

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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**CALLUNA VINEYARDS  
CHALK HILL'S PREEMINENT BORDEAUX BLEND SPECIALIST**



I have known David Jeffrey for many years, as he used to buy wine from me back in my merchant days, when he was still working in the world of corporate finance in Manhattan and dreaming of doing something dramatically different with the second chapter of his professional career. Finally, at the start of the new millennium, David and his wife Marla moved west to start that new chapter, with David enrolling at Fresno State University's Oenology Department (once headed by Joe Heitz) and setting out on the road to crafting his own wines. He spent three and half years working on degrees in both Oenology and Viticulture and also spent a season working in St. Émilion at Château Quinault l'Enclos, prior to launching Calluna Vineyards in 2005. It was during his time in St. Émilion that David's vision for what Calluna might offer wine lovers really came into focus, and since his first vintage in 2007, he has offered several different Bordeaux-styled blends from his seven hectares of vines in the Chalk Hill appellation in Sonoma County. While Calluna has kept a relatively low profile during the ensuing years, David has gained a loyal and passionate following for his old school, beautifully balanced and very ageworthy red wines, and in recent vintages, he has added a Bordeaux-styled white wine blend of sémillon and sauvignon blanc to the winery's lineup. David and Marla were drawn to the Chalk Hill area for its cooler microclimate in comparison to Napa Valley, where David could craft wines which

combine the Old World sensibilities he cherished most in wine, crafted within a slower, more temperate growing season and with fewer of the notable heat spikes so often found in Napa today.

Every aspect of Calluna Vineyards is nicely old school, with David and Marla having purchased their Chalk Hill property unplanted and clearing and planting their own vineyards, in much the same way California's earliest winemaking pioneers of previous generations might have done, and the couple has lived on their property and raised their three children at Chalk Hill since 2005. The vineyards have now been farmed for three years organically, and though not yet certified as organic, this is in the works for coming years. They initially planted close to five hectares of vines to classic red Bordeaux grape varieties: cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, petit verdot and malbec. In 2012 they were able to augment these vines with parcels of sauvignon blanc and sémillon, so that eventually the property could begin to offer a white wine as well. The vineyards sit on the crest of a hill in AVA of Chalk Hill, offering a nice variation of exposures, less high temperatures in the depths of summer from the higher elevation, but also less of a dramatic swing in temps when the evening winds blow in from the Pacific (as the cooler air settles in down below at the base of the hillside). Unlike pinot noir, which thrives in those vineyards where there are dramatic diurnal temperature swings, the Bordeaux varieties that David has planted at Calluna would not easily ripen without their being situated on the eastern side of the Russian River Valley and being a touch warmer than vineyard sites on the Sonoma Coast. But, though Chalk Hill is one of the warmer sections of Sonoma, it still sits in the pathway of the Petaluma Gap through which cooler Pacific air flows in each evening and it is a far cry from the much higher summer heat experienced in the heart of the Napa Valley these days. Calluna is beautifully situated to provide fully ripe fruit at the slightly lower octane levels necessary to produce traditionally-styled red wines, thanks to the cooling effect of the Petaluma Gap. The topsoils here are a combination of clay and loam, sitting over a bedrock of shale and sandstone.

The Calluna vineyards are all drip-irrigated, as David notes that “even though we are in a relatively cool area for Bordeaux varietals, we are still on the north coast of California, which has very low humidity and is subject to heat spikes.” He continues, “I do not think we could successfully dry farm our vineyards” as “our vineyards are all on hillsides and ridge tops with relatively leaner soils, so they dry out quickly” and “in this region, we almost never get rain during the growing season, unlike Europe's top growing areas.” For David, “the key issue is to get the right level of irrigation” so that one does not end up with “inappropriately high yields” from too much watering or pruney, eviscerated grapes from too little. In the cellars, all of the wines, with the exception of the Colonel's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon bottling, see both their alcoholic and malolactic fermentations take place in tank, prior to racking into barrels for their *elevage*. The percentage of new oak is kept quite low by contemporary California norms, with only the aforementioned Colonel's Vineyard going over fifty percent new wood (and then only sixty percent), with a couple of the bottlings seeing as low as ten or twenty percent. Clearly, Calluna is not your typical, modern house for Bordeaux varietals in California and this is a relatively new winery where those of us with old school, traditional palates can find a lot going on that is highly laudable! David Jeffrey tends to raise his reds in cask for twenty-one or twenty-two months prior to bottling, with rackings taking place every six months or so.

Today, a dozen years out from the first vintage of 2007, Calluna Vineyards offers five different bottlings. These include their Calluna Estate Blanc, which is composed of a blend of roughly two-thirds sauvignon blanc and one-third sémillon, their workhorse red wine bottling called Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- this being one of their most Right Bank Bordeaux-styled wines, as it generally ranges from thirty-five to fifty percent merlot, a quarter to a half cabernet franc, and supporting percentages of cabernet sauvignon, petit verdot and malbec. The Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is raised in a very judicious twenty percent new oak each year, again showing the estate's old school orientation. It is one of the very best values to be had in all of California for this style of wine, as it sells for just over \$30 per bottle and is always impeccably well-made. David Jeffrey also makes one of the finest bottlings of merlot in all of California, which is called Merlot "aux Raynauds" in homage to his mentor at Château Quinault l'Enclos, Alain Raynaud, and which always contains a small amount of cabernet franc in the blend in addition to the merlot. It too sees very little new wood, with the percentage ranging here from ten to twenty percent of new casks, depending on the style of the vintage. There is only one bottling at Calluna that is one hundred percent cabernet sauvignon, which hails from a parcel on the property called "The Colonel's Vineyard" and this is the sole wine in the lineup here that is a touch more modern in style, with the wine undergoing its malolactic fermentation in new oak barrels and its *levage* conducted in sixty percent new oak. Happily, it is still nicely restrained in its octane level, so the nod to a more modern-styled wine at Calluna is not all that evident to my palate!

David Jeffrey's top of the line bottling is called Calluna Estate, and this is the winery's Bordeaux-styled blend that "leads with cabernet sauvignon" as David likes to say. The *cépages* of this wine varies from year to year, depending upon the relative success of each variety on the property, so that for instance, vintages such as 2012 and 2014 of Calluna Estate included nearly sixty percent cabernet sauvignon, but a vintage such as the 2008 was only thirty-five percent cabernet. The bottling always includes all five red wine varieties planted on the property in the cuvée, and the new oak is again kept quite reasonable, as the wine is raised in forty percent new casks each year. The Calluna Estate is made as a top Bordeaux bottling would be, with each varietal vinified and raised separately for the first four or five months, after which barrel selections are made and blending trials conducted to come up with each year's final composition. It is always a beautifully structured wine made for long-term cellaring (yet another nod to the traditionalist orientation at Calluna) and clearly seems like a wine built for fifty to seventy-five years in bottle. The first vintage of the Calluna Estate produced was the 2008, which is still four or five years away from its true apogee, so it seems that most vintages of this excellent bottling deserve a full fifteen years in the cellar to really start to blossom completely and drink with unrestrained generosity. To my palate, it is now one of California's very top division red wines from Bordeaux varietals made for long-term cellaring, and it deserves to be ranked up at the very pinnacle alongside wines such as the cabernets from Philip Togni, Cathy Corison, Ric Forman, Ridge, Mount Eden and the like as the very best bottlings for long-term cellaring and very positive evolution in bottle.

In addition to the five standard bottlings now produced at Calluna, David Jeffrey has occasionally produced another single varietal wine as circumstances have allowed, a solo bottling of Malbec. Currently, the winery is offering this pure Malbec bottling from the 2016 vintage, but in very small quantities and only through their website. I asked David about the origins of this single varietal wine, and he noted that "I have bottled about 50 cases of Malbec

each year since 2011- primarily driven by the fact that I have more Malbec than I want to put in the blends.” He continued, “regarding Malbec, while it is considered one of the *Bordeaux* *varietals*- and there really is not a lot of Malbec left in Bordeaux- it seems substantively different from the other four varietals because it has an exotic blueberry/blackberry element which sets it apart, even when it is made in my relatively leaner style.” So, as the varietal is only used in the two blends of the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée and the Calluna Estate bottlings, what is leftover here in certain vintages is bottled up on its own and made available to mailing list customers. Another incentive for getting on the winery’s mailing list is that David Jeffrey has held back a percentage of each of the recent vintages to release to the winery’s customers as library selections, so that it is possible today to buy their flagship Estate bottling as far back as the 2012 vintage in vertical six packs, and their fine Calluna Vineyards Cuvée (maybe California’s finest value at \$33 a bottle for a first class Bordeaux blend) is currently available in the 2015, 2014 and 2013 vintages. David notes that there remain very small quantities of the 2011, 2010 and 2009 Calluna Estate still available as well, which he is thinking about packaging up in a small vertical offering, but I suspect that if you wrote and asked, they might be made available.



*David and Marla Jeffrey at our April vertical tasting at Bar Boulud in New York City.*

In April of this year, David and Marla Jeffries hosted a vertical tasting of their various bottlings here in New York, to show how nicely the wines are evolving with bottle age. It was an abnormally warm day for April in New York (though in this age of climate change, what indeed

is “normal” weather?) and it was a great pleasure to descend into the cellar level at Bar Boulud, escape the heat and sample a fine range of older vintages of the Calluna bottlings. David had very kindly included a few of his 2011s in the retrospective tasting, knowing my fondness for this vintage in California (I may well be a minority of one in championing the lovely potential of the best 2011s!) and I was quite pleased to overhear a couple of other people at the tasting say “the whole lineup was excellent, but my favorite was the 2011.” The wines all uniformly showed well at our tasting, confirming my impressions from first tastings of the wines when they were released that David is fashioning classically balanced wines for the long haul at Calluna Vineyards, and all of his red wines are built to reward long-term cellaring. Of the white wines shown, the 2016 Calluna Estate Blanc was not singing and I did not take a note on it, but I was not certain if it was not just my palate needing some time to adjust after coming in from the heat outside (it was close to ninety degrees Fahrenheit that day!) and perhaps I should have circled back to it at the end of the tasting to see if it was showing more properly after I had cooled off with the great range of red wines. So, I do not have a note on the wine in this report, but the 2018 Blanc seemed to be in fine form and showing very well. Calluna Vineyards is a relative newcomer to the firmament of top California estates, but as the notes below will attest, David Jeffrey has hit the ground running and these are some of the state’s most exciting Bordeaux-styled wines to be found today. If you are not yet familiar with David and his wines, now is a great time to get acquainted, as prices remain some of the most reasonable in all of California!

### ***Calluna Estate Blanc***

*The 2016 vintage was the first for the Calluna Estate Blanc bottling, which is a lovely Sonoma white wine based on the style of the great white wines of Pessac-Léognan in the Bordeaux region. The wine is roughly a two-thirds blend of sauvignon blanc and one-third sémillon (though this will vary a bit from vintage to vintage), with the wines barrel-fermented and then aged in neutral oak casks for five to six months prior to bottling. David Jeffrey does not allow the wine to undergo malolactic fermentation, so as to keep the acidity up in the finished wine without having to acidulate. The 2018 Blanc was really showing beautifully at the tasting and is the current release of this new white wine from Calluna Vineyards.*

### **2018 Calluna Estate Blanc- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2018 Calluna Estate Blanc is a two-thirds, one-third blend of sauvignon blanc and sémillon and the wine is excellent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very stylish blend of gooseberry, green apple, a touch of beeswax, salty soil tones and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a good core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is very fine juice. 2019-2025. **92.**

### ***Calluna Vineyards Cuvée***

*As I mentioned above, the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is one of the very best values to be found anywhere today in the realm of California wine, as there are scant few Bordeaux-styled blends or cabernet sauvignon bottlings that offer this kind of cellaring potential, complexity and class at such a low price point, as the current release is selling for all of \$33 a bottle! Like all of David Jeffrey’s blended bottlings, the cépages here changes from year to year, reflecting how each grape variety has succeeded in the vintage and how the blend best comes together, though merlot is often the dominant component in this wine. After the blend is settled upon for a given vintage, the wine spends twenty-two months aging in barrel, of which around twenty percent are*

*new oak year. The Calluna Vineyards Cuvée starts out life nicely structured, but never overly tannic, and though some restaurants in California currently like to pour it by the glass after it is a few years old, to my palate, this wine does not really start to drink properly until it has reached the age of eight to ten years old. From that point on, it seems likely that another twenty-five to thirty years of life in bottle are no problem for the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée, and this is truly a fine, fine workhorse bottling from David Jeffrey. If you are yet to try one of David's excellent wines, the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is the perfect entry level wine to discover the superb quality of this estate's wines!*

#### **2016 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2016 "CVC" bottling from Calluna Vineyards is a bit riper than the lovely 2015 version, tipping the scales at 14.3 percent alcohol, but sharing that same sense of balanced grace as the previous vintage. The blend this year is forty-nine percent merlot, twenty-six percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent cabernet franc, eight percent petit verdot and seven percent malbec. The wine offers up a lovely aromatic mix of sweet dark berries, cassis, a hint of dark chocolate, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, a touch of Pomerol-like tobacco leaf and a very discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, ripe and full, with lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. One can sense the ripeness here a bit more than on the previous vintage, but it is not hot at all and simply shows a bit more backend generosity as a result of the slightly higher octane. Despite it being fairly approachable, I would still tuck it away for at least four or five years and let the tannins fall away and the secondary layers of complexity start to emerge. 2023-2060. **92.**

#### **2015 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2015 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is showing very well at the present time, and probably only needs another four or five years in the cellar to really reach its plateau of maturity. The *cépages* this year was fifty-one percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent cabernet franc, eight percent malbec and seven percent petit verdot and the wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane. The bouquet is ripe, but also nicely complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of black raspberries, cassis, cigar smoke, a hint of chocolate, a fine base of soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, modest tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This is a lovely wine in the making. 2023-2060. **92.**

#### **2012 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2012 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is composed of a slightly different blend, as it comes in with thirty-six percent merlot, twenty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent cabernet franc, and ten percent each of petit verdot and malbec. Aromatically, it is just starting to show some secondary layering in its mix of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, cedar and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-plate depth, with fine focus and detail, a cooler vintage personality than the 2015, and a long, modestly tannic and complex finish. Qualitatively, this is very close to the 2015 version, but I like the style of the 2012 a hair better. This is really a serious wine for its price tag! 2022-2060. **93.**

#### **2011 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2011 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is quite ripe for this cool vintage, coming in at fourteen percent, and it is starting to really drink beautifully at eight years of age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and very refined blend of cassis, black cherries, dried

eucalyptus, a lovely base of soil tones, a bit of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in personality, with good depth at the core, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is not particularly concentrated, but it has plenty of intensity and is a very satisfying bottle that has plenty of life still ahead of it, but is really drinking beautifully today. 2019-2045. **91.**

**2009 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2009 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is now just entering its plateau of peak maturity and is starting to really drink nicely, though it remains beautifully balanced and still has at least three decades of potential life ahead of it. The *cépages* of the 2012 has a touch more merlot in it than the 2012 version, but quite a bit more cabernet franc, as its breakdown is forty-three percent merlot, forty-one percent cabernet franc, ten percent cabernet sauvignon, four percent petit verdot and two percent malbec. The nose has blossomed beautifully with a decade's worth of bottle age and now offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a nice hint of spiced meats, cedar and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, melting tannins and a very long, wide open and really classy finish. This is first class juice! 2019-2050+. **93.**





### **Merlot “aux Raynauds”**

*I love David Jeffrey’s Merlot “aux Raynauds” bottling, which is the most “grown up” California merlot that I regularly taste these days, since Bob Travers sold Mayacamas Vineyards and Terry and Frances Leighton decided that one vintage of this varietal at Kalin Cellars was sufficient for their long-term cellaring needs. This is most emphatically not one of your fruit forward, velvety and simple red wines that made merlot so ubiquitous and so unappealing to seasoned wine drinkers a couple of decades ago, but rather a wine that pays tribute to the great wines made from this grape variety in Pomerol and St. Émilion before the scourge of Michel Rolland’s success started to so muddy the Right Bank waters. For this bottling, David makes a selection of what he feels are the finest blocks of merlot in a given vintage, and these are then augmented with a touch of cabernet franc to give a bit of that Right Bank Bordeaux palate feel and aromatic complexity to the wine. The merlot vines at Calluna are planted on a block that has a higher percentage of clay in the topsoil layer, where the variety can thrive. The bottling is aged for twenty-two months in cask, with between ten and twenty percent of the wood used for the élevage new barrels in a given vintage. To my palate, six to eight years of bottle age really allows the wine’s secondary layers of complexity to emerge, and though it is beautifully balanced out of the blocks and quite accessible at a fairly early age, it makes sense to let it rest quietly in the cellar for at least these six or seven years and let it really blossom and come into its own. This is the smallest production bottling at Calluna, with generally no more than two hundred cases produced in even the most prolific of vintages. It truly is California’s gold standard when it comes to this varietal today, and again, a very good value, as it sells for under \$40 a bottle.*

### **2016 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The new release of the 2016 Merlot “aux Raynauds” from Calluna Vineyards includes twelve percent cabernet franc in the *cépages* this year. The wine offers up a very promising nose of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar wrapper, a dollop of Pomerol-like fresh herbs, dark soil tones, a touch of cedar and lovely spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and already nicely complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and classy finish. Despite a few heat spikes leading into harvest, this wine has retained really good acidity in 2016 and this shows in its precision and backend lift. 2023-2055+. **92.**

### **2013 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2013 Merlot from David Jeffrey is aging very well and is every bit as impressive today as when I first tried the wine, back in the spring of 2016. The *cépages* of the 2013 is very similar to the 2016 version, with thirteen percent cabernet franc blended into the merlot in this vintage. The wine is getting nice Pomerol signature elements on the nose today, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, black plums, dark chocolate, a touch of young Pomerol weediness, dark soil tones, gentle spices and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure, complex and very nicely soil-driven, with a velvety attack, a good core and a long, modestly tannic and very sophisticated finish. This is really lovely and has decades of life ahead of it, but is starting to really hit on all cylinders! 2019-2050. **93.**

### **2011 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

While 2011 does not get much love amongst commentators wed to the modern style of cabernets and merlots in California, I really like the style of this cooler vintage and David Jeffrey has really made a beautiful bottle of merlot in 2011. Again, the Pomerol sensibilities are very

evident here, as the wine delivers a fine and complex bouquet of plums, fresh herb tones, tobacco leaf, dark soil elements, a touch of eucalyptus, chocolate and just a bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and quite poised in profile, with beautiful balance and grip, fine-grained tannins and a very long, elegant and classy finish. This is not a particularly big wine, but it is utterly complete! It is a bit more structured than the 2013 and will need a bit more bottle age to really blossom, but it has all of the constituent components in place for a long and very lovely life in bottle. 2022-2055+. **94.**

**2009 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

I had never previously had the pleasure to taste the 2009 Merlot from Calluna and the wine was showing very well indeed at our tasting in April. This wine is fully ninety-six percent merlot in 2009, with only four percent cabernet franc rounding out the blend. It is starting to really drink with grace and style at ten years of age, wafting from the glass in a refined constellation of plums, chocolate, dried eucalyptus, a touch of black raspberry, vanillin oak and a bit of Barolo-like road tar that is quite nice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with good focus and grip, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, refined finish. 2019-2045. **92.**

***Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”***

*The “Colonel’s Vineyard” bottling is probably David Jeffrey’s only wine that could be called slightly modern in style, as it is composed entirely of cabernet sauvignon, and as I mentioned above, the wine undergoes its malolactic fermentation in new oak barrels. It is raised in sixty percent new casks after the malo is completed for just under two years. The wine hails from a 1.25 acre parcel of cabernet sauvignon planted right up at the summit of the vineyard hill on the property, with a southwesterly exposition that allows it to bask in the sunlight deep into the afternoon each day during the growing season. This too is quite limited in quantity, as the largest production I have seen of this bottling was in the 2016 vintage, when David produced 204 cases of the “Colonel”. In many other recent vintages, there has only been around one hundred cases produced. It is very much a Calluna wine, with poise, elegance and a lovely structural chassis for long-term aging, despite its slight nod to modernity in being produced entirely from cabernet sauvignon and seeing its malolactic fermentation undergone in barrel.*

**2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The newly released 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard” from Calluna is a very good bottle in the making and may well be my favorite vintage yet of this cuvée. The bouquet offers up a youthful and nicely sappy nose of red and black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, Cuban cigar, a fine base of soil and a generous, but nicely measured serving of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a superb core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, good acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long, well-balanced and very promising finish. As I said above, despite its nod to a more modern style, I do not find that this is out of character with the rest of the old school Calluna lineup. 2028-2065+. **94.**

**2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

2014 was a hot growing season, so not always one of my favorites, but the 2014 Colonel’s Vineyard bottling was showing quite nicely at our tasting in April. The wine is starting to show the first vestiges of maturity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash a nice dollop of fresh herbs, dark soil tones, a bit of eucalyptus and a

lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a fine core, very good balance and focus, ripe tannins and a long, still fairly primary finish. Though the nose is starting to show a bit of development at five years of age, this remains a young and promising wine on the palate and still needs some time alone in the cellar. 2029-2065+. **92+**.

**2010 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

2010 was a cool growing season (though not as much as the following year of 2011), and as David Jeffrey notes, “it is a bit of an outlier for us stylistically, as there is a bit of herbaceousness in all of our 2010s.” However, there is also plenty of complexity on both the nose and palate and this is a very good bottle in the making. The nose delivers a fine mix of cassis, black cherries, a touch of road tar, cigar ash, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones, cedar and a nice touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite refined in profile, with a good core and grip and a long, still quite closed and tannic finish. This is shut down at the moment, but will be a fine bottle when it is ready to drink. 2025-2060+. **92.**

**2007 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The inaugural vintage of the Colonel’s Vineyard is really starting to drink nicely at twelve years of age. The wine offers up a wide open and refined bouquet of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with melting tannins, very good focus and grip and a long, suave and very well-balanced finish. This is just now entering into its plateau of maturity, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2050. **92.**



*The entrance to the hilltop vineyards of Calluna in the Chalk Hill AVA.*

### **Calluna Estate**

*The Calluna Estate is David Jeffrey's flagship bottling and it is currently one of the very finest Bordeaux blends from California produced anywhere, and I find it far more interesting (and far more Bordeaux-like in orientation) than wines such as Opus One and that crowd that came of age back in the decade of the 1980s and have wandered far, far away from their original raison d'être as their early successes have been squandered at those estates with the passing of the years. As I mentioned in the introduction above, the Calluna Estate bottling was first produced in the 2008 vintage, as David Jeffrey wanted to have at least one vintage under his belt before deciding where on the property he wanted to start sourcing the grapes for his top of the line bottling.*

#### **2016 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2016 vintage is the newest example of Calluna Estate to be prepared for market, as the wine is due for release in the coming months. The *cépages* this year is forty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-eight percent cabernet franc, thirteen percent merlot, nine percent petit verdot and three percent malbec. The wine shows lovely nascent complexity in its pure bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar smoke, a lovey touch of spice, eucalyptus, dark soil tones, a hint of lavender and a restrained framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave in its structural polish, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and very promising finish. This needs plenty of time in the cellar to blossom properly, but it is going to be outstanding. 2031-2085+. **95.**

#### **2015 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2015 Calluna Estate is a touch riper in personality than the very cool and classic 2016 version, but it shares a similarly refined structural harness and great potential for long-term aging. The blend of the 2015 version has a bit more merlot and a bit less cabernet franc than the 2016, being comprised of a blend of forty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet franc, ten percent petit verdot and four percent malbec. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful blend of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar ash, eucalyptus, lavender, cedar, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with excellent mid-palate concentration, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and still quite youthful finish. This has closed down a bit since I last tasted it, but has not lost any of its outstanding potential. 2030-2085. **95.**

#### **2014 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2014 vintage of Calluna Estate is one of the most heavily-invested cabernet sauvignon vintages of this wine, as the blend this year is fifty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, augmented by eighteen percent cabernet franc, seventeen percent merlot, five percent petit verdot and two percent malbec. The wine offers up a beautiful and quite sappy bouquet of black cherries and black raspberries, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, violets, eucalyptus, a touch of cigar ash and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent depth at the core, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and very well-balanced finish. Tasted side by side with the 2016 and 2015 versions, the 2014 Calluna Estate seems just a hair less complex, but perhaps this is simply a sign that it is closing down a bit for hibernation? In any case, this too is an excellent wine in the making. 2026-2065+. **93+.**

### **2012 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2012 vintage is another more generously cabernet sauvignon vintage of Calluna Estate, as this wine includes fully fifty-nine percent of this varietal in the blend this year. The balance is composed of twenty-five percent merlot, seven percent cabernet franc, five percent petit verdot and four percent malbec, fully underscoring that this bottling can range quite a bit in terms of *cépages* depending on which varieties excel in a given vintage. The wine is really starting to hit its stride at age seven, offering up a gorgeous nose of red and black raspberries, Cuban cigar, dark soil tones, a touch of balsam bough, a fine base of soil, lavender, a touch of eucalyptus and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is complex, full and a bit more reserved than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate and quite suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is not all that many years away from starting to really enter into its plateau of maturity. It is an outstanding wine by any measure! 2025-2070. **94.**

### **2011 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

I was very, very happy to see that David Jeffrey had brought along the 2011 Calluna Estate to our vertical tasting in April, as I really like the style and shape of this vintage for traditionally-minded producers. As readers may recall, Mother Nature stepped in and tempered ripeness levels quite a bit in 2011, with the cool summer allowing only moderate levels of sugar accumulation (at least by modern standards in California) and providing a vintage of quite old fashioned sensibilities. The 2011 Calluna Estate is composed of a blend of forty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-six percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet franc, seven percent petit verdot and four percent malbec. I did not take note of what its octane level was in this vintage, but I have to imagine that this is one of the lowest in alcohol since the debut vintage of 2008. The wine is aging beautifully, offering up lovely secondary stirrings in its aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, eucalyptus, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, allspice, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure and complex, with moderate tannins, lovely focus and grip, a perfectly respectable core of fruit and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is not quite as deep in the mid-palate as these other vintages of Calluna Estate, but the wine is complete in every respect and a lovely wine in the making. 2027-2060. **93.**

### **2010 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2010 vintage, according to David Jeffrey, is a bit of an outlier in the pantheon of Calluna Estate bottlings, as he noted it was pretty recalcitrant out of the blocks and is only now starting to stir a bit as it closes in on its second decade and start to show some of its detail and true potential. It remains quite a structured wine and definitely needs more time in the cellar, but it is starting to round into form nicely on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is quite classically Sonoma cabernet in its profile, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, weedy overtones, eucalyptus, tobacco leaf, dark soil elements, espresso and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, closed and full, with a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, primary, but still quite promising finish. This is nowhere near as charming as the 2012 is today, but it has very good potential and will reward patience with an outstanding wine! 2028-2075. **94.**

### **2008 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The inaugural vintage of Calluna Estate was showing beautifully at our vertical tasting and getting fairly close to its plateau of maturity. The beautiful bouquet shows a nice, “cool fruit” composition of cassis, dark berries, dried eucalyptus, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf, cedar and a lovely topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impressively pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, impressive soil signature, still some well-integrated tannins and excellent grip and balance on the long and quite complex finish. The *cépages* of the 2008 was thirty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-two percent merlot, eighteen percent malbec, twelve percent cabernet franc and three percent petit verdot, so it is a bit different in the personality of its blend than any of its younger siblings. Fine juice. 2023-2070. **94.**