

YEAR'S BEST **BAROLO & BARBARESCO**

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YEAR'S BEST CABERNET SAUVIGNON & BLENDS

Our blind panels tasted 608 US cabernets and Bordeaux-variety blends for this issue. Our critics rated 172 as exceptional (90+) and 52 as Best Buys. Joshua Greene reviews the wines of California's North Coast and Santa Cruz Mountains; Patrick J. Comiskey reviews wines of the Central Coast and the rest of the US. *Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.*

CALIFORNIA NORTH COAST

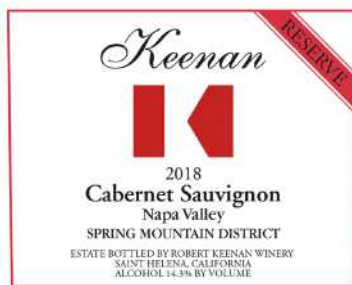
LAKE COUNTY



93 | Obsidian \$75
2019 Red Hills Lake County Half Mile Cabernet Sauvignon Alex Beloz blends his top cellar selection for his club members, incorporating fruit from all three climate zones of the estate. The wine includes petit verdot and petite sirah (8 percent each) grown at the highest point in the vineyards, above the fog line at 2,640 feet—a half mile above sea level. The cabernet selections range from vines at 2,300 feet up to the high point, the blend aged in Hungarian oak barrels (75 percent new). This is a beautiful mountain wine from Lake County, its fruit tart without being sour, its red-currant astringency and fresh plum-skin tannins providing refinement to the structure. Firm and juicy in its stance, light and airy in its delivery, this is well worth a place in your cellar. —J.G. (1,353 cases)

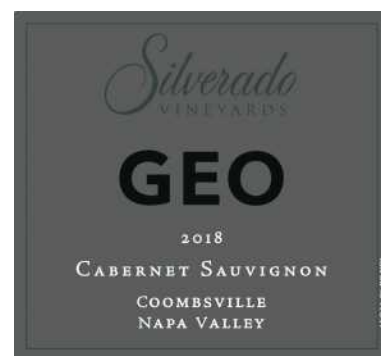
NAPA VALLEY SUB-DISTRICTS

94 | Stags' Leap Winery \$95
2018 Coombsville Napa Valley Having made cabernet at Gruaud Larose in St-Julien and Canoe Ridge in Washington before he came to Stags Leap Winery in 2009, Christophe Paubert developed an affinity with the fruit character of grapes grown in the hills west of Napa city, a cool pocket for cabernet. He launched this wine with the 2012 vintage, and focuses it on fruit from the Garvey Vineyard. That deep red fruit is luscious and round, darkening to bold blackcurrant flavors, sustaining freshness in their savory ripeness. The flavors have a powerful impact while the wine itself feels cool and refined. Decant it for a beautiful complement to lamb shank. —J.G.



93 | Keenan \$119
2018 Spring Mountain District Napa Valley Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon A darkly fruited product of the Mayacamas, this wine has lovely freshness in both its deep well of tart cherry flavor and in its tannins. Those mountain-forest tannins are bold, edged in mineral abrasion, well connected to the vinous core of the wine. Every vintage of this wine since 2011 has earned at least 93 points, an exceptional string of great wines from Michael Keenan's collection of high-elevation estate vineyards and from his team. —J.G. (700 cases)

93 | von Strasser \$90
2018 Diamond Mountain District Napa Valley Sori Bricco Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon At a high elevation on Diamond Mountain, this vineyard still sustains some of the original vines, planted in 1968 and '70. Rudy von Strasser blends this wine using fruit from those old vines, as well as from vines replanted in 2008. His latest release combines fresh notes of roses and plums with dried-fruit scents of black Mission figs and dates. The tannins are powerful, freighted with black-mushroom umami and black-pepper spice, malleable but restricting the wine in its youth. Those tannins will sustain the wine for a decade or longer in the cellar. —J.G. (100 cases)



92 | Silverado \$78
2018 Coombsville Napa Valley GEO Cabernet Sauvignon From the gravelly hillside of this historic estate vineyard at the base of Mt. George, the source of the volcanic soils, GEO is a blend of cabernet sauvignon and merlot, with small amounts of petit verdot, cabernet franc and malbec. The wine has the coolness of Coombsville fruit: a full-on sour-cherry saturation that makes the tannins feel sweet. Brisk and vibrant, it's a wine for beef carpaccio. —J.G. (2,511 cases)



92 | Trefethen \$65
2018 Oak Knoll Cabernet Sauvignon The Trefethen family farms 400 acres of vines on Oak Knoll Road, and at an additional 40

Year's Best Cabernet Sauvignon & Blends

acres focused on Bordeaux varieties at Hill-spring, above the fog line in the Mayacamas Mountains. They emphasize the cool side of Napa Valley in this savory cabernet with herbal details and violet scents. Its muscular tannins build on the wine's youthful strength without adding weight. Rather than viscous, this is elegant and ready to decant for dinner, whether tonight or in two years or ten. —J.G. (65 cases)

91 | von Strasser \$90

2018 Diamond Mountain District Napa Valley Post Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

Rudy von Strasser planted this vineyard in 1992 at the base of Diamond Mountain, where the mix of soils includes volcanic tuff and alluvial gravels. His 2018 shows a deep earthiness under the cool richness of Diamond Mountain fruit, as dark as bitter chocolate. There's a smoky green-chile note in the tannins, a hint of orange zest, the chewy blackness of dates and that dark chocolate richness layering the finish, suited to short-term cellaring. —J.G. (100 cases)

91 | Anthem \$125

2017 Mt. Veeder Napa Valley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon

Scents of conifer forest and blackberries turn toward warm blueberry-skin tannins and dark, bitter-chocolate notes, a smooth yet austere dry cabernet that leaves a clean feel in the finish. The alcohol is substantial, needing braised meats to keep it in check. —J.G. (715 cases)

91 | Grand Napa \$165

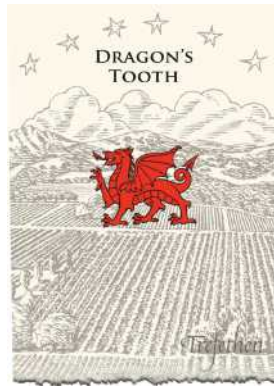
2018 Spring Mountain District Napa Valley Heir Apparent Cabernet Sauvignon

Layered in its plum-skin and black-mushroom savor, this wine is sophisticated and complex. While black fruit saturates the middle, the end touches on sawdust character from the oak, needing time to integrate. —J.G. (142 cases)

91 | Truchard \$40

2018 Napa Valley Carneros Cabernet Sauvignon (BEST BUY)

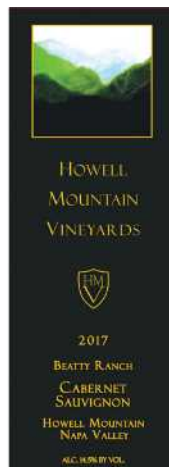
Tart cherry and blackcurrant flavors provide the fruit focus in this wine, framed by oak but not subsumed by it. The tannins are herbal and gentle in tone. For roast lamb. —J.G. (4,300 cases)



90 | Trefethen \$65

2018 Oak Knoll Dragon's Tooth From vines planted in the rockier soils of Trefethen's estate, this is half malbec, along with petit verdot and cabernet sauvignon. It leads with oak scents, but then the pretty side of malbec comes through with strawberry notes. Warm with tobacco scents in the end, this will yield its pleasures in a steakhouse. —J.G. (65 cases)

HOWELL MOUNTAIN



95 | Howell Mountain Vineyards \$150

2017 Howell Mountain Napa Valley Beatty Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon

Bryan Kane had made wines from Beatty Ranch for a decade before joining Howell Mountain Vineyards in 2013. Located at the top of a ridge, the site may be best known for its zinfandel, though Kane makes a strong argument with this 2017 for cabernet grown at high elevations in rocky, volcanic soil. It's a wine about transformation, the volcanic-soil stink and fierce tannins carrying a mysterious refinement that, apparent from the start, becomes increasingly evident as the tannic power turns into racy fruit. Charged with

energy, gentle to the touch, this is a monumental cabernet that will continue to draw you in further with each taste. Savor it over the course of days, or cellar it for a decade. —J.G. (100 cases)

95 | Cakebread \$191

2018 Howell Mountain Napa Valley Dancing Bear Ranch

Stephanie Jacobs makes this wine from Cakebread's estate vineyard that rises up a volcanic ridge above the fog line, topping out at an elevation of 1,900 feet. Her 2018 is the third exceptional showing in a row for Dancing Bear, and the best we've tasted so far, transforming Howell Mountain's volcanic power into textural grace. The tannins in the wine are fascinating, a weave of rocky soil and oak character that expresses the wine's intensity with an energy that continues long after each taste. There are floral notes, coffee-bean elements of oak, and black fruit tones, but they are all minor players in a wine that builds its voluptuous richness from the rocky ground. —J.G. (2,750 cases)

94 | Duckhorn \$100

2016 Howell Mountain Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

We tasted the 2016 and 2017 vintages of this wine side-by-side, not knowing they were related. With an additional year of age, the '16 is beginning to show its elegance, the wine's black-currant richness lending depth and power as if captured at a peak moment of ripeness. The fruit is fragrant and savory, taking on scents of fine cigar tobacco as it blossoms over the course of several days. A pretty wine with the underlying intensity and structure of Howell Mountain cabernet. This should age well for ten years or more. —J.G. (2,153 cases)

93 | Roots Run Deep \$125

2018 Howell Mountain Napa Valley The Graduate Cabernet Sauvignon

This is Macario Montoya's second vintage as winemaker for Roots Run Deep, and the second year that his Graduate has topped out the winery's four "Higher Education" bottlings, all from a high-elevation site on Howell Mountain. This 2018 immediately captures the scent of a conifer forest, focusing in on madrone, building smoky intensity to surround an abundance of red-cherry flavor. Five days later, the wine is brisk and elegant, long on spice and the coolness of a mountain spring. That freshness suggests it will age with grace. —J.G. (50 cases)