

Wine Spectator Insider

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THIS week, *Wine Spectator's Insider* takes you on a tour of California, pointing out 38 exciting wines from the Golden State. James Laube covers Napa Valley Cabernets, Sonoma and Napa Chardonnays and Rhône-style reds from across California; Tim Fish chimes in with a few Merlots as well. You'll find outstanding new wines from Napa's Lewis, JC Cellars and Robert Foley in this report, as well as the latest offering from former WineSpectator.com guest blogger and accomplished rock star Maynard James Keenan's Caduceus label, but turn to the Hot Wines, on page 4, for this issue's top-scoring wine, a classic-rated 2007 Amador County Syrah from Favia, the winery's first 95-point wine.

There are also a few rare California red values in this week's *Insider*—five outstanding Rhône-style reds in this issue are priced at \$25 or less.

California

ERIC KENT

Syrah Dry Creek Valley 2007

93 points | \$25 | 118 cases made | Red

Delivers a mix of juicy dark berry fruit flavors, with wild berry, blackberry, black cherry, huckleberry and plum. Deliciously complex, full-bodied, elegant and balanced, ending with supple tannins and a long, smooth finish. Drink now through 2017.—J.L.

FAVIA

Rompecabezas Amador County 2007

93 points | \$65 | 128 cases made | Red

Wonderfully pure, ripe, fleshy and grapey wild berry, black cherry and plummy berry flavors have an enticing spicy, peppery edge. Elegant, full-bodied, complex and layered, this is simply delicious to drink, with a long, persistent finish. Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah. Drink now through 2015.—J.L.

JC CELLARS

Syrah Napa Valley Isabel Stagecoach Vineyard 2007

93 points | \$60 | 149 cases made | Red

Firm and tightly wound, with great structure, focus, depth and concentration, delivering vivid blackberry and wild berry fruit, spice, pepper, nutmeg, black olive and cedar. Full-bodied, ending with a long, lingering finish that turns up a mineral note. Drink now through 2017.—J.L.

MERRYVALE

Chardonnay Napa Valley Silhouette 2007

93 points | \$48 | 412 cases made | White

This impressive wine is intense and firm, tight and full bodied, with rich fig, melon, toasted marshmallow and citrus notes that provide a complex range of flavors and compelling depth. Drink now through 2014.—J.L.

SANS LIEGE

The Prophetess Santa Barbara County NV

93 points | \$36 | 110 cases made | Red

Aromas of ripe blackberry, wild berry, fresh earth, pepper and spice are rich, firm and full-bodied, complex and layered, concentrated and persistent, with ripe, integrated tannins. Syrah and Mourvèdre. Back label says VII/VIII to indicate blend of vintages. Drink now through 2016.—J.L.

SKYLARK

Syrah Sonoma Coast Rodgers Creek Vineyard 2007

93 points | \$35 | 225 cases made | Red

A mouthful of Syrah, big, ripe and complex, with a mix of rich boysenberry, wild berry and blackberry fruit, aromas of black and white pepper, anise and tar all folding together. Full-bodied, intense and tannic, yet graceful for its size. Drink now through 2016.—J.L.

THREE STICKS

Chardonnay Sonoma Valley Durell Vineyard 2007
93 points | \$50 | 212 cases made | White

Firm, ripe and complex, with touches of rich fig, citrus, smoky oak and hazelnut folding together, gaining both depth and nuance. The finish is long and persistent. Still a touch green and grainy. Drink now through 2015.—*J.L.*

ZACA MESA

Syrah Santa Ynez Valley 2006
93 points | \$22 | 12,325 cases made | Red

Offering wonderful floral, grapey plum and wild berry aromas, this is rich, smooth and supple on the palate, with tiers of dark berry, mocha, mineral and spice flavors that glide along. Drink now through 2015.—*J.L.*

BUONCRISTIANI

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley The Core 2006
92 points | \$125 | 274 cases made | Red

Bold, rich and concentrated, with plush black currant, blackberry, herb, dill and sage flavors that are full-bodied and expansive, turning fleshy as this unfolds. Firms up nicely on the finish. Best from 2011 through 2017.—*J.L.*

CARICA

Temptation Kick Ranch Sonoma County 2007
92 points | \$25 | 192 cases made | Red

Intense, rich and layered, with tiers of blackberry, wild berry, plum and boysenberry. Full-bodied, with pleasant earthy notes and touches of creamy, toasty oak. This returns to its rich core of berry flavors, turning fleshy and concentrated. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2016.—*J.L.*

DOMAINE DE LA TERRE ROUGE

Syrah Sierra Foothills Ascent 2007
92 points | \$80 | 200 cases made | Red

Firm and spicy, with a mix of white pepper, sage, mineral and beefy berry fruit that's taut, full-bodied, savory and layered, ending with a long, complex finish. Drink now through 2016.—*J.L.*

ROBERT FOLEY

Claret Napa Valley 2007
92 points | \$110 | 1,000 cases made | Red

Offers a wonderful sense of harmony, balance and finesse. Ripe and rich without being heavy, this is marked by complex currant, black cherry, anise, spice and sage, gaining depth and complexity on the long, lingering finish. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

JAFFURS

Syrah Santa Barbara County 2008
92 points | \$25 | 1,166 cases made | Red

Offers an amazing mix of ripe, pure blackberry, wild berry and huckleberry fruit that's fresh, rich, vibrant, full-bodied and complex, keeping a tight focus on the youthful fruit vitality and ending with a long, persistent finish. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

LANDMARK

Chardonnay Sonoma County Damaris Reserve 2007
92 points | \$40 | 2,000 cases made | White

Rich, unctuous and full-bodied, with tiers of ripe apricot, melon, fig and citrus flavors that are intense without being heavy, ending with a dash of smoky oak. Drink now through 2016.—*J.L.*

LEWIS

Merlot Napa Valley 2007
92 points | \$75 | 200 cases made | Red

Powerful yet silky and focused, with blackberry and toasty mocha aromas and plush, layered flavors of blackberry, mineral and spice that take on tannins at the finish. Drink now through 2014.—*T.F.*

NEYERS

Syrah Napa Valley Hudson Vineyards 2008
92 points | \$48 | 110 cases made | Red

Firm and mineral, with loamy earth, spice, dried berry, black licorice, dill and sage notes, all adding attractive elements of complexity. Full-bodied, deep and structured, this ends with a long, lingering finish. Decant for now. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

NOVY

Syrah Russian River Valley Parsons' Vineyard 2007
92 points | \$29 | 140 cases made | Red

Rich and intense, with a pure core of ripe blackberry, wild berry and blueberry fruit that's complex, structured, concentrated and full-bodied, ending with a touch of road tar and firm tannins. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

PAX

Syrah Russian River Valley Walker Vine Hill Vineyard 2007
92 points | \$55 | 450 cases made | Red

Deliciously rich and layered, pure and focused, with complex spice, wild berry, blackberry, huckleberry and blueberry flavors that are firm and full-bodied, gaining a pleasant earthy flavor on the finish. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

PLUMPJACK

Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville McWilliams Oakville Vineyard 2007
92 points | \$78 | 5409 cases made | Red

Rich, full-bodied and creamy-textured, with dried currant, spice, mineral and leather scents, unfolding to reveal spice, plum and wild berry notes and ending with drying tannins. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

PRIDE

Syrah Sonoma County 2007
92 points | \$60 | 936 cases made | Red

Firm, rich and intense, with loamy earth, dried berry, plum, anise and mineral flavors that are taut, full-bodied, complex and concentrated, framed by structured tannins. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

SAMSARA

Syrah Sta. Rita Hills Ampelos Vineyard 2007
92 points | \$36 | 132 cases made | Red

Rich, intense and concentrated, with flavors structured around firm, beefy, peppery wild berry, blackberry, mineral and sage. Bold, full-bodied and slow to unfold, this shows a wonderful core of dense fruit. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

SAMSARA

Syrah Sta. Rita Hills Melville Vineyard 2007
92 points | \$40 | 107 cases made | Red

Rich and complex, with savory herb, beef, spice and dried berry flavors that are intense, full-bodied, deep and concentrated, with a long, persistent finish weaving the flavors together. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

SANS LIEGE

The Offering Santa Barbara County 2007
92 points | \$24 | 424 cases made | Red

Aromas of spicy berries, fresh earth, cedar and herb are complex and full-bodied, with touches of anise, pencil shavings and mineral, returning to the elegant fruit themes on the finish. Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Viognier. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

TABLAS CREEK

Grenache Paso Robles 2007
92 points | \$35 | 750 cases made | Red

Offers a wonderful purity of flavors built around ripe blueberry, wild berry and boysenberry fruit, with tight-knit mineral and earth notes that turn grainy and give the berry flavors traction. Drink now through 2016.—*J.L.*

WIND GAP

Syrah Sonoma Coast Griffins Lair 2007
92 points | \$48 | 300 cases made | Red

Complex blackberry, wild berry, cedar, spice and chicory flavors are full-bodied and focused, with a mineral edge turning to tar and ending with chewy, gripping tannins that turn cedary as well. Drink now through 2016.—*J.L.*

BLACKBIRD

Arise Napa Valley 2007
91 points | \$50 | 772 cases made | Red

Concentrated black currant and espresso aromas open to sleek yet complex blackberry, cedar and sage flavors that slowly build power and tannins on the finish. Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. Drink now through 2014.—*T.F.*

CADUCEUS

Primer Paso California 2007
91 points | \$40 | 450 cases made | Red

Firm and spicy, with a complex, delicate mix of mineral, dried berry, currant and sage flavors that are full-bodied and evenly presented, gaining complexity and subtlety on the finish. Syrah and Malvasia Bianca. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

DANA

Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford Helms Vineyard 2006
91 points | \$275 | 235 cases made | Red

Rich berry, kirsch liqueur and black currant aromas fold over to the palate in this Cabernet, providing a deep display of ripe fruit framed by firm tannins that give this structure. Drink now through 2018.—*J.L.*

FREESTONE

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2007
91 points | \$75 | 1,300 cases made | White

Sleek and spicy, with a mix of tangerine, citrus and orange zest that's intense, vibrant, complex and earthy. Full-bodied, offering floral scents and a hint of mineral. Drink now through 2016.—*J.L.*

JAFFURS

Syrah Sta. Rita Hills Ampelos Vineyard 2007
91 points | \$46 | 144 cases made | Red

A rich yet subtle style that balances ripe, intense blackberry, spice, fresh earth and savory herb flavors with a sense of restraint. Full-bodied, structured and layered, ending with detailed flavors. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

LEWIS

Chardonnay Napa Valley 2008
91 points | \$45 | 1,000 cases made | White

Rich and layered, offering complex, full-bodied pear, fig and melon flavors, with smoky, toasty notes that take on a subtle roasted marshmallow hint. Elegant and stylish, this is a shade less rich and opulent than prior vintages. Drink now through 2013.—*J.L.*

LEWIS

Chardonnay Russian River Valley Sonoma 2008
91 points | \$45 | 1,000 cases made | White

Smooth and rich, with creamy fig, melon, apple and spice flavors that are full-bodied and layered, ending with a mix of anise and toasty, buttery oak. Drink now through 2015.—*J.L.*

PAX

Syrah North Coast Cuvée Christine 2007
91 points | \$57 | 925 cases made | Red

Firm and structured, with full-bodied flavors built around dried berry, mineral, spice and cedar, gaining depth and traction on the finish, where the minerality is complex. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

SAMSARA

Syrah Mendocino County Alder Springs Vineyard 2006
91 points | \$40 | 96 cases made | Red

Tightly wound, firm and spicy, with a focused beam of spice, pepper and beefy berry flavors that are full-bodied, complex and well-structured, ending with great minerality. Drink now through 2017.—*J.L.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

FAVIA

Syrah Amador County Quarzo 2007
95 points | \$65 | 220 cases made | Red

Immense and expressive, offering broad, expansive layers of wild berry and blackberry, fresh, loamy earth, pepper, spice and nutmeg, with a rich mouthfeel that lets the berry fruit fan out and gain nuance and complexity. Drink now through 2017. *From California.—J.L.*

TABLAS CREEK

Esprit de Beaucastel Paso Robles 2007
94 points | \$50 | 4200 cases made | Red

Rich, dry and full-bodied, with loamy earth, dried berry, mineral, anise and black licorice flavors that run deep and persistent, layered and concentrated, ending with a long, tight finish. Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah and Counoise. Drink now through 2017. *From California.—J.L.*

LEWIS

Cuvee L Napa Valley 2006
93 points | \$225 | 225 cases made | Red

Smooth, rich and creamy, with mocha-laced plum and black cherry fruit that's elegant, stylish, full-bodied and complex, ending with a long, firm, concentrated finish. Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Drink now through 2018. *From California.—J.L.*

RODNEY STRONG

Chardonnay Russian River Valley Reserve 2007
93 points | \$40 | 2,465 cases made | White

Floral honeysuckle, ripe fig and melon scents are rich, full-bodied, elegant and refined, showing a light touch of toasty vanilla oak on the finish, where the flavors turn subtle and delicate. Drink now through 2015. *From California.—J.L.*

WINE SPECTATOR'S TASTERS

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Wine Spectator's tasting staff includes 14 people in three offices. They work together to review more than 18,000 wines each year, more than any other publication. Together, our seven senior tasters count more than 140 years of tasting experience.

We always taste wine blind in our offices in Napa, New York and Tuscany. This is your guarantee that our reviews are fair and objective, and that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed. We score wines using the 100-point scale, explained below.

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Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended