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Wine & Spirits


Cabernet Touchstones

10 California Wines
with Staying Power



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GRENACHE

93 | Habit \$32
2017 Santa Ynez Valley Demetria Vineyard Grenache Noir The bright, transparent red color matches this wine's fresh strawberry flavors. There's nothing complex about it, but it's hard to resist a wine that captures the sun and delivers its energy in the glass, glowing red. It's bright and brash and packed with strawberry energy, if there is such a thing. And then there's the lovely tannic spice. Bring a little summer to your winter just by opening a bottle. (192 cases)

MALBEC



90 | Lava Vine \$45
2015 Napa Valley Malbec This wine has the plumpness of malbec with unusually high acidity for the grape, bringing a pungent pink-grapefruit character to the plush fruit. That spicy, tight acidity will open up with grilled meats or the char on meaty grilled vegetables.

MERLOT

90 | Stewart \$40
2014 Napa Valley Merlot Plush in its ripeness, bouncy in its fruit, this is a soft merlot with silken tannins finely integrated into the dark juiciness of the wine. Pour it with filet mignon. (651 cases)

85 | Fetzer \$10
2016 California Eagle Peak Merlot (Best Buy) Grapy and warm with cherry-jam flavors, this wine's tannic extract adds a bitter note to the finish. Pour it with roast beef.

MOURVEDRE

94 | Terre Rouge \$30
2015 Sierra Foothills Mourvedre It's hard to argue with a chill-able, crunchy red that races with energy and then lasts with the tannic earthiness of crushed rock. This includes mourvedre from two sites, one on sandy loam, another on granite and clay; there's also a little grenache and syrah in the blend. The flavors are high-toned, with

strawberry and cranberry notes and some dried orange zest, making it savory, bright and delicious. (250 cases)

90 | Donkey & Goat \$28
2016 El Dorado Twinkle Mourvedre This starts off on anise-like spice, with notes of dill and leather. It's light and heady, with floral red fruit developing over the course of several days, suggesting this will benefit from a year or two of cellar time. Or, decant it now for pork rillettes. (247 cases)

PETITE SIRAH

91 | Barra \$20
2016 Mendocino County Petite Sirah This wine's quiet power unfurls over time. It's not heavy with extract, rather, the flavors are potent black raspberry shot through with brighter red-berry notes. It's a clean and elegant petite, suited to long aging. Most of this fruit grew at the Bella Collina Vineyard in the hills above Ukiah, with 14 percent from the Barras' home ranch in Redwood Valley; both estate vineyards have been farmed organically since 1955. Charlie and Martha Barra used fruit from their petite sirah vines for the first wine they bottled under their own label, in 1997. (244 cases)

PINOT NOIR

94 | Hirsch \$85
2015 Sonoma Coast West Ridge Pinot Noir The western ridge of David Hirsch's estate bears the brunt of the weather coming in from the Pacific at Fort Ross. That weather helps restrain the ripeness of the fruit while the mix of heritage selections of pinot noir (Mt. Eden, Swan and Pommard) and soils (varied clays, sands, loams and rocks) creates a wine of inherent complexity. The fruit's forest-cherry tone is tight and reduced, the initial scent bringing to mind the pungency of kombucha. The fragrance unfolds with air, revealing mint, mountain roots and red fruit at the underside of ripeness. It's a gentle beauty, youthfully hidden from view, suited to long maturation in the cellar, and enjoyment along the way. (245 cases)

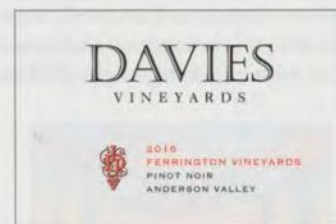
94 | Rochioli \$65
2016 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Tom Rochioli is the third generation of this family to grow grapes on their farm, the vineyards rising up the west bank of the Russian River. He started bottling his own wine in 1985, and later developed a focus on single-parcel pinot noir. His estate blend is a fragrant, red-fruited pinot in 2016, a clean, gracious wine

that seems to greet you with open arms. Oak plays a supporting role to the fruit that drives through the wine, lasting with fresh, floral, wild-berry flavors. Delicious. (2,080 cases)



93 | Beckon \$45
2016 Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard Pinot Noir This is Fetzer's project in the Central Coast, and the second vintage in a row in which Robert Blue turned out an exceptional pinot from Bien Nacido. It's an immediate hit of bright red fruit and stemmy peppercorn spice, then it lasts with quiet persistence, lively and substantial in its blood-orange acidity and roseate tannins. Those tannins have a sandy feel, coastal and fresh. (273 cases)

93 | Byron \$55
2015 Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard Clones 2A and Gamay Pinot Noir The best thing about this wine is the scent, as if you'd stuck your nose in a spring rose. The fruit lives up to that scent, hinting at rose gelée and salty umeboshi plum, along with zesty, nori-scented tannins. It's a little soft and creamy in the end, but the overall impression remains delicate, fragrant and pretty. (132 cases)



92 | Davies Vineyards \$70
2016 Anderson Valley Ferrington Vineyards Pinot Noir This wine's delicate weight belies its firm, sandy tannins and orange-zest acidity, compressing the light strawberry flavors from all sides, building on the plump texture and leaving a perfumed trace of lilacs in the end. An elegant pinot to match roast sea bass with forest mushrooms.

apparent wood tannins. It's focused on cool, zesty grape-skin flavors stated with clarity.

91 | Fess Parker \$39
2016 Sta. Rita Hills Ashley's Chardonnay Round and supple, this wine offers a range of mineral accents, from graphite to powdery sand. It's also intriguingly floral, with a distinct violet perfume wrapped within smoky oak tones. Tight in the end, this is ready to chill for a clambake. (2,140 cases)

90 | Altvs \$40
2015 Napa Valley Chardonnay Nutty, savory and solidly built, this offers crunchy green-apple flavors and the cashew richness of oak from 30 percent new barrels. It's supple and clean, a simple pleasure to serve with fruit and cheese. (240 cases)

90 | Patz & Hall \$65
2016 Carneros Hudson Vineyard Chardonnay With its yellow-apple ripeness, this wine is floral and crisp up front, then honeyed with beeswax notes in the end. Oak aging brings scents of pastry that add a biscuit-like richness and suggest serving it with a chicken pot pie.

90 | Sonoma-Loeb \$25
2016 Sonoma County Chardonnay This wine's floral notes bring to mind viognier while the zesty fruit falls on the chardonnay spectrum of tart apple and brisk grapefruit. That fruit is tight and pithy while alcohol buzzes around it. Clean and bright, this is ready to pour with a thyme-roasted chicken.

89 | True Myth \$18
2016 Edna Valley Paragon Vineyard Chardonnay (Best Buy) A refreshing white with tangy orange flavors and bitter notes of citrus pith, this is clean and simple, with a little of the banana oil scent of yeast—the only detraction from its clarity. Chill it for arctic char in a citrusy yuzu sauce.

CHENIN BLANC

90 | Chappellet \$38
2017 Napa Valley Signature Chenin Blanc A refreshing Napa Valley white, this tastes of quince and green melon, the fruit sweetness clarified by a buzz of acidity in the end. It's firm and juicy, with enough structure and length to serve with pan-roasted brook trout.

88 | Vinum \$13
2016 Clarksburg Chenin Blanc (Best Buy) This has a dusty grape-skin flavor that brings to mind lilies and green pears. It's fat up

front, then lean and clean in the end, ready to take on chicken liver mousse. (3,000 cases)

PINOT GRIS

95 | Donkey & Goat \$28
2017 Anderson Valley Filigreen Farm Ramato Pinot Gris (Best Buy) Delicate red wines with flavor intensity are not something you often find out of California. Here's one that could only be grown in California, and isn't even a red wine, though it has the complexity and flavor length of a great pinot noir. Tracey Brandt works with a biodynamic grower in Booneville for this fruit, bringing it to the winery in Berkeley, where she and her husband, Jared, destem the grapes, leaving them whole, in a concrete vat, covered in carbon dioxide. The weight of the fruit creates free-run juice, and they draw off enough of that juice to fill one barrel each day. After five days, they press the grapes, leaving the wine to ferment and then rest in those used French oak barrels for ten months. In 2017, the wine developed fresh woodland berry flavors, the red fruit underscored by meaty scents of charcuterie. There's also a Campari-like bitterness to the fruit-skin tannins, bringing the spice of dried orange peel and the crunch of a red-skinned apple. Intriguing and vinous, this is a pleasure to drink. (381 cases)

SAUVIGNON BLANC

90 | Habit \$30
2017 Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara McGinley Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc A plump sauvignon blanc with rich passion-fruit ripeness, this is smoky rather than vegetal, with a citrus edge of acidity adding structure. For seared scallops. (585 cases)



90 | St. Supéry \$35
2017 Napa Valley Dollarhide Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc The Dollarhide Ranch in Pope Valley is a large bowl-shaped vineyard in the eastern hills of Napa Valley. The site consistently produces some of Napa's most distinctive sauvignon blanc. This vintage is smoky and tight, with passion-fruit scents and mineral-rich acidity. The alcohol makes it a little warm, suggesting a firm chill and

a pairing with sand dabs pan-roasted with grapes. (3,668 cases)

86 | Line 39 \$11
2017 California Sauvignon Blanc (Best Buy) Ripe pear and guava notes fill this pleasant sauvignon, finishing with a touch of grape-skin bitterness. A simple white to chill for drinking poolside.

WHITE BLENDS

90 | Margerum \$21
2017 Los Olivos District M5 (Best Buy) Doug Margerum blends this from five Rhône varieties he grows at his estate vineyard—mostly grenache blanc (54 percent, lending a pale orange richness), with viognier (giving that lily-like perfume), marsanne, roussanne and vermentino. It's peppery and cool, the grape-skin tannins providing an intriguing structure, the wine tightly built yet juicy and robust enough for a veal stew. (1,400 cases)

CALIFORNIA RED

CABERNET FRANC

91 | Keenan \$70
2015 Spring Mountain District Napa Valley Cabernet Franc From two blocks of cabernet franc at Keenan's Upper Bowl, a vineyard at 2,000 feet elevation on Spring Mountain, this cabernet franc ripened into an elegant cranberry-scented red. A gentle undertone of herbs, like celery leaf, contrasts the supple red fruit, the structure light and austere. This should age gracefully over the next several years. (500 cases)

CHARBONO



91 | Lava Vine \$36
2015 Calistoga Charbono Shypoke Vineyard Black fruited and clean, this needs long exposure to air to begin to open. It develops from spicy cured-beef scents toward juicy blueberry flavors. A day later, it's clean, zesty and lovely. Charbono is one of those old-line Napa varieties that needs vine age and bottle age; when it has both, it can deliver a lot of satisfaction.