.”

When the moment of truth came, so much was riding on Robert Parker’s assessment of Realm’s 2012 vintage. His reviews of the 2011s had been damningly lackluster, with just one wine receiving a 90-point score and the rest were in the 80s. At the end of October 2014, Parker published his annual Wine Advocate Napa report, focused on the 2012 new releases. Realm’s Dr. Crane Vineyard and The Absurd both received 100 points, with no label scoring below 96. “The meaning of tasting those 2012 wines with Bob...” Becker confided with me, “...we will never forget that, and we continue to wake up every day trying to live up to the opportunity he gave us.” Realm was back in business.

In 2015, the team at Realm took the next step toward achieving their big dream. They purchased a home—the Hartwell Winery and vineyards located just off the Silverado Trail in Stags Leap District, up on Wappo Hill. “To go from struggling for survival to being able to farm our own vineyards, it’s hard to overstate the significance of that,” Becker said. “Eight years is a relatively short window in winegrowing years. It’s been a huge transformation, one we feel incredibly lucky and grateful for. We worked our tails off to get here, but we are still constantly humbled by the gravity and responsibility we now carry to be stewards of the land. When you are just buying fruit, you are living year to year. When you plant your own vineyard, you have to be thinking about the next 30 or 40 years.”



The team named their new home vineyard on Wappo Hill “Moonracer,” paying homage to the Wappo Native Indians that once used the hill as a central lookout. Jack London, who wrote about the races among Native Indian tribes that took place during full moons, noted that the Wappos often won. Thus, Moonracer is a reference to the former inhabitants of the place Realm calls home. “It is made up of about 12 acres in production at the moment, with another eight acres in the stage of replanting, so ultimately we will have 20 acres surrounding the winery,” Becker informed me. “The original Hartwell blocks at the top of the hill are planted to two acres today, but we hope to expand that to five acres or more in time.”

The acquisition of their new base kick-started a massive project to build a new winery, expand the cellars and restructure the vineyards. I asked Becker about their current production volumes and how big would they like to get. “Across 14 different wines (13 reds, one white) we bottled almost 15,000 cases in 2018, and it will be the same for 2019,” he said. “Some of the wines are a few hundred cases. The Bard is our largest production wine, which is about half of the total production. The growth in the future will come more from estate vineyards—as we bring on new plantings for Moonracer and Farella. We always said we wanted Realm to be the size of a First Growth, so call that anywhere from 15,000 to 25,000 cases. I believe to build something enduring we need a certain scale—to invest in quality, to attract and retain top talent, to matter to the wine trade, to gain global reach, etc. We don’t need to grow much in volume, but we really see opportunities to continue growing in terms of quality. That’s at the core of who we are—we are absolutely maniacal about quality. More precision, more focus, more delineation between the wines. I see the number of wines in the portfolio evolving a little over time. Perhaps one vineyard or blend may go away. We want the portfolio to collectively reflect the diversity of Napa Valley. Sometimes I’d like to think we want the scale and ambition of a Bordeaux First Growth, but we want a reverence for the land and for nuance like a Burgundy domaine.”

I asked Scott Becker about their new arrangement with Farella vineyard, which is now considered as an “estate” vineyard. “Frank wanted to provide some certainty and clarity to his four children, and he also wanted the vineyard to go into the hands of someone who would be a worthy steward for decades to come,” Becker replied. “Frank’s son Tom has made wine at the Farella Vineyard for the last 30 years. The three of us came up with a partnership that looks like this: Frank has a life estate in the house, Tom continues to source fruit and make wine for several years to come, Realm took over farming and control of the vineyard. We made this agreement in 2018, so that’s the first vintage we consider Farella as an estate wine in our portfolio. Tom brings a wealth of experience and knowledge; we brought in the Bettinelli family as our farming partner (they also farm our Stags Leap District estate and Upper Range). So, we farm the vineyard for our fruit as well as Tom’s, and we also sell a small amount of fruit to a few other wineries based on long-term relationships. We know over time that the vineyard needs to be replanted (first vines dated back to early '80s), and we are working on a long-term replant plan.”



With all that has happened since the beginning, so many changes, what is Realm today? “A giant light on his feet,” Becker smiled. “Wines of richness but also freshness. Plenty of fruit but also something more. Intensity but also elegance. There’s an inherent tension to these words, and that’s the razor’s edge we seek to find in the wines. I would say the house style has evolved slightly since 2012. The wines in those days were more hedonistic but perhaps lacked some of the finesse. Today, I would like to think the wines are still big, even in some cases hedonistic, but they also have more grace to them.”

“As far as we’ve traveled, I still see the best days in front of us,” Becker continued. “We are respectful of the past, we stand on the shoulders of giants (mentors like Michel Rolland or Bill Harlan, pioneers who passed the baton to us like Bob Hartwell and Frank Farella)...but we are focused on the future and what might be possible. I think the meaning is the same but perhaps the scale has changed. I think our vision and ambition is more obvious now to our consumers or to the market. Perhaps Realm’s meaning in the context of Napa Valley has changed. With over 1,000 wine brands in Napa Valley alone, how does any single one stand out? We aren’t a corporation, but we aren’t a family business either. We aren’t big but we aren’t small. We are trying to build something for the long-term, but we’ve only been around a relatively short time. I’d like to think Realm now represents the next generation, the future leadership of Napa Valley. I don’t write that lightly either—there is a sense of responsibility that goes along with that.”

Realm. What calls into question your assumptions about this name and indeed Napa Valley are the wines. What’s inside these bottles is so disarmingly unassuming. These are wines that are recognizably honest to their Napa origins yet are laced with such drama and conflict, beauty and passion, sound and fury. They pull you in and make you question. They outright challenge your preconceptions about where they come from and the people that make them. And, ultimately, after you have been so challenged, summoned and enticed, they welcome you into their Realm.

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