

02.25.2016

## A Look at 2014 Napa Cabernet: Tasting at Premiere Napa Valley



Each year, the [Napa Valley Vintners Association](#) pulls out all the stops to host its annual fundraising event known as [Premiere Napa Valley](#). Not to be confused with its star-studded charity auction in the spring (known as Auction Napa Valley), Premiere Napa Valley is a more focused event. It is a barrel tasting and auction, in which the wines on offer are all unique creations made specifically and only for this event, offering purchasers the opportunity to own an incredibly rare wine that often represents the very pinnacle of the winemaker's efforts in that vintage. All the invited bidders are ostensibly in the wine trade (retailers, distributors, etc.), while other attendees include the media and winery staff. The proceeds from the auction of 225 unique lots of wine go to help fund the Vintners Association itself.

The auction action at Premiere always serves as something of a barometer for California wine, measuring both the strength of the Napa brand in the marketplace, as well as the interest in the upper echelon of fine wine (many auction lots sell for well over \$2000 per bottle).

Last Saturday, the Vintners [raised \\$5 million dollars at the auction](#), which was down from the last couple years of auction totals which were \$6.0 in 2015 and \$5.9 million in 2014. I'm not entirely sure to what we should chalk up the reduction in proceeds, except perhaps a combination of some uncertainty about the economy and having to follow one of the greatest vintages in recent memory.

Each of the 225 auction lots usually represents something approximating the best possible wine that the winery can make in the vintage. Consequently, the wines offer a unique window into the pinnacle of quality for that particular vintage.

Every year, I attend Premiere with the goal of tasting as many of these wines as I can, in an effort to get a bead on the vintage as a whole in Napa.

In the case of last weekend's event, the vintage in question was 2014, which, had it occurred a decade earlier would have been heralded as one of the best vintages in years. Coming on the heels of the spectacular 2013 vintage, it suffers slightly by comparison. The harvest was smaller than 2013, and featured a very hot summer, but, like 2013, Napa avoided inclement weather during harvest, and the quality of fruit brought in by most wineries was superb.



So what does the best of 2014 Napa Cabernet taste like? Juicy and very pretty. The most successful wines have great balance, excellent acidity, and their tannic structures are wonderfully fine and smooth. Some producers seemed to have trouble taming the tannins that might have resulted from the Summer's heat, and a few clearly ended up with over-ripe fruit (to my palate) though whether that was by choice or by neglect there's no way of knowing.

As in 2013, the wines also seemed to continue a trend of better integrated oak. Sure, there are still those that insist on smacking you over the head with a 2x4, but most wines managed to show some restraint (though it must be said that all these wines will spend another 8 months at least in their barrels). I chalk

this up to a combination of the quality of the vintage's fruit, which when well-balanced can handle more oak, and (dare I hope?) some increasing restraint by vintners backing away from their past excesses.

No matter where the truth lies, the 2014 wines are excellent, and to the extent that this sample is truly representative of the vintage, it is one that will make most wine lovers quite happy.

The event also often serves to introduce me to new producers with whom I was previously unfamiliar. This year did not disappoint in this department. There are now several new names to whom I will be paying close attention thanks to the quality of what I tasted last Saturday. In particular, I'm excited to learn more about Vice Versa, Perliiss Estate, Anthem, Galerie, and Kale.

Here are my tasting notes for everything I tasted. The notes in italics after each wine are my brief thoughts made on the spot while tasting. By tasting a bunch of wines on Friday afternoon, as well as during the Saturday main event, I was able to get through 224 of the 226 wines (the missing two wines were poured-out by the time I reached them). Note that anyone interested in getting ahold of the wines below can discover their availability through [Premiere Napa Wines](#), a web site designed to connect successful bidders with consumers who may want to purchase the wines.



#### WINES WITH A SCORE BETWEEN 9.5 AND 10

2014 Acumen "2+2+2+2" Red Wine, Napa Valley  
*Juicy, bright, fine grained tannins, super mouthwateringly yummy.*

2014 Alejandro Bulgheroni Estate "The Debut" Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Bright, juicy, light on its feet. Well integrated oak, sweet cherry fruit. Fresh.*

2014 Barbour "Man Cave Blend" Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Helena  
*Gorgeous, bright, lush, but beautifully balanced. Yummy.*

2014 Continuum Estate Red Wine, Napa Valley  
*Gorgeous, long, supple, phenomenal balance and deliciousness.*

2014 Farella Vineyard "Terrace Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville  
*Gorgeous floral, bright, juicy, lean, awesome.*

2014 Notre Vin "On a Saturday afternoon" Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain  
*Wonderfully floral, bouncy, great balance.*

1990 Schramsberg Vineyards "J. Shram Late Disgorged" Sparkling Wine, Napa Valley  
*Nutty, butterscotch and marzipan. Saline and delicious.*

2014 Vice Versa "Heart & Soul" Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Gorgeous, bright, juicy, fantastic. Black cherry velvety tannins, long rich good acidity and balance.*

#### **WINES WITH A SCORE AROUND 9.5**

2014 Antica Napa Valley - Antinori Family Wine Estate "II Presidente" Cabernet Sauvignon, Atlas Peak  
*Smooth, savory sweet and bright.*

2014 CADE Estate Winery Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain  
*Juicy, bright, fresh, yummy.*

2013 Chappellet Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Rich, black, smoky cherry. Delicious.*

2014 Clos Du Val Wine Co. Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District  
*Brilliant, juicy, bright, fine tannins.*

**2014 Coho "Michael Black's Best Last Vintage" Merlot, Coombsville**  
***Juicy, cherry goodness.***

2014 Corison Winery "Premiere Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Bright, fresh, floral.*

2014 Davies Vineyards "J. Davies Estate- Jamie's Block" Cabernet Sauvignon, Diamond Mountain District  
*Bright, floral, mouthwatering.*

2014 Keever Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, Yountville  
*Bring that pure cherry, smooth, velvety. Gorgeous. Great acid.*

2014 Larkmead Vineyards "A5W" Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Juicy, tight, bright, nice stoniness.*

2014 Matthiasson "Three Sisters" Red Wine, Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley  
*Light bodied, stony, earthy, floral, gorgeous.*

2014 Memento Mori "Inebriari In Vitae " Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Helena  
*Smooth operator. Supple, juicy.*

2014 Mt. Brave Cabernet Sauvignon, Mount Veeder  
*Juicy, tightly wound. Give it some time, and wow.*

2014 PATEL -- Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville  
*Lush bright, juicy, and oh-so-tasty.*

2014 Perliss Estate "The Ravens, Amphora" Cabernet Sauvignon, Calistoga  
*Beautiful, juicy, restrained and powerful at the same time. Aged in terra cotta.*

2014 Pride Mountain Vineyards "Summit Select" Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Fantastically aromatic.*

NV Seavey Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Unusual blend, deep and complex.*

2014 Spottswoode Estate Vineyard & Winery Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley  
*Bright floral, beautiful.*

2014 Spring Mountain Vineyard "Fogline" Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain District  
*Wonderful balance earthy, fine tannins. Long.*

2015 Stony Hill Vineyard Chardonnay, Spring Mountain District  
*Killer, lean, pithy, grapefruit and lemon.*

2014 Tierra Roja Vineyards "Collaboration" Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville  
*Bright juicy cherry, long finish.*

2014 Turnbull Wine Cellars "Leopoldina Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville  
*Rich, with a little oak influence, but delicious.*

2014 Varozza Vineyards "The Virtuoso" Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Helena  
*Gorgeous. Lean, fresh, juicy, fine grained tannins.*