

Robb Report

The 50 Best Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons of the 21st Century

By Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen - December 12, 2024



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Melka 2018 Mêtisse Montbleau Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon St. Helena Napa Valley

Owners Philippe and Cherie [Melka](#) produce four lines of wine including Mêtisse and CJ from Napa Valley, Mekerra from Sonoma, and Majestique from vineyards around the world. Philippe learned winemaking by working at fine wine estates in Bordeaux, Italy, and Napa while Cherie, a self-taught winemaker, studied microbiology. Their 2018 Mêtisse hails from Montbleau Vineyard and has aromas of cherry pipe tobacco, mocha, and black plum with opulent tannins and flavors of red cherry, dark chocolate, cassis, and black raspberry.

With a winemaking history stretching back to 1839, Napa Valley has been heralded as the source of some of the world's best Cabernet Sauvignon since 1976, when Stag's Leap Wine Cellars 1973 Cabernet Sauvignon received the highest rating in a comparative tasting between French and American wines. Napa Valley's reputation has grown exponentially in the intervening 48 years, as have the number of wineries there and the overall quality of the wines.

America's most famous wine producing region is now home to almost 500 wineries, a vast jump from the year it first gained international acclaim, when there were only around 50. The 21st century has been a boon for Napa Valley, with the number of highly rated or exceptional vintages far outpacing poor or even average seasons. Although just about any grape you can think of is grown and made into wine in Napa Valley, more than 50 percent of its vineyards are devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon, making it by far the most important crop and the most popular wine made there.

We have been visiting the valley for more than 25 years and have been writing about wine professionally for almost two decades, and fortunately we are both avid note takers. While we have a stash of old notebooks and tasting booklets from visits over the years, when we began working on our book *Wines of California*, which was released in 2014, we both switched to taking notes on our laptops and phones, leaving a digital record. At that time many wineries opened their cellars for us then, offering us the opportunity to taste not just their current vintage but back vintages as well, which gave us unique insight into the ageability and evolution of some of Napa Valley's finest bottles of Cab. In addition to some of the renowned names that brought recognition and accolades to the region in the last quarter of the 20th century, many of the newer entries have quickly made a name for themselves with the right combination of fruit sourcing and winemaking talent.

The best thing about this list is that almost every single wine on here, even the oldest vintages, should still be drinking well. The second-best thing is that all of the more recent vintages still have years of life left in them and can be opened in a decade or two. We took many elements into consideration when making our choices, and the most important is taste, but how a wine actually "tastes" involves a variety of impressions, including flavor, texture, tannins, acidity, and finish. Many were tasted blind in comparative tastings with similar wines, but some were enjoyed at professional tastings at wineries, at dinner with winemakers, or opened by friends. With that in mind, we have chosen the 50 Greatest Cabernet Sauvignons of the Century so far.