



Life Is A Cabernet

The World Loves A Good "Cab"

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It is a debate of the first order among wine connoisseurs as to what is the best grape, the best wine. Such topics are, of course, up to the personal discretion of the individual. Matters of taste are such a subjective thing. However, it seems that everyone the world over loves a good cabernet.

Cabernet sauvignon is found virtually anywhere wine grapes are grown. Certainly in France, where cabernet is the major grape of Bordeaux, but cabernet is also found all over both Eastern and Western Europe (at least they can agree on something). It is grown in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, New York, and yes, even California.

California hit the big team less than a decade ago, when a Parisian wine merchant, a transplanted Englishman named Stephen Spurrier, conducted a wine tasting of the best in Bordeaux versus the best in California. The results—you may have already guessed—showed California cabernets beating the wines from Bordeaux, and people began taking California seriously as a major world-class wine producing area.

Cabernet sauvignon is grown up and down the state and is a grape that does quite well in the moderate coastal regions. Many local wineries with small vineyards have chosen to plant cabernet while others, with little or no vineyards of their own, buy cabernet grapes from as far away as Mendocino County in the north and Santa Barbara County to the south.

One newly released cabernet worth searching for is the 1982 **P & M Staiger**. The Staigers are up in Boulder Creek, and this is the first cabernet they have sold to the public from their own Estate vineyard. Dark ruby-hued with a bouquet of light earth and varietal fruit, the wine is fresh and clean in the mouth, with abundant flavors, excellent balance and a clean, lingering finish.

Also in Boulder Creek, **Ahlgren Vineyards** is preparing to release its 1981 Napa Valley Cabernet, produced from a vineyard near Oakville. If this wine were to have a fault, it would be that it is medium-light in body. But the aroma, flavors, structure and finish of the wine are so good, to call the body a fault would simply be nitpicking. The wine will be released in a couple of weeks, "as soon as we get the labels," explained Dexter Ahlgren. "They're on the U.P.S. truck now." Such is life when you are a small vintner.

Also due out in a couple of weeks is the new wine from Richard and Paule **Crescini**, who own a small winery in Soquel. The 1981 Crescini Cabernet, also from Napa Valley, is a deep ruby-garnet color and has a marvelous bouquet of cherry, earth, cabernet and just a hint of chocolate. In the mouth, the flavor again carries forth with that same combination. The wine is well-balanced and has moderate tannins in the lingering finish. The final price has not been established, but this wine should be a real bargain.

Bargetto Winery is also in Soquel, of course. The Bargetto family has dedicated their 1981 Napa Cabernet to the memory of the late Lawrence Bargetto, winemaker there for many years. This is an excellent wine, scheduled to be available July 15.

A very nice, easy-to-drink cabernet is being sold by **Bonny Doon Vineyards** under the name Vin Rouge. Federal law requires a varietal wine (a wine bearing the name of a single grape variety, like cabernet sauvignon) to contain at least 75% of that grape. The 1981 Bonny Doon Vin Rouge in fact contains only 67% cabernet and so cannot legally be called cabernet. (The rest of this wine is a blend of 3% merlot and 30% grenache.) Quite frankly, it doesn't matter what the label says, for the wine itself is delicious. The grenache, grown in the Morgan Hill area, adds a "dusty" quality to the Sonoma-grown cabernet that is most appealing. Medium-bodied,

with a complexity reminiscent of the best Rijoas, this wine is very nice now and quite reasonably priced.

Felton-Empire is currently offering a 1980 Santa Cruz Mountain Cabernet. Made from both the Hallcrest vineyard, located at the winery, and the Beauregard vineyard in Bonny Doon, this medium-bodied wine shows the varietal qualities of Santa Cruz cabernet. Good fruit in both the aroma and taste, with a rich yet gentle earthiness and light cedary overtones, this wine can be enjoyed now, but a couple of years in your cellar couldn't hurt.

Another Santa Cruz-grown cabernet is the 1980 Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard wine from the **Bates Ranch Vineyard**, located on the back side of Mount Madonna. As with almost all of owner Ken Burnap's wines, this one is a big, dark, tannin monster of a wine that truly needs time to soften and mature. (**Ahlgren Vineyards** also made a Bates Ranch cabernet from 1980, but as of this date, the wine is not yet available.)

Other locally-grown, Santa Cruz Mountain cabernets are produced by **Ridge Vineyards**, located above Cupertino and currently offering their 1979 cabernet though older vintages are available in many local stores and restaurants; **Kathryn Kennedy Winery** of Saratoga, whose 1981 Estate cabernet is delightful; and **Woodside Vineyards**, who have a very nice 1979 wine from their Estate vineyard.

Many other local wineries make cabernets from grapes grown outside of Santa Cruz County. These would include **Roudon-Smith Vineyards**, **Smothers** and **Devlin Wine Cellars**, all using grapes grown in Sonoma County; **River Run Vintners**, made from San Luis Obispo grapes; **Grover Gulch Winery**, whose vineyard source is Santa Clara County; and **David Bruce**, whose "Vintner's Selection" cabernet is also (usually) from Santa Clara.