

Wine & Spirits

SPECIAL ISSUE

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BUYING GUIDE

100

Best Wines
Best Buys

Top 100 Wineries of 2015



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Four of our Top 100:
Cobb, Niepoort,
Penfolds and Bollinger

Big Table Farm

Former Californians Brian Marcy and Clare Carver settled in Gaston, Oregon, where they produce a select group of vineyard-designated wines. At their best, they're among the most generous of Oregon wines, as if inhabited by a luminous core of California sunshine.

Down on the Farm: Big Table Farm includes beehives, pigs, chickens, draft horses, a small herd of Irish Dexter cattle, two hounds named Clementine and Levi, and a somewhat amorous female goat named Goatio. The biggest addition to the 70-acre farm has been a spectacular, energy efficient post-and-beam structure at the center of the property, a literal and symbolic hub for all of these ancillary efforts. (An estate vineyard planting on the farm is imminent; they've picked out a south-facing hillside that will one day be planted to about 15 acres.)

Their New Vineyard Designates: Before moving to Oregon, Marcy made wine at Marcassin, Turley, Neyers and Blankiet. At Big Table, however, he's adopted a much more delicate hand, in part to tease out the subtler expression of two vineyard sources, Pelos Sandberg in the Eola-Amity Hills, and Wirtz, a 40-year-old 12-acre vineyard west of Portland, from which Big Table has secured a long-term lease. The Pelos Sandberg pinot, from younger vines not far from Amity, is a wine of unrestrained purity, structured, but with an appealing red core of fruit. The Wirtz, meanwhile, is quirkiest, the plant material (said to have originated from Oregon pioneer Charles Coury) a genuine mystery. The wine is vinous and foresty, with a mulch-like earthen note that suggests old-vine depths of flavor.

A Penchant for Whites: Among Big Table's top-scoring wines this year was their Willamette Valley Chardonnay, blended from four vineyards. A cool autumn allowed for extra flavor maturity in the fruit here, but it is the Wirtz contribution, says Marcy, from an old Davis clone, that gives the wine its structural spine and mineral edge. It was made simply, with little intervention, and is practically irresistible in 2013. —P.J.C.



Brian Marcy

Winemaker/viticulturist:

Brian Marcy

Owners: Brian Marcy & Clare Carver

Founded: 2006

Acres owned: 12 (long-term lease)

Cases produced: 3,500

Estate grown: 25%

Location: Gaston, OR

Website: bigtablefarm.com

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 94 '13 Willamette Valley Chardonnay \$45 (10/15)
- 94 '13 Eola-Amity Hills Pelos Sandberg Vineyard Pinot Noir \$48 (10/15)
- 92 '12 Willamette Valley Wirtz Vineyard Pinot Noir \$48 (4/15)

Calluna

Austere, restrained, tense and backward are not words you'd normally use to describe merlot and cabernet grown in California. Yet those are the kinds of wines that David Jeffrey makes off his estate in Sonoma's Chalk Hill appellation, where a cool climate for Bordeaux varieties translates into trim, mineral-inflected reds.

Savory Intent: Jeffrey began collecting Bordeaux in the mid-1980s, when he worked in Seagram's finance division. As he explored California cabernet, he gravitated toward the more savory renditions, like Ridge Monte Bello, Mayacamas, Mount Eden and Dominus. He sums up his perspective by quoting Dominus proprietor Christian Moueix: "I fear excess in wine."

A Cool Estate: When Jeffrey's wife became president of a company based in Fresno, California, he decided to turn his wine obsession into a profession. He entered the viticulture and enology program at Fresno State, then spent three months working for Alain Raynaud at Château Quinault L'Enclos in St-Emilion. Back in California, armed with investment funds from friends and family, he began his search for land. He wanted a cool climate, and he wanted a hillside vineyard. The property he found in Chalk Hill tops out at 650 feet, rising above the Russian River Valley to the west, with thin topsoil over sandstone and shale. It's a cool site, exposed to the same maritime influence that makes the valley below prime pinot noir country. Most of the estate—12 acres—was planted in 2005, with significant blocks of petite verdot, malbec and franc rounding out the cabernet and merlot.

Proof of Concept: Despite their youth, Jeffrey's vines are already growing compelling wines. The Colonel's Vineyard Cabernet, from a southwest-sloping block that he considers among his best, is stunning in 2011, with refreshing scents of violets and turned earth, its coiled structure suited to age. His Calluna Vineyards Cuvée makes use of all five varieties grown on the estate. Led by merlot, the 2012 is perhaps his best wine yet, the fruit deep and layered, supremely fresh, also ready for a long stay in a cool cellar. —L.S.



David Jeffrey

Winemaker/viticulturist:

David Jeffrey

Owners: David & Marla Jeffrey

Founded: 2004

Acres owned: 17 planted

Cases produced: 2,800

Estate grown: 100%

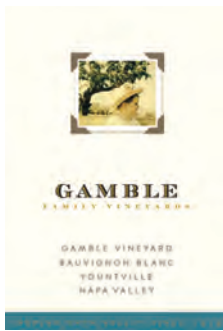
Location: Windsor, CA

Website: callunavineyards.com

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 95 '12 Chalk Hill Calluna Vineyards Cuvée \$33 (8/15)
- 94 '11 Chalk Hill The Colonel's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon \$60 (12/14)
- 92 '12 Chalk Hill The Colonel's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon \$70 (10/15)

BEST SAUVIGNON BLANC



93 | Gamble Family Vyds. \$25
2013 Yountville Napa Valley Gamble Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc It's rare for sauvignon to be as clean and refreshing as this wine while still feeling rich. The flavors explode with scents of lime and bright notes of tangerine, fattening up in the middle before lasting on a long, tangy line of citrus. It has the nettle-like grip to take on sashimi, from white salmon to Spanish mackerel. *Gamble Family Vineyards, Oakville, CA*

BEST CABERNET BLENDS

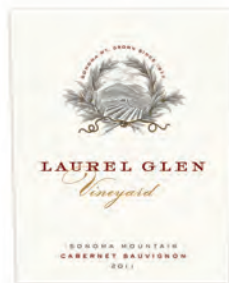
96 | Ridge \$165
2011 Santa Cruz Mountains Monte Bello Vineyard The cool 2011 season turned out a pristine vintage of Monte Bello, made from cabernet (88 percent) grown on a limestone-inflected ridge high above Silicon Valley, blended with some merlot and cabernet franc. The team at Ridge let the fruit recover for two weeks following an early October storm before picking, and were more aggressive in their extraction than normal, drawing as much color and structure as possible from the delicate fruit. The aromas revolve around oak at first—anise, wood smoke, cedar bark and cinnamon—but the wood's contribution is fine and integrated, shading gradually toward bright fruit as the finish lengthens with floral aromas and the tang of tiny, concentrated black currants. It's even better with a day of air, as the tannins turn to velvet, allowing red-fruited acidity to take the lead and brighten the wine's savory, pungent *sous bois* tones of wet wood and forest mushrooms. Supremely elegant and polished, it's a wine to put away and forget about for the next ten years or so. Its transparency will suit game birds as much as beef. (4,000 cases) *Ridge Vineyards, Cupertino, CA*

95 | Calluna \$33
2012 Chalk Hill Calluna Vineyards Cuvée David Jeffrey's estate, in the hills east of the Russian River Valley, tends to give a cool, taut

expression of the Bordelaise grapes, thanks to maritime influence and the vineyard's sandstone and shale-based soils. This merlot-based blend includes cabernet sauvignon, franc, petit verdot and malbec; in 2012, the wine's flavors are vigorous and cohesive, with hints of black plum and mint, though the overall impression is primarily mineral, the refreshing glints of fruit completely tied to the structure. It evolves slowly over several days of air, barely loosening, suggesting that it will reward a long stay in the cellar. (1,779 cases) *Calluna Vineyards, Windsor, CA*

95 | DeLille Cellars \$44
2011 Columbia Valley D2 DeLille's 'second' wine bests a lot of other wineries' firsts this vintage. This blend includes merlot (56 percent) and cabernet sauvignon (36 percent) with franc and petit verdot. It takes on a savory, cedary accent from oak, enough to leave an impression without intruding on the sleek cherry-scented fruit. The vibrant red-fruit flavors are tethered to a suave texture with the kind of natural elegance that brings to mind a Right Bank Bordeaux in a generous vintage. For a well-aged steak. (3,300 cases) *DeLille Cellars, Woodinville, WA*

BEST CABERNET SAUVIGNON



95 | Laurel Glen \$65
2011 Sonoma Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon Rainy and unseasonably cold, the 2011 vintage wasn't a year for beginners, but for better or worse it was Bettina Sichel's first vintage at Laurel Glen, after she purchased the property from Patrick Campbell. In March of that year she brought in Phil Coturri to manage the vineyard, which he began cultivating organically while dialing back the irrigation. The vineyard, perched on a saddle of volcanic soil above the fog line yet sheltered from the coastal wind, did manage to fully ripen, just later than normal. The final grapes were harvested on November 1. Sonoma Mountain is one of California's cooler areas for cabernet, so you might be surprised at how expansive this wine feels. Made by Randall Watkins, with input from David Ramey, this

is tight with mineral tannins and flashes of minty black-currant tang. With a day of air, the tannins turn more supple and the flood-gates open into a clean line of cassis flavor that's driven by fresh acidity, energizing a wine with the lilting complexity of a string quartet, scents of violet and Christmas spices and bay-infused meat stock intertwining in a finish that goes on for minutes. Give this ten years in the cellar; it's a classical mountain cabernet with a profound structural integrity, build to last. (888 cases) *Laurel Glen Vineyard, Santa Rosa, CA*



94 | Diamond Creek \$200
2011 Diamond Mountain District Napa Valley Volcanic Hill Cabernet Sauvignon This south-facing wall of white volcanic tuff produced a great 2011, complete and healthy, with all its elements tuned for long aging. It feels cool and rich, a chewy, expansive cabernet that's more accessible, with more balanced baby fat, than is typical for Volcanic Hill. The tough undergirding of tannins is finely integrated into the fruit, so the wine finishes savory and spicy even as the generous sense of plushness continues. (414 cases) *Diamond Creek Vineyards, Calistoga, CA*

BEST MERLOT

93 | Keenan \$68
2012 Spring Mountain District Napa Valley Reserve Mailbox Vineyard Merlot A red-fruited merlot, this has some blackness to the tannins that places it firmly in the Napa Valley hills. There's a rocky sense to those tannins, along with hints of black olive and scents of conifer forests, coming together in a lasting, mineral-tinged flavor. The fruit is cool and full, integrating into the oak to create a luscious merlot that needs plenty of time in a decanter to show its best. (400 cases) *Robert Keenan Winery, St. Helena, CA*