

California Cabernet

TO FIND THE BEST, HEAD FOR NAPA

By James Laube



Despite challenges by other red wines, in terms of both quality and value, Napa Cabernet still rules the roost in California.

Pinot Noir and Syrah in particular have made serious inroads in the lands beyond Napa Valley. Quality has risen dramatically and these varietals deliver more mileage for your dollar when you're shopping below the \$100 line. That doesn't rule out all Cabernets, but it cuts out many of the top bottlings.

We're in the midst of two stellar vintages, 2001 and 2002. The 2001 Cabs (rated 93 points in Napa) are ripe and intense, though some top producers missed the mark. In 2002



Karen Culler of Ladera

(my preliminary rating is 91–93 for Napa), the wines are a shade more supple, less opulent and perhaps better balanced. But there are outstanding wines from both years, and that's more important than trying to handicap which of the two vintages is the better.

Napa is always the best place to begin your hunt. But Cabernet producers around the state are making fine wines, often at more reasonable prices. Sonoma especially has its share of stars, and in general is more affordable. There are also goodies to be found in outposts such as Paso Robles and Santa Cruz Mountains. Here are some of my top choices for delicious Cabernet from these two outstanding vintages.

RECOMMENDED WINES

96	\$65	Lewis Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2002
95	\$NA	Shafer Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Hillside Select 2001
93	\$70	Caymus Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2002
93	\$62	Pride Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2002
93	\$70	Whitehall Lane Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2001
92	\$40	Peter Franus Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2001
92	\$65	Ramey Diamond Mountain District 2002
92	\$77	Smith Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley Landslide 2001
91	\$65	Ladera Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lone Canyon Vineyard 2001
91	\$70	Martin Ray Cabernet Sauvignon Diamond Mountain District 2001

91	\$75	Sbragia Family Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain Rancho Del Oso 2001
91	\$NA	Shafer Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2002
91	\$40	Whitehall Lane Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2001
90	\$35	Frank Family Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2001
90	\$36	Ramey Clet Napa Valley 2002
90	\$64	Seavey Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2001
89	\$17	Sebastiani Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County 2001
89	\$35	Truchard Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Carneros 2001
88	\$36	Burgess Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Vintage Selection 2001
88	\$39	Clos du Bois Marlstone Alexander Valley 2001
88	\$30	Honig Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2001
88	\$32	Rutherford Hill Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2001