



Written by

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Smart Americans

Jancis writes Those of us on the team who are based in the UK are all too aware that we have a very incomplete view of what's going on in American vineyards and cellars. I for one rather envy our two team members based in California, Alder Yarrow in San Francisco and Elaine Chukan Brown in Sonoma (see, for example, her Napa Valley Cabernets – depressing?

and Sonoma Cabernet for value), who are able much more easily than us to keep up to date with the West Coast wine scene. I spent some time with Jaime Araujo of Accendo and Trois Noix recently and was bedazzled by all the new Napa wine producer names she came up with.

But we do our best, and I for one am heartened by the fact that – admittedly after a very long absence – we have seen a few high-profile California wine producers in London recently. Raj Parr has been almost as faithful a visitor to London as Paul Draper of Ridge Vineyards, but we have also seen Will Harlan, Pax Mahle and Don Weaver very recently, as well as Bo Barrett and David Ramey last year. Next week Marcus Notaro, the winemaker at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, will be in town and only this morning I received a sample of a new release from Mayacamas. Is all this a sign that at long last the British market is becoming a bit more important to American wine producers? I do hope so.

The 122 tasting notes below complement those that I took at our recent California wine tasting fundraiser for victims of the October wildfires. One major source of them was a tasting of American Cabernets organised by the Institute of Masters of Wine, a follow-on to the one organised in London in 2014 and reported on in *Hand-picked American Cabernets*. The selection included wines from Canada, Washington state, New York, Virginia, Chile and Argentina, as well as the great bulk of them from California. I had time and capacity to taste only a handful from outside California and Washington on this occasion unfortunately; a total of 94 Cabernets chosen by American MWs were shown.

Another major ingredient in the mix was a tasting organised by Thorman Hunt, one of the leading UK importers of tip-top Napa Cabernets from Shafer, Bond, Eisele Vineyard and Harlan, followed up by a tasting of five vintages of Harlan Estate at Hedonism. And then there were various assorted samples I tasted at home. Richard, arguably a more generous scorer than me at the top end, tasted quite a selection of the wines below at various trade tastings, including a vertical of Rosemary Cakebread's highly regarded Gallica Napa Cabernet – further signs that producers of [smarter Americans are taking more notice of the UK market?](#)

I expect to add a few more tasting notes very soon – notably the recently released Mayacamas Chardonnay 2016 and current releases from Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. More words and opinion on Saturday.

Needless to say, the suggested retail prices for some of the Napa Valley wines raised some eyebrows on this side of the Atlantic. Also, the 2014 vintage that predominated in the MWs' California Cabernets was arguably not as impressive and potentially long-lived as, say, the 2013, so perhaps less likely to appeal to European palates. In the less impressive American wines, it is often the apparent sweetness that makes them seem less refreshing and interesting than the better ones.

The 122 tasting notes below are grouped into California whites, California reds and Other Americans (both red and white and the odd South American). Within groups the wines are listed alphabetically by producer but you can change this.

CALIFORNIA REDS

- Gallica Cabernet Sauvignon 2014 Oakville 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc. 19 months in French oak. Oak and fruit seem un-knit at present, with sappy, cedary spices dominating both nose and finish. Smooth tannin, savoury finish, strong bitter olive flavours on the length. (RH)14.5% Drink 2022-2039 17+

Gallica Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 Oakville 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc. 20 months in French oak. Highly tannic, densely fruited and full bodied. Showcases all of Napa's power, but has refreshment on the finish and nothing at all candied about it. Fibrous and starchy and expressive. (RH)14.5% Drink 2020-2040 £188 Hedonism 17.5

- Gallica Cabernet Sauvignon 2012 Oakville 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc. 20 months in French oak. Closed nose with tight, furry tannins on the palate and a dense, compressed fruit core. This seems very much in hibernation mode. Manages to convey density without heaviness. Long, elegant floral notes to finish. (RH)14.5% Drink 2020-2036 17++

- Gallica Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 Napa Valley 96% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Petit Verdot, 1% Cabernet Franc. 19 months in 70% new French oak. Cool vintage (more so than 2010). Lighter and more nimble-footed than the 2010, but with the same delicious herby note as well as cassis and black cherry fruit. Gorgeously tender tannic feel and staunchly savoury finish. (RH)14.1% Drink 2017-2031 17.5

- Gallica Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 Napa Valley 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, 7% Petit Verdot. 19 months in 78% new French oak. Cooler vintage than 2009.

Interesting leafy notes here, which gives greater interest and complexity to the nose than the 2009, yet there is tremendously rich fruit in support too. Finishes with seriously savoury notes. Sophisticated and rich and delicious. (RH)14.4% Drink 2018-2035

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- Gallica Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 Napa Valley 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot, 4% Cabernet Franc. 18 months in 81% new French oak. A late vintage, from spring to harvest. Still gorgeously fruity and succulent on the nose and palate, with svelte texture and great intensity on the finish – but there doesn't seem to be much development of flavour in terms of complexity. Perhaps still just too young? Certainly has incredible persistence. (RH)14.4% Drink 2015-2029 17+