

Trefethen

RETROSPECTIVE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

vintages 1974–2009

1974 – Right Off the Bat, a Classic

Featuring warm spring days and perfect growing conditions throughout the summer and harvest months, 1974 was a celebrated growing season for Cabernet Sauvignon. Now nearly 40 years old, the wine displays lovely dried cherry, rose petal and leather aromas with still-rich, meaty flavors and soft tannins. It's a delightful older wine that's ready to drink now.

1975 – Cool and Flavorful

One of the coolest years of the decade—everything from budbreak and bloom to grape set and harvest was appreciably later than normal—1975 still managed to produce some wonderful Cabernets, including this one. Boasting earthy black cherry and raspberry fruit, with leather, herbal spice and smoky oak tones, the wine is beautifully balanced and a pleasure to drink now.

1976 – Oops!

The first of two consecutive drought years, 1976 brought less than 13 inches of rainfall to Napa Valley, which served to concentrate fruit flavors. Frankly, however, our 1976 Cabernet has seen better days, as it displays musty, tarry and oxidized tones, along with tomato and rhubarb-like fruit. Time to move on!

1977 – No Tout for the Drought (Part 2)

During the second consecutive year of drought, our overhead sprinkling system, ordinarily reserved for frost protection, was used to bring rainfall totals from 13 to 20 inches, relieving vine stress. While this vintage is clearly superior to last year, with ripe cherry and black currant fruit and hints of smoky oak and dried herbs, it shares some of its brethren's musty, barnyard scents.

1978 – Complex and Pleasing

After two years of drought, 1978 was seriously wet, with 50 inches of rainfall. The early growing season was cool, but record-breaking heat in September caused all our varieties to ripen at once. Lighter than its predecessors, the wine offers pleasingly complex black currant, raspberry, black olive, pepper, chocolate and toasty oak tones. Drink now.

1979 – A Charmer

After three years of either drought or flood, 1979 was a blessing. Ideal weather conditions prevailed until September 6th, the start of a ten-day heat wave that caused premature ripening in some varieties. This Cabernet is soft and silky with delightful black cherry and blackberry fruit complemented by intriguing rosemary, caramel, bell pepper and cigar box tones. Enjoy now.

1980 – Pizza Anyone?

A cool growing season followed by a late-summer heat spell led to one of the quickest harvests on record. The late heat may explain why this wine displays aromas of ripe tomato and roasted chilies. With good weight and grip on the palate and notably spicy flavors, one might mistake this wine for a Zinfandel. Varietal identity aside, it's ready to drink now.

1981 – Red and Black

One of the warmest growing seasons ever in Napa Valley, the heat accelerated the vines' growth cycle, resulting in early budbreak and an early harvest. Like the 1980 Cabernet, this wine displays a pronounced spiciness—mainly black pepper, black tea and bay leaf—that nicely complements its full-bodied red fruit flavors. Drink now.

1982 – Not All Wet

Record winter rains and cool, foggy, early summer weather retarded grape maturation and led many growers to thin their crops to ensure ripening. Heavy September rains fostered some rot, but a fine October saved most of the crop. Our 1982 Cabernet is soft with light tannins, but boasts savory black currant flavors, with hints of wet earth, roast beef, soy sauce and coffee. Drink now.

1983 – All Wet

Another wet year kept growers guessing. After an exceptionally wet winter and cool spring, record-breaking heat challenged vintners at harvest. Reflecting the vagaries of the vintage, the wine displays odd menthol, aldehyde and soy aromas, although it shows decent length on the palate. Still, this one began life with two strikes against it.

1984 – A Hot Vintage for Cabernet

A hot growing season that extended throughout harvest was tempered by adequate soil moisture levels, ensuring our Cabernet grapes were harvested in superb condition. A true standout offering ripe cherry and black currant fruit with nutmeg and leather notes, the wine is nicely textured with good acidity and tannin. It's lovely now but can be held another few years.

1985 – Oh So Fresh

1985 was among the finest growing seasons we've had at Trefethen Family Vineyards. A frost-free, warm spring helped the vines bloom and set an even crop under perfect conditions. A long, temperate summer yielded grapes with excellent acidity and bold flavors, boasting vibrant red and black berry fruit, spicy notes and fine tannins. Drink it now to enjoy its still-fresh fruit.

1986 – Do Not 86!

The city of Napa flooded in February, but spring was warm. Temperatures throughout the rest of the growing season were cooler than normal, with no excessively hot days. Harvest gave us good yields and fine fruit that produced a wine boasting ripe blackberry, bay leaf and leather aromas and nice red fruit, cola and white pepper flavors. Drink it now or hold for a couple years.

1987 – Spicy!

Above-normal spring temperatures hastened the growing cycle, and harvest was very early. Yields were below normal, but quality proved excellent. On the spicy and herbaceous side with black cherry, bay leaf and bell pepper tones, the wine has plenty of acidity but the fruit seems to be drying out. It's best consumed in the near term.

1988 – Whither the '88?

Due to erratic weather during bloom, crop size was relatively small, but an early harvest produced excellent fruit with concentrated flavors. With a fragrant nose of ripe raspberries and thin mints (!), slightly candied flavors framed by substantial tannins and a somewhat astringent, attenuated finish, the 1988 may improve with time—or not.

1989 – Mentholated

Rain disrupted the Chardonnay harvest but didn't affect our thicker-skinned Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, which achieved a delicious ripeness after the rains gave way to warm, sunny days. The wine's nose has a pronounced menthol quality, along with notes of red cherry, chocolate and bay leaf. Slightly oxidized, it's best consumed now.

1990 – Starting a Rhubarb

1990 marked the 4th consecutive year of drought in Napa Valley, but late storms in May rescued the vintage. The weather was cool during the growing season, but warmed up in time for harvest. The wine displays pleasing cherry, raspberry, rhubarb pie and toasted vanilla aromas with rich, well-structured flavors. Decant and drink now or hold a few more years.

1991 – Artichoke Tart

The cool summer delayed harvest by nearly a month. Were it not for a fine Indian summer, our winemaking crew might have spent Thanksgiving at the winery crushing grapes! As it is, the cool year and some rain in late October yielded an atypically thin, tart Cabernet that displays some vegetal notes and a touch of oxidation. It is best consumed now.

1992 – Wet Early, Warm Late

1992 marked the official end of six years of drought. Making up for lost time, Mother Nature dumped nearly a year's worth of rain in February alone, but warm days and cool nights during summer created ideal growing conditions. Offering spicy black fruit aromas with nicely textured cherry flavors and balanced tannin and acidity, this Cabernet could stand a few more years' aging.

1993 – Wet Early, Hot Late

A wet first quarter brought over 46 inches of rainfall, and a cool summer delayed grape maturation. Warm temperatures in August accelerated ripening and a hot September brought a hectic harvest. With attractive blackberry jam, mint, green spice and smoked meat aromas the wine's well-balanced, peppery, black fruit flavors are balanced by soft tannins. Drink or hold.

1994 – '94 Gives You So Much More

Late spring storms brought rainfall levels up to normal without adversely affecting the vines. A cool August and mild September ushered in a relaxed harvest of clean, mature grapes with ideal sugar-acid balance. The 1994 offers a nose of ripe raspberry with whiffs of mint, coffee and vanilla and boasts an excellent balance of tannin, oak and acidity. It's drinking nicely now.

1995 – The Proof is on the Palate

Heavy winter and spring rains led to a late flowering of the vines and a hot summer reduced yields, berry sizes and acidity. Due to a late harvest the grapes enjoyed plenty of hang time on the vine, concentrating flavors. The wine delivers more in the mouth than on the nose, with rich raspberry, cola and mint flavors that beg to be enjoyed now.

1996 – Talented, but a Little Crazy

A warm winter, 40 inches of rainfall and an early spring led to an early harvest. A cooling trend in late August slowed ripening, which intensified fruit flavors and yielded grapes with beautifully balanced sugars and acids. The 1996 is a still-developing wine with earthy red-fruit aromas, a nice, full body and rich, complex, spicy flavors. Drink or hold for 2-3 years.

1997 – Lucky 7s

The earliest harvest in the 30-year history of Trefethen Family Vineyards, reflecting near-perfect growing season conditions. A little rain fell at the beginning of harvest, but warm, dry weather followed. The '97 boasts a rich, ripe mouthfeel with raspberry, rhubarb, pepper, chocolate and toasty oak flavors dominating. Drink now or hold for a few more years.

1998 – Blame it on El Niño

The El Niño year of 1998 will long be remembered for its extreme and challenging weather. Endless spring rains and cool temperatures reduced yields and caused poor cluster development. Despite a beautiful, warm fall, many Cabs wound up with some 'off' characters. Ours has earthy, barnyard-y aromas that mar its otherwise pleasing mint, herb and spice tones.

1999 – Smokin' Good

A mild growing season with plentiful morning fog segued into a warm, sunny, late September which allowed our Cabernet grapes to develop rich, beautifully balanced flavors. The wine offers ripe black fruit aromas with smoky, spicy nuances. Its sumptuous, spicy flavors are delicious now with decanting, but the wine's fine structure suggests it will continue aging well.

2000 – Once in a Millennium

A warm spring set the stage for a perfect budbreak and grape set. A relatively cool summer prefaced a leisurely harvest yielding a plentiful, high-quality crop. Cherry cola and ripe blackberry aromas with smoky, bacon-y oak tones and rich black fruit flavors abound with well-integrated tannins. Capable of a bit more aging, it's ready to drink now.

2001 – A Singular Oh! One

An early, warm spring set the stage for remarkably quick flowering and fruit set. Summer was beautiful, with warm days and cool mornings fostering optimal flavor development. This is a real standout, offering jammy black fruit flavors with mint and green spice nuances, sturdy tannins and great density and length on the palate. Decant and drink now or hold.

2002 – Crowd Pleaser

The 2002 growing season was a wild ride of heat spikes followed by cool weather. Grape sugars increased dramatically as harvest neared, but temperatures leveled-off, leaving fruit with well-balanced sugar-acid ratios. Redolent of blackberry pie, with peppercorn, vanilla and smoky oak tones thrown in, the wine is rich and ripe with strong tannins. It's hard to resist now.

2003 – Topsy-Turvy

The topsy-turvy vintage featured a warm winter; cool, wet spring; temperate summer with several late-September heat spikes and classic autumn weather, yielding Cabernet Sauvignon grapes with rich fruit and healthy acidity. Ripe raspberry, cola, bay leaf and vanilla aromas are revealed with pretty red fruit flavors. A few more years' aging will soften its firm tannins.

2004 – Warm, Warm, Good

A warm, dry spring and summer set the stage for an early harvest. Early September brought memorable heat, prefacing a harvest of small berries with intense, concentrated flavors. The 2004 Cabernet displays enticing raspberry and molasses aromas with herbal and vanilla oak tones. Its rich, ripe, cassis and licorice flavors are long on the palate and merit several more years' aging.

2005 – No Jive, Great Cab in '05

A warm, late winter instigated early budbreak, but persistent spring rains set back vine development. Mild summer temperatures resulted in slow, even ripening of the grapes, and a classic Indian summer brought harvest to fruition. Ripe, complex, berry jam, cinnamon spice and smoky oak aromas are offered with dense, spicy, black fruit flavors. Drink or hold.

2006 – One Cool Customer

Among the longest growing season in our history, an unusually cool, wet spring was followed by a mild summer with few heat waves. Cool weather prolonged harvest, increasing hang time and flavors. The wine displays juicy, dark cherry and red berry fruit with seductive cigar box, bramble spice and toasty oak tones. Delicious now, it will age well for several years.

2007 – Lucky 7s, Part Deux

After a relatively dry winter, budbreak and bloom came earlier than usual. The lower soil moisture curtailed foliage growth, so the grapes enjoyed ample sunshine during a beautiful summer. The 2007 is redolent of ripe raspberry and blackberry fruit with sweet oak, cedar and tobacco tones. Its rich, dense, oaky flavors, buttressed by strong tannins, merit further aging.

2008 – Frost Worth the Cost

The growing season began with the worst spring frost damage in decades, but summer was splendid, as was a beautiful autumn that provided a perfect finale to the vintage. A bright, beautifully fragrant nose showcases intriguing thyme, sage and clove spice. The rich, textured, raspberry and black fruit flavors are delicious now, but warrant further aging.

2009 – New Kid on the Block

An excellent, even-keeled vintage in Napa Valley with consistently mild weather throughout the growing and harvest seasons resulted in fruit with finely developed flavors at modest sugar levels. The 2009 offers appealing raspberry, hazelnut and toasted oak aromas, with nicely textured red and black fruit flavors framed by youthful tannins. Hold on, it's just a baby!

