



California's Surprising 2004 Cabernets: 20 to Watch

Exciting New Cabernet Labels

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Nearly 100 new Cabernet bottlings have appeared in California over the past year-and most of them are from Napa Valley. The 20 producers profiled here stood out in recent tastings. They represent the efforts of a diverse group of winemakers: world-renowned vintners, hobbyists, landowners, a vineyard manager and a well-known wine retailer. Some own vineyards and/or a winery, some do not, but each has assembled a passionate and committed Cabernet team. And there's no sign of the boom of new producers slowing-there are dozens more new labels on the horizon, scheduled to release their first wines over the next couple years.

ANTICA NAPA VALLEY

Piero Antinori, of the famed Tuscan winemaking family, first became involved in Napa Valley in the late 1980s, when he invested in what would become Atlas Peak Vineyards. Today, Antinori leases 500 acres of vineyards to the Atlas Peak venture (a contract that is up in November 2008, at which time Antinori will take over management of those vineyards once again), and with Washington's Ste. Michelle Wine Estates recently purchased Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Antica is short for "Antinori California." Its debut wine is a Cabernet Sauvignon made from grapes grown in the Townsend Vineyard, a 24-acre Antinori-owned property adjacent to the current Atlas Peak vineyard.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
89	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004	\$55	1,200

BOUNTY HUNTER

Mark Pope established the Bounty Hunter Rare Wine & Provisions catalog in 1994, offering sought-after California wines to wine lovers across the country. These days he also operates a popular wine bar and bistro in downtown Napa. In 1999, Pope started to experiment with purchasing bulk wine to bottle for his catalog, then made the switch to producing fine wine beginning with the 2003 vintage. "I'm fortunate to get to taste about 5,000 wines a year. I have a good sense of what customers want," says Pope. The Justice Series is a trio of Cabernet-based wines that winemaker Marco DiGuilio sees as representing various expressions of that grape: Blind Justice is 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon; Poetic Justice a Bordeaux-inspired blend; and Frontier Justice a blend that will vary each year, with the '04 version a mix of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
95	Frontier Justice Beckstoffer Vineyard Napa Valley 2004	\$100	108
94	Poetic Justice Beckstoffer Vineyard Napa Valley 2004	\$100	100
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Blind Justice To Kalon Beckstoffer Vineyard 2004	\$100	141

BRANDLIN

Cuvaison is perhaps best known for producing Carneros Chardonnay, but in 1998, the winery, which is owned by the Swiss-based Schmidheiny family, purchased a historic 170-acre ranch on Mount Veeder founded by the Brandlin family in 1926. (Chester Brandlin, now in his eighties, still lives on the property.) The vineyard is so good, says winemaker Steve Rogstad, that the decision was made to bottle its fruit - under this separate label. "The site produces very fragrant, solid, tannic-structured and muscular wines," he says, adding that there is a good natural acidity in the wine because of its cool-climate growing site.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
90	Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder 2004	\$80	808

GARRIC

The name "Garric" combines the first names of coproprietors and Chicago physicians Gary Ochwat, a foot surgeon, and Ricardo Cajulis, a pathologist. The two began dreaming of owning their own Cabernet label after their many trips to Napa Valley, and bought a home in Calistoga in 2002. The next year, they purchased grapes from two different vineyard sites to make their inaugural wine, a 2003, crafted by winemaker Pam Starr.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
91	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004	\$75	187

GHOST BLOCK

Ghost Block is owned by Napa Wine Company-the self-declared "cult wine central" of Napa Valley-a custom-crush facility serving dozens of Napa Valley producers that don't have their own winery or equipment. Managing partner Andrew Hoxsey also oversees more than 600 acres of vineyards, including the Rock Carin vineyard in Oakville, the source for the Ghost Block label. Winemaker Rob Lawson crafts this wine, so named because the vineyard overlooks the Yountville cemetery.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2004	\$55	1,222

HIDDEN RIDGE

The only non-Napa label to make this list, Hidden Ridge Vineyard lies between Mount Hood and Diamond Mountain in the Mayacamas range on the Napa and Sonoma border. Marco DiGiulio is the winemaker, working with 55 acres planted in 21 blocks, all on rugged terrain and steep slopes. The entry road is nearly 2 miles long. "You feel like you're falling off the end of the earth," says DiGiulio about the drive in. Owners Lynn Hofacket and Casidy Ward planted the vineyard over the past decade. "It's one of those vineyards that you just have to see to believe," says DiGiulio.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County 2004	\$75	1,500
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County 2003	\$75	980

JANZEN

Claus Janzen debuted Bacio Divino ("divine kisses") in 1993, creating a high quality Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah blend. He's since added other unique blends-Pazzo (Sangiovese and Zinfandel) and Vagabond (Syrah and Cabernet)-to that portfolio. His newest label, Janzen, is a departure from the blending philosophy, making two 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignons from distinctive vineyard sites. Cloudy's Vineyard is a 2.5-acre parcel of Janzen's own land lying about 600 feet above the valley floor between St. Helena and Calistoga, and the much-lauded To Kalon is located in Oakville. Niels and Kirk Venge are the winemaking consultants.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley To Kalon Vineyard 2004	\$100	400
88	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Cloudy's Vineyard 2004	\$100	300

JEAN EDWARDS

This is the debut commercial release from Karen and John Troisi, a couple in their early fifties who live and work in New Jersey and plan to build their new brand slowly before making the switch to being full-time vintners. Winemaker Kian Tavakoli (formerly of Clos Du Val) crafted this wine from fruit purchased from the popular Stagecoach Vineyard, using the custom-crush facility Crushpad in San Francisco. The name "Jean Edwards" combines Karen and John's middle names.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Stagecoach Vineyard 2004	\$50	300

KAPCSÁNDY

This label arrives with an impressive pedigree. The Kapcsándy family purchased the State Lane Vineyard from Beringer in 2000, redeveloping it with help from superstar winemakers Helen Turley and John Wetlaufer. In 2005, winemaker Rob Lawson and Denis Malbec from Château Latour took the winemaking reins. Beginning with the 2005 vintage, three estate-grown reds will be released: the State Lane Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, a Merlot-based red called Roberta's Reserve and the Cabernet blend Estate Cuvee.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
93	State Lane Vineyard Napa Valley 2004	\$90	900

LEVENDI

Father and son James and David Gianulias and longtime friend Todd Rustman combined their experience in real estate, asset management, grapegrowing and hobby winemaking to create Levendi. Winemaker Alison Doran crafts the Cabernet Sauvignon with grapes from the Stagecoach Vineyard. The partners are currently designing a winery to be built in Rutherford that will also be home to artisanal cheese production.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
91	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Stagecoach Vineyard 2004	\$68	675

BERNARD MAGREZ NAPA VALLEY

Bordeaux native Bernard Magrez adds a Napa outpost to his winemaking empire, which includes vineyards in France, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Portugal and Morocco. Enologist Michel Rolland and vineyard manager David Abreu consult on this project, which debuted with the 2004 vintage. The fruit came from the Thorevilos Vineyard at the foot of Howell Mountain. All the winemaking equipment was imported from France, and the 2004 harvest was vinified at Quintessa.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
88	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004	\$190	200

MACAULEY

The Macauley label was first established by Ann Macauley Watson in the early 1980s and was known for a late-harvest Sauvignon Blanc made by winemaker Ric Forman. Her son, Mac, revived the label in 2000, after a 13-year hiatus, with help from childhood friend and winemaker Kirk Venge. From the 2004 vintage, there are two Macauley releases: the Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard and a broader Napa Valley bottling.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
96	Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Beckstoffer To Kalon 2004	\$100	185

OAKVILLE EAST

Founder Elliot Stern is a 35-year veteran of the wine industry, mostly on the sales and marketing side, including stints as a vice president at -Wilson Daniels and director of sales and marketing operations for Franciscan Estates. Stern, who owns a 1-acre vineyard in Oakville, convinced his neighbors who also own tiny vineyards to join together to create a label. He says they are "set up a like a Loire Valley co-op," with owners receiving residuals. The core of the 2004 bottling was sourced from the Harter, Schwarz and Lopez vineyards. The winemaker is Sarah Gott, formerly of Quintessa.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
89	Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Exposure 2004	\$125	494

PARALLEL NAPA VALLEY

Winemaker Philippe Melka (of Gemstone and Caldwell, among others) is key to the success of this new venture, which was founded by four couples who met in Park City, Utah. The friends share a love of skiing, hence the name and the label design of parallel ski tracks. Parallel debuted with the 2003 vintage, and the 2004 is a blend of grapes from St. Helena, Howell Mountain and the Parallel Vineyard at the northern end of Conn Valley.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
90	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004	\$49	980

PEDEMONTE

Chris and Mark Pedemonte grew up helping their father make homemade wine in Oakland, Calif. Chris' extensive experience as a vineyard manager for top Napa estates (as well as years of home winemaking) prepared him to launch this label, in which he partners with his wife, Lisa, his brother Mark and a family friend, Tim Conner, who brings a business background to the project. Grapes come from the Round Pond vineyards in Rutherford (see the following profile), a property Chris has managed for more than 20 years.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
90	Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2004	\$48	272

ROUND POND

Vintners sometimes venture into making olive oil or vinegar, but the MacDonnell family did the reverse, adding wine to their artisanal olive oil, red wine vinegar and citrus syrup business. They own 350 acres of vines in Napa's Rutherford district, and for years they sold the fruit to other producers. Now winemaker Cary Gott crafts wine from a portion of their grapes-in addition to its Cabernet Sauvignon, Round Pond also makes a Nebbiolo. The name is a reference to founder Bob -MacDonnell's childhood retreat in upstate New York.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
89	Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2004	\$50	1,400

SCARECROW

Scarecrow debuted with the 2003 vintage, but the history of this Rutherford vineyard, originally planted by Joseph Judson Cohn, dates to 1945. Bordered by the former Inglenook Estate vineyard, the J.J. Cohn vineyard previously sold grapes to the likes of Inglenook, Opus One, Rubicon, Duckhorn and Joseph Phelps. The current owner, photographer Bret Lopez, named this label in honor of Cohn, his grandfather, who oversaw production of The Wizard of Oz as an executive at MGM studios. Celia Masyczek is the winemaker.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
96	Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2004	\$125	312

TAMBER BEY

Proprietors Barry and Carol Waitte own two Napa vineyards: a 60-acre parcel called Two Rivers, which lies just east of Yountville, and their 11-acre estate vineyard, in Oakville. All of the label's wines, which are made by winemaker Thomas Brown, come from these two vineyards. (Tamber Bey produces impressive Chardonnay and Merlot bottlings, along with its Cabernet.) The moniker "Tamber Bey" combines the nicknames of the first Arabian horses that the Waittes owned and raced.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
89	Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2004	\$60	400
88	Cabernet Sauvignon Yountville Two Rivers Vineyard 2004	\$28	600

VILLA HERMOSA

Art and Cherie Goulard own a 2.5-acre Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard high in the hills of Angwin, Calif., at an elevation of 2,000 feet. Art, a Napa-based landscape contractor for more than 40 years, studied viticulture before planting his own vineyard. This is the couple's debut commercial release, with help from vintner Andy Schweiger.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
92	Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain 2004	\$75	171

WAYPOINT

A "waypoint" represents a particular location along a route of travel. It is with this spirit of a sense of place that Napa-based retailer Mark Pope started his second label (see "Bounty Hunter," profiled above) to focus on site-specific wines. Each of Waypoint's bottlings is vineyard-designated, sourced from sites such as the Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard and the Hidden Ridge Vineyard (see above). Marco DiGiulio is the winemaker.

Score	Wine	Price	Cases Made
92	Cabernet Sauvignon St. Helena Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard 2003	\$80	480
91	Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2003	\$80	460