

CONNOISSEURS' GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA WINE



Cabernet Sauvignon

THE VAGARIES OF VINTAGE



We are great students of vintage variation, but we are also believers that vintage means less than it once did. Perhaps it is global warming that has expunged the notion of bad vintages or perhaps it is simply the advances in grape growing and wine making that have helped us achieve better and better results. And some of what happens here in California is that we do not have one set of growing conditions but many. Even in places like the Napa Valley, which might seem like an easily defined and more or less similar piece of turf, the vineyards experience quite significant differences in exposure, heat accumulation, elevation, soil depth and rainfall. What these differences mean is that some wineries, especially those who make cropload adjustments and rigorous selections, are almost always going to make wines of very high quality. It is the rare vintage when the percentage of failure among Napa Valley makers runs far above average, but it is also the rare vintage when it runs far less.

The vintages of 2006 and 2007 remind us that, just as 1997 and 1998 were early-on viewed as perfect and imperfect, 2006 and 2007 need to be judged not on barrel tastings or even by the early releases of wines, but by the whole panoply of results. Thus 2006, a vintage that many had seen as less interesting, is now beginning to show improved results with wines that have been kept longer in the wineries. Some writers have been moved to upgrade their overall ratings of the vintage because of these late-released successes. On the whole, we judge wines, not vintages, despite our observations of what each year brings, and, in our view, there were too many 2006s that did not succeed because their inner stuffing was simply not up to the acid-tannin interferences in those wines. That there are now wines coming out with fewer problems does not change the bottom line fact that 2006 has been, at best, a mixed blessing.



The Endeavour Vineyard at Dry Creek Vineyard has yielded a two-star Cabernet Sauvignon in this Issue.

Which brings us to the 2007 Cabernets. Everyone will agree that 2007 was a pretty good growing year with a fairly long ripening season and nothing by way of rain or heat spikes to mess things up. Certainly, the early heroes of the vintage, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, have been spectacular. For a vintage to rate highly it needs to produce lots of brilliant wines AND it needs also to see the lower-priced end of the spectrum succeed. 2007 was such a year for the early-ripening grapes. Whether it will finally also prove to be so for Cabernet Sauvignon is less clear. It will certainly be a very good year and less inconsistent than most years, but there is an underlying edge of greenness in some 2007s, and even if Cabernet can easily handle and integrate a touch of that feature, there is some evidence that 2007 is not quite so perfect as the first reports by the pundits have indicated.

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 **87** **EDUCATED GUESS Napa Valley 2008**

5% Merlot; 5% Cabernet Franc; 1% Petit Verdot. With its blend of cherries, dark berries and a hint of rich loam to its mid-depth aromas, this somewhat rounded and reasonably accessible wine offers slightly quiet but pleasantly focused flavors and never lets its light-medium tannins get in the way of current drinking.

GOOD VALUE



\$20.00