

SCOTTISH FIELD

[HOME](#) [FOOD & DRINK](#) [HOMES & GARDENS](#) [OUTDOORS](#) [TRAVEL](#) [CULTURE](#) [FASHION & BEAUTY](#) [LIVING](#) [COMPETITIONS](#) [SUBSCRIBE!](#)

CALIFORNIA: VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

By Peter Ranscombe - 5th December 2017

A series of recent tastings have reminded Peter Ranscombe about the diversity of wines available from California.

ONE of the most-exciting aspects of visiting California back in March was learning about the wide variety of grapes being grown in the golden state. As I wrote at the time, there's far more to Cali than over-oaked chardonnay and over-ripe cabernet sauvignon.

That conclusion was reiterated for me recently at a series of four tastings, which demonstrated how producers are continuing to show creativity and flair with their wines.

Rosemary Cakebread is a prime example; the winemaker may have made her name by producing beautifully-elegant cabernet sauvignon, but it was her **2016 Gallica Albarino (£38, Sideways Wines; £42.80, Hedonism Wines)** that really caught my attention over dinner at Portland Restaurant in London.

Bursting with apricot and lemon on the nose, it was the citrus fruit that sparkled on the palate, balancing the crisp acidity and giving wines from albarino's traditional homeland in Galicia in North-West Spain a run for their money.

The **2015 Zotovich Vineyards Estate Viognier (£30.60, Four Corners Wine)** from the Sta Rita Hills area within the Santa Ynez region north of Los Angeles struck a similar fine balance between its fruit and its acidity at Four Corners' tasting in 67 Pall Mall.

Lemon sherbet and apricot on the nose led into fresher fruit flavours on the tongue and into a dry finish – more a savoury food companion than a summer's day sipper.

Merlot's reputation may have been mauled by the 2004 film *Sideways*, but there's nothing embarrassing about drinking high-end Cali merlot, like the **Barnett Vineyards Estate Merlot (£65.10, Four Corners Wine)**, which contains an 18% splash of cabernet franc and which manages to walk the line between tasting of chocolate without becoming cloying, or the **2013 O'Shaughnessy Estate Winery Howell Mountain Merlot (£80.10, Four Corners Wine)**, which is a much more savoury beast, with redcurrant and cranberry flavours to balance its well-integrated tannins.

Napa in particular has a reputation for being a mono-culture of cabernet, but nothing could be further from the truth, with everything from pinot noir to sauvignon blanc being grown in the valley.

A great example is the **2015 Trefethen Family Vineyards Dragon's Tooth (£41.95, Vino Wines)** – a play on the winery's Welsh heritage – which is formed from a blend of 47% malbec, 30% petit verdot and 23% cabernet sauvignon.

An unusual form of a Bordeaux blend, for sure, but one with warming and ripe blackcurrant and blackberry fruit; a great fireside wine on its own or an ideal accompaniment to casserole and one of the stars at the Napa Valley Vintners tasting at the Jones Family Project.

From Bordeaux blends to Rhone blends and the **2015 Inglenook Blancaneaux (£55.10, Hedonism Wines)** (or look out for the 2009 from Drinkmonger on offer at £35.95), which consists of 50% viognier, 30% roussanne and 20% marsanne.

Green apple and pear on the nose develop into viognier's tell-tale peach and apricot on the palate, with a tingle of acidity for balance.

Last night's Circle of Wine Writers' Christmas party at the RSA also yielded a diverse set of wines.

Highlights included the **2016 Hagafen Cellars Coombsville Riesling (\$24, Hagafen.com)**, which was crackling with lemon and lime flavours and had a sweet roundness in the mouth to balance the tingle of the acidity.

I was really impressed with many of Truchard's wines, including the 2014 Careros Chardonnay and the 2004 Careros Merlot, but especially the **2015 Truchard Vineyards Careros Syrah (2014 for £27.11, Fine Wine Company)** with its refreshing acidity, rich blackcurrant flavours and lighter redcurrant and raspberry notes.

The winery's **2014 Truchard Careros Cabernet Sauvignon (£27.29, Fine Wine Company)** showed how fresh cabernet can taste from a hillside or mountain site, demonstrating that not all Napa's cabernets taste the same.

Also worth a look is the **2012 Long Meadow Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon (£30, Luvians)**, especially while it's on special offer – always a reliable label.