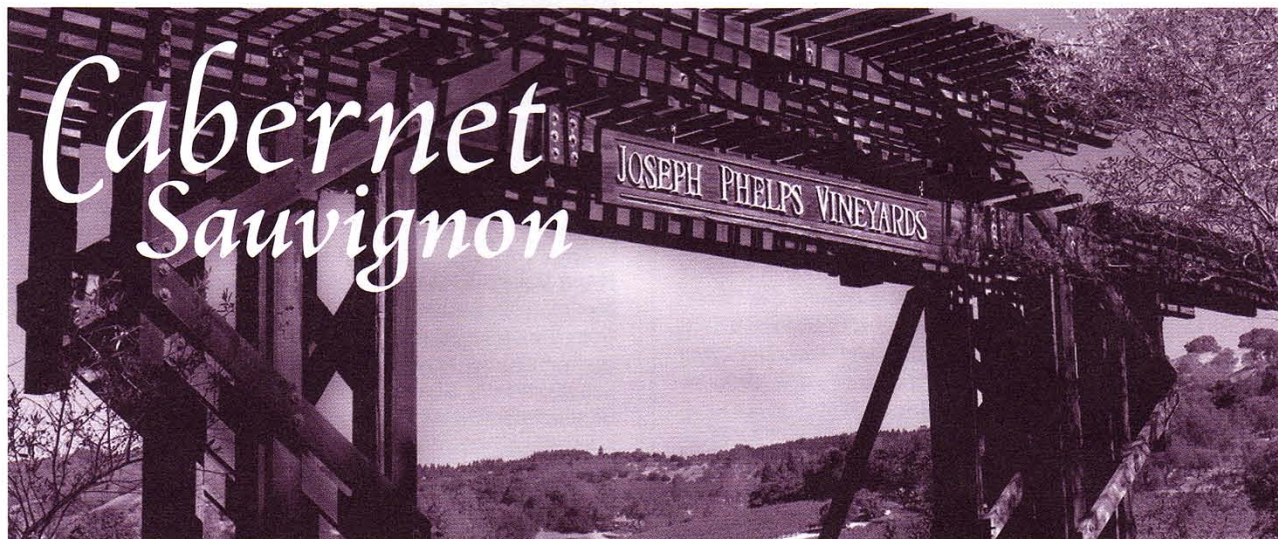


CONNOISSEURS' GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA WINE



The 97-point Joseph Phelps Insignia 2005 is our Wine Of The Year.

What is it about recent vintages that end in 5s? We cannot say that our memory goes back to 1965 and earlier except for tastings of the few wines still standing from those vintages. But, beginning in 1975, which is solidly in the modern era for California wine, each of the "5" vintages has been something of an enigma. In the 1970s, we entered a new phase in the production of Cabernet Sauvignon. No longer were the wines consigned to big old tanks made of aged redwood or cement but the wines were now being aged in newer oak barrels and were being bottled before the life had been half squeezed out of them. To be sure, new producers in the late 1960s like Heitz, Ridge, Spring Mountain and others had already started the trend, but just look at the early 1970s when Montelena, Caymus, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and dozens of others began to take center stage away from Inglenook and Krug, Martini and Beringer.

By 1975, the thinking of the industry had completely changed, and it became clear that California Cabernets were rapidly becoming collectibles, not just to a few aficionados here on the West Coast, but much more broadly. We had seen the change in dominant style in just a few short years, and by the back-to-back successful vintages of 1973 and 1974, the fans of California Cabernet were beginning to look towards the similarly constituted wines of Bordeaux for comparison and inspiration. Into that exciting time came 1975, a long and cool year whose wines were a little lower in alcohol and a little higher in acidity. The best of them, Sterling, Heitz Martha's Vineyard, Caymus were sturdy wines that made up in structure what they lacked in bombast.




In the mid-1980s, the trio from 1984 to 1986 was hailed as the best yet. It turned out that each of those years had flaws, and it was the '85s that again were

the lightest and tightest of the bunch. Once again, folks started thinking of Bordeaux. And so it went in the 1990s with 1994 being a wonderfully fruity year whose wines are just now maturing yet promise to hold for another decade and with 1995 being a lighter but much more tightly structured vintage. In each of those "5s", the potential of the wines made was hailed, if not as broadly as the preceding year, then at least more than a little bit. And now we come to 2005. In comparison to 2004, it was a long, cool harvest, with many wines not getting ripe enough, and with grapes like Zinfandel being underripe at times. Yet, as we taste through the 2005 Cabernets, we are finding more to like in this longer and tighter year than in the much heralded 2004s. It may not be a classically ripe California vintage, but balance and depth are carrying the day, and the 2005 Cabernets look to be some of the best yet.




There are divergent styles cropping up among to the complaints about oversized, overoaked, individuality. And yes, it is true that very ripe and that oak tastes like oak. Indeed, those rules from Burgundy where Chardonnay, although often higher in well. In this Issue, the highly recommended wines run from the fleshy to the bold Pahlmeyer that is an amalgam of winemaker style and cold area grapes to the bright, zesty Patz & Halls that go nowhere near the end of the spectrum that seems to offend some tasters.

CHARDONNAY




California Chardonnays—mostly as a reaction overripe wines that are accused of lacking Chardonnay tastes like very ripe Chardonnay have applied forever, and they were learned from its California counterparts, can get ripe and oaky as Pessagno that is an honest reflection of the Santa Lucia Highlands to the bright, zesty Patz & Halls that go nowhere near the end of the spectrum that seems to offend some tasters.

to the evident matchsticky smells in the nose, and the wine fares no better on the palate where chemical harshness and a streak nagging bitterness come into play. Do not bet on age as a fix to its too noticeable problems.    **\$22.00**




84 NAPA CELLARS Napa Valley 2007

On the one hand a touch sweet and smacking of sweet butter, but, on the other, inherently lean and green with regards to its essential fruit, this uneven wine is driven off course by obvious matchsticky notes in the nose and a finish that is bothered by a bit of chemical heat.    **\$24.00**




89 NEYERS Napa Valley 2007

A little more temperate than either of its siblings in terms of oak and winemaking extras, this ripe and relatively full-bodied wine keys on ripe apples and pears with its adjunct elements of toast and sweet spices held in abeyance. Fat and close to oily in feel, it finishes with a slight rise in heat, and it argues for drinking in the immediate term.    **\$29.00**




88 NEYERS El Novillero Vineyard Carneros District 2007

Long on oak spice with elements of toasted coconut and crème caramel running its length, this rich, slightly oily, golden-hued wine is a tad dry and developed given its age. It does, however, come with firm edge of finishing acid, and, while ready to drink now, it is far from flattening out.    **\$42.00**

85 NEYERS Carneros District 2007




There is no missing the liberal use of oak here, and the wine is directed by winemaking more than it is by clearly defined fruit, but it comes across as being both ripe and a little bit empty at one and the same time. Slightly soft upon entry then a touch stiff at the finish, it could do with another six months in bottle before being poured.    **\$29.00**

86 OLD CREEK RANCH Sanford Benedict Vineyard 2007

Sta. Rita Hills. A bit of oak and scattered suggestions of toast provide a lift in richness to this ripe, glycerin-fattened, medium-full-bodied wine, and, if never complex or wildly fruity, it shows a streak of sweet apples from front to back and counts good balance among its achievements.    **\$22.00**




PATZ & HALL

91 PATZ & HALL Alder Springs Vineyard 2006




Mendocino County. Charged with lots of well-ripened fruit and filled out with plenty of rich oak and accents of sweet toast, this full-scaled look at Chardonnay is long on volume and depth yet is balanced by spry acidity and is at the same time both rich and fairly light on its feet. Quite long at the finish with enough snap to succeed famously with the likes of lobster in sauce, it is thoroughly enjoyable now but is structured for a few years of guaranteed keeping.    **\$60.00**

91 PATZ & HALL Zio Tony Ranch 2006




Russian River Valley. This deep, fruit-laden Chardonnay is the most refined of the Patz & Hall bunch and comes with a note-

worthy sense of palatal polish that wins it an enthusiastic vote of thumbs up. Very well-filled, but neither flashy nor prone to excess, it is optimally ripened, deftly oaked and simply brimming with appley fruit. Like its mate from the Alder Springs Vineyard, it shows a slight spring in its step, and it promises to make very fine drinking with dishes ranging from richer shellfish dishes to grilled salmon.    **\$60.00**




84 PATZ & HALL Hudson Vineyard Carneros 2006

If showing the same fine sense of balance as well as the deep, slightly juicy fruit that marks both of its mates, this bottling is distressed by an evident acrid, matchsticky note in the nose and fights with both bitterness and heat at the finish. It was tasted twice with identical results.    **\$60.00**




92 PESSAGNO Intrinity Santa Lucia Highlands 2006

More often than not, Chardonnays from this appellation come with an extra measure of body and weight, and this very ripe, very deep working confirms the point. Dense and dramatic with a distinct streak of honey and roasted grain in the nose, it is fat and very full in the mouth with unctuous flavors that abound in ripe apples, sweet cream and buttered toast. Its keenly placed acids keep it in good balance, and its decidedly dramatic style calls for very rich food.    **\$45.00**




89 PESSAGNO Sleepy Hollow Vineyard 2006

Santa Lucia Highlands. Showing clear kinship with its partner above, this bottling is rife with toast and is as flamboyant as it is very full-bodied. If not quite so fruity, it is equally rich, and its combination of ripe apples, honey and sweet butter is colored by the very faintest touch of dried herbs. It needs teaming with appropriately flavorful foods, and, while not likely to fall apart soon, it is ready to go now.    **\$32.00**




86 ROBERT MONDAVI Napa Valley 2006

Light to medium in volume and heading off in the direction of green apples as much as ripe, this bottling starts off with a nice touch of roundness at entry to the palate, but its flavors run into stiffening acids all too soon, and the wine ends with citrus pith edginess invading its moderate fruit.    **\$20.00**




85 ROCKLEDGE The Emerald Pool Alder Springs Vyd 2006

Mendocino County. Despite coming from one of the leading Chardonnay vineyards, this wine is both ripe and somewhat low in fruit making for a somewhat awkward impression. Its leanings toward the floral, perfumed end of the varietal spectrum are not much in its favor either. And while it is clean and drinkable, it is far from the expected norm.    **\$50.00**

86 RODNEY STRONG Sonoma County 2007

Redolent of fresh pears and juicy green apples in scent and very much of similar mind in the mouth, this crisply balanced middle-weight effort is an uncomplicated and fairly likeable wine that is wholly concerned with straightforward fruit. It is priced right for everyday drinking, and it is as ready to enjoy today. **GOOD VALUE**    **\$15.00**

95 PAHLMAYER Sonoma Coast 2006

As big, bold and beautifully oaked as Chardonnay is bound to get, this latest offering from Pahlmeyer never once loses sight of incisive, impressively extracted, ripe-apple fruit, and, although a dense and very full-bodied wine, it is uncannily well-balanced. Its scant last-minute heat strikes us as being a small price to pay for such remarkable richness and range, and, as the cream will invariably rise to the top, it too rises to the head of this year's Chardonnay class.    **\$70.00**

PAHLMAYER