


Robert Parker - Napa Valley: Styles and Pricing in Flux

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By Joe Czerwinski

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In my previous Napa report, I discussed the 2022 vintage in depth, so while this report, based on two weeks spent visiting Napa in November 2024, includes reviews of a number of 2022s, it seems redundant to go over that same ground. Suffice it to say that the 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon-based wines from Napa are significantly more variable in quality than the 2021s. The very promising 2023s are just beginning to get bottled and be released, so readers can expect more of those reviews to trickle out over the course of this year.

The wines in this report were almost entirely tasted with the winemakers and/or consultants, during visits to wineries, or through a sample-submission program run with the assistance of Napa Valley Vintners. Members were invited to submit up to three finished wines (current or upcoming releases), which I then tasted and reviewed. Unfortunately, the sheer number of producers now making Napa wines means it isn't practical to visit every location or taste anything close to every wine, even when spending six weeks per year in Napa.

It's an interesting time in the valley. With both tourism and overall wine demand sagging, plus a large crop from 2023 waiting in the wings, there were a few scattered vineyards that weren't even harvested in 2024—good news for overwintering birds. With that perception of surplus in mind, deep-pocketed growers have pulled the trigger on vineyard redevelopment, taking marginal vineyards—largely due to red blotch—out of production temporarily.

In addition to these highly visible upheavals, the buzz on the winemaking side is all about stylistic preference and picking decisions. Some of the really big, in-your-face wines of the mid-2000s haven't necessarily aged all that well. Combine that with trends toward lower alcohol levels and there is probably a wider divergence of Cabernet Sauvignon styles than at any other time in history. It is more important than ever before to read the reviews to determine if a wine will match your stylistic preferences.

I've seen alcohol levels from the mid-13s to touching 16% alcohol this year, but my personal sweet spot usually sits from 14.5% to 15% alcohol—enough to give the wine a sense of sunny ripeness and wholesome richness on the palate without dried-fruit flavors or a feeling of excessive alcoholic warmth. The best wines marry those traits with a sense of weightlessness—one of the seeming paradoxes that mark great wines.

Despite an irregular 2022 vintage and bountiful 2023 and 2024 harvests, Napa Valley producers have been publicly holding their prices steady. In an ego and brand-driven world, any move to lower prices tends to be interpreted as an admission of failure or at least weakness.

That doesn't mean prices aren't softening—just that it will take some work on the part of consumers. Deals are often made available only to a limited number of retailers or for limited time windows. Some websites may only offer them as mystery selections, with a few effusive statements to entice consumers to bite.

If you're willing to take a gamble, you may get a great deal, but it can be a frustrating and confusing marketplace. Some consumers may be best served by simply narrowing down their options to the wines they really want and then tracking them down. Good hunting!

Robert Parker - Search

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Rating:93

Release Price:\$110

Drink Date:2027 - 2040

A selection of the winery's top lots, the 2021 Red Wine X2 is a blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot and 4% Zinfandel. Gorgeous black cherry and cassis aromas lead the way, graciously framed by a hint of vanilla. In the mouth, the wine is medium to full-bodied and smooth in texture, framed by plentiful silky tannins that linger on the long, softly dusty yet fruit-focused finish. Well priced for the quality, this a bottling that wine lovers shouldn't overlook.

Producer:Red Wine X2

Wine regions:California, North Coast, Napa Valley

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Young/Table/Dry



Rating:91+

Release Price:\$90

Drink Date:2027 - 2040

A blend of 63% Cabernet Sauvignon and 37% Syrah, Paradoxx's 2021 Howell Mountain Red Wine delivers waves of cherries and blueberries, plus hints of vanilla and pine needles. Medium to full-bodied, silky but reasonably tannic, this could stand a few years in the cellar or a hunk of rare red meat.

Producer:Howell Mountain Red Wine

Wine regions:California, North Coast, Napa Valley, Howell Mountain

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Young/Table/Dry



Rating:90

Release Price:\$56

Drink Date:2025 - 2035

A blend of 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Zinfandel, 13% Malbec, 10% Merlot, 6% Syrah and 5% Petite Sirah, Paradoxx's 2021 Proprietary Red Wine is the winery's main offering. Marked by scents of cherries and berries, with a hint of vanilla, it's medium to full-bodied and reasonably supple. It's framed by silky tannins—but there are plenty of them, making a burger or steak something of a necessity with this wine, which finishes a bit drying.

Producer:Proprietary Red Wine

Wine regions:California, North Coast, Napa Valley

Color/Maturity/Type/Sweetness:Red/Early/Table/Dry

Sustainability

Robert Parker Wine Advocate has recently included sustainability markers to indicate wines that have been produced with sustainable methods. [Learn more about sustainability](#)