

15 California Wines Gone Rhône-Style

New reviews of Syrah, Petite Sirah, Viognier and Grenache Blanc from the Golden State



Photo by: Richard Knapp

Limerick Lane has the benefit of cold nights, foggy mornings and warm afternoons.

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Posted: August 14, 2017

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Tasting Highlights' wine reviews are fresh out of the tasting room, offering a sneak-peek of our editors' most recent scores and notes to WineSpectator.com members.

California's Rhône-style wines are more diverse than ever before, as vintners experiment with different varieties and styles, and plant grapes in new regions. It's a good place to start exploring what the state has to offer. To learn more about the category, read senior editors MaryAnn Worobiec and Tim Fish's latest tasting report.

Syrah remains the movement's quality leader. It thrives in cool-climate sites, notably in Santa Barbara's Santa Ynez Valley, home to Firestone, and Sta. Rita Hills. Farther north, the grape is planted throughout Sonoma County. Hard Six owners Wayne and Kara Fingerman tapped their Seven Pillars vineyard in the cool Fort Ross-Seaview appellation for their deeply structured version of the grape.

Petite Sirah, which is a cross between Syrah and the little-known grape Peloursin, makes dark, bold wines with plenty of tannins. It adds heft to blends or shines on its own as evidenced by the duo from Robert Biale.

Viognier, and increasingly Grenache Blanc, lead California's white Rhône grapes. They offer bold flavors and heady aromas, typically on a refreshing frame. Calcareous' Lily Blanc is an intense and fragrant Viognier blend, while Kale Anderson's eponymous label shows the juicy side of Grenache Blanc.

FIRESTONE Syrah Santa Ynez Valley Clone 174 2014 Score: 92 | \$40

Combines a brooding core of lively tannins and acidity with rich and lively blueberry, crushed stone and cracked pepper flavors. Would benefit from time in the cellar. Best after 2018. 612 cases made.—*T.F.*

AMPELOS Syrah Sta. Rita Hills Gamma: The Complex 2013 Score: 91 | \$35

Expressive blueberry, smoky beef and bitter chocolate aromas open to precise, well-structured flavors that finish with refined tannins. Drink now through 2022. 420 cases made.—*T.F.*

ROBERT BIALE Petite Sirah Napa Valley Royal Punishers 2015 Score: 91 | \$45

Deep and brooding, with layered and persistent blackberry, orange zest and licorice flavors that finish with snappy tannins. Drink now through 202. 1,100 cases made.—*T.F.*

CALCAREOUS Lily Blanc Paso Robles 2016 Score: 91 | \$34

Fresh and fragrant, offering a mix of mango, peach and muskmelon flavors that are ripe, succulent and juicy. Intense and balanced on the refreshing frame, with a spice note gaining complexity on the finish. Viognier, Roussanne and Grenache Blanc. Drink now. 535 cases made.—*M.W.*

MYRIAD Syrah Sonoma Coast Petaluma Gap Sangiacomo Vineyard 2015 Score: 91 | \$45

Well-built and expressive, with supple black raspberry, pepper and orange zest flavors that build momentum and tannins toward the finish. Drink now through 2025. 125 cases made.—*T.F.*

ROBERT BIALE Basic Black Sonoma County 2014 Score: 90 | \$50

A zesty kitchen-sink blend that's loaded with personality, offering notes of blackberry, fruitcake spices and licorice that linger toward spry tannins. Petite Sirah. Drink now through 2024. 505 cases made.—*T.F.*

HARD SIX Syrah Fort Ross-Seaview Seven Pillars 2014 Score: 90 | \$40

Deeply structured and persistent, with blueberry, crushed stone and peppered black olive accents that are framed by full-bodied tannins. Hands-off for now. Best from 2019 through 2024. 408 cases made.—*T.F.*

LIMERICK LANE Syrah Russian River Valley Headpruned Block 2015 Score: 90 / \$50

Appealingly untamed, with briary huckleberry and smoked pepper aromas and potent, focused flavors. Zesty tannins. Best from 2019 through 2025. 474 cases made.—*T.F.*

ZOTOVICH Syrah Sta. Rita Hills 2014 Score: 90 / \$42

Expressive boysenberry and smoky meat aromas lead to vibrant, well-built black cherry and black pepper flavors that linger on the long finish. Drink now through 2023. 375 cases made.—*T.F.*

EBERLE Côtes-du-Rôbles Blanc Paso Robles 2016 Score: 89 / \$24

Creamy and spicy, with succulent melon, peach and nectarine flavors that are generous and lush. Spice and honey details linger on the finish. Grenache Blanc, Roussanne and Viognier. Drink now. 622 cases made.—*M.W.*

KALE Grenache Blanc Napa Valley Somerston Vineyard 2016 Score: 89 / \$40

Juicy grapefruit and pear flavors show appealing notes of beeswax and lentil, with a refreshing finish. Drink now. 201 cases made.—*M.W.*

TENSLEY Fundamental Central Coast 2015 Score: 89 / \$18

Dark and potent, with brooding blueberry, orange zest and smoky spice flavors that finish with big but ripe tannins. Best after 2018. 4,669 cases made.—*T.F.*

TRUETT HURST Petite Sirah Dry Creek Valley Burning Man Old Vine 2014 Score: 89 / \$41

Dark and potent, with concentrated plum, licorice and grilled rosemary flavors, finishing with tannic grip. Best after 2018. 1,200 cases made.—*T.F.*

HAWLEY Viognier Sonoma County 2016 Score: 88 / \$28

Dried mango, peach and melon flavors are ripe and succulent, set on a sleek, refreshing frame, with a squirt of lemon on the finish. Drink now. 650 cases made.—*M.W.*

TENSLEY Syrah Central Coast 2015 Score: 88 / \$18

Burly and concentrated, with potent currant, dried beef and licorice flavors framed by big tannins. Best after 2018. 2,029 cases made.—*T.F.*

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