Decanter Vintage report

NAPA CABERNET 2022

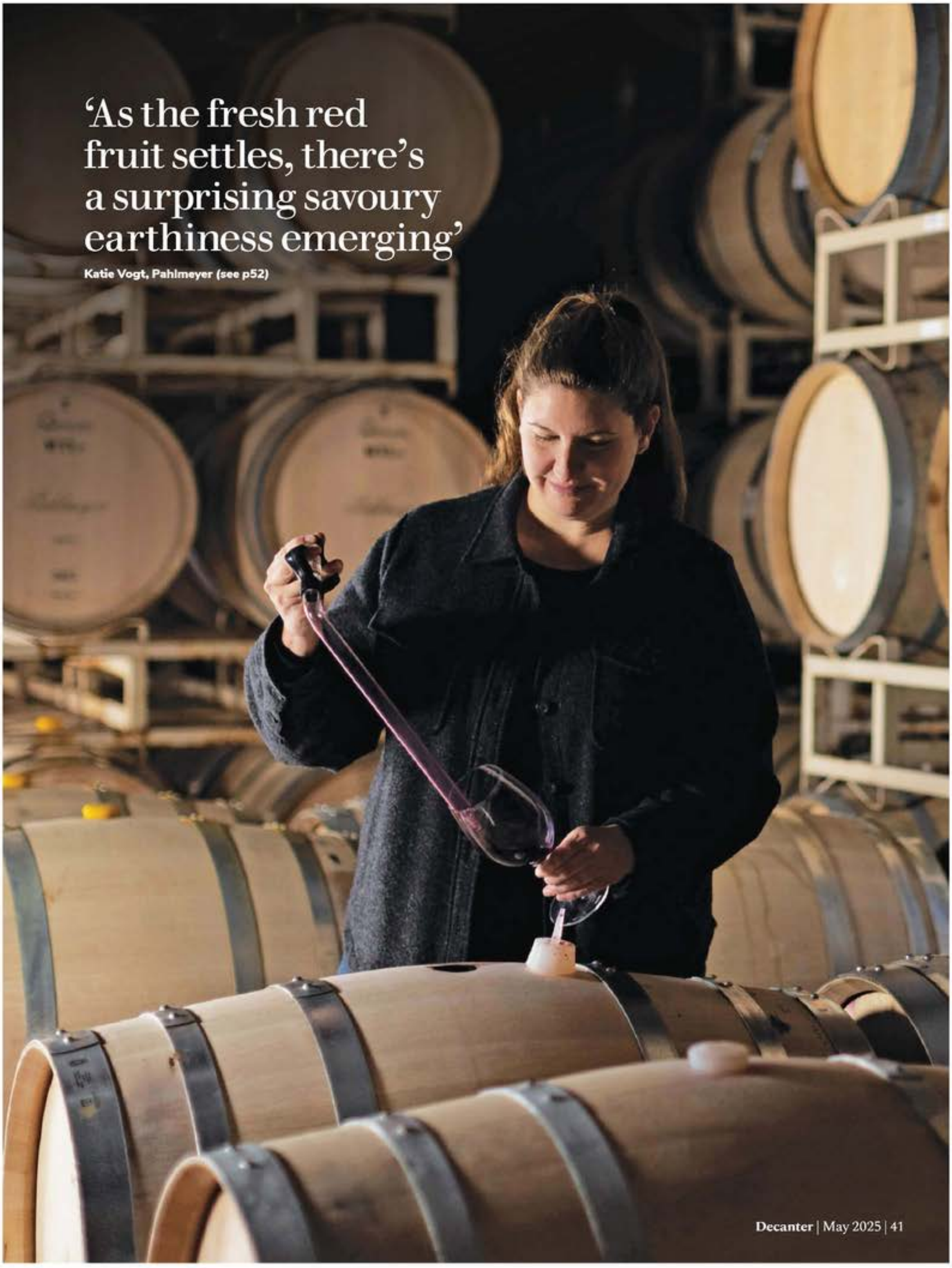
A cool growing season followed by an unprecedented harvest-time heatwave and unexpected rain have resulted in an early-drinking vintage of rich, fruit-driven wines, many with immediate appeal. The variation in quality and ageability across all price points will make careful selection essential for both collectors and enthusiasts. Our Napa correspondent presents a selection of 40 excellent wines from the more than 600 he tasted, many with very high scores

REPORT & SELECTION JONATHAN CRISTALDI

"They are definitely divisive"

Napa Cabernet 2022 vintage rating

★★★


‘As the fresh red fruit settles, there’s a surprising savoury earthiness emerging’
Katie Vogt, Pahlmeyer (see p52)

sorting was essential for any fruit he harvested during the heatwave. With most fruit in before the heat, Cole's wines have density and a standout structure.

Consultant winemaker Jean Hoefliger calls 2022 'perhaps the greatest surprise of my career'. His wines showed a deft hand, offering intensity of flavours and balanced elegance. 'I overwatered to the point of insanity before the heat dome settled,' he explains, 'and we had no dehydration.'

Pahlmeyer winemaker Katie Vogt *(pictured, p51)* reflects on grower relations. 'We had to make tough picking decisions to ensure the character and intensity we were looking for.' On the reds, she adds: 'As the fresh red fruit settles, there's a surprising savoury earthiness emerging, giving me optimism for ageing potential.'

During the extreme Labor Day heatwave, desiccation and shrivel were minimal on Pritchard Hill, where vineyards above 245m are typically 4°-5°C cooler than the valley floor. 'Budbreak and bloom are later, but warm nights help the vines catch up,' says Allison Tauziet of Colgin Cellars, who harvested most fruit on 6-8 September. 'I'd never seen flavours move so fast,' she said of their valley floor vineyards.

Further north, at Arkenstone on Howell Mountain, above 420m, grapes are fully exposed to the sun and the harvest is typically weeks ahead of the valley floor. 'I asked if the wine would be better after the heat dome and chose to pick most before it hit,' says winemaker Sam Kaplan, who usually harvests early, 'finishing the rest during and after.'

Napa Valley's 2022 vintage at a glance

Their immediate and suave style makes many of these wines a pleasure to drink upon release. Those seeking ageworthy bottles should focus on the upper tier of my score range and consult the detail of the tasting notes closely. While time will ultimately reveal the full ageing potential, at present these wines appear to be structured for a drinking window of around 10 years, though a few standouts will undoubtedly surprise.

Multiple narratives

The 2022 Napa Valley Cabernet vintage underscores a fundamental truth: in this climate changed world, there is no new normal. The year demanded adaptability, as location, access to water and precise timing dictated success. While some winemakers likened the vintage to past years, comparing it to 2012 or 2015, the diversity of results suggests no single narrative applies.

Ultimately, the vintage reinforced the importance of pre-planning, precision farming and the ability to pivot under pressure. The best wines of 2022 will come from those who anticipated the worst, hoped for the best, and made crucial decisions in real time.

The Chappellet vineyards on the slopes of Pritchard Hill overlooking lake Hennessey

Cristaldi with Allison Tauziet, Colgin Cellars

Cristaldi's 40: top 2022 Napa Cabernets to buy

Because of the nature of the 2022 Napa vintage, we have split these 40 wines into three sections, according to their suitability for early consumption, or mid- or long-term keeping. Wines are then listed by points scored, then alphabetically by producer. The appellations given are those the producer has opted to show on the label, otherwise the generic Napa Valley AVA applies. Stockists and prices are shown where available – UK allocations may not have been finalised, some wines will not be exported at all, and some may have already sold out. For the latest availability updates, contact specialist merchants.

Long-term reward

Annulus, Vine Hill Ranch, Oakville 100

A stylish, polished wine – super-suave and expressive, with rich, perfectly weighted fruit and gorgeous, super-fine tannins infused with an iron-scented minerality. Beautifully compact yet intensely juicy, it bursts with red and black fruit, layered with gravelly mineral depth. The exceptional tension and structure give it poise and balance, making it a masterful effort that radiates freshness, precision and impeccable harmony. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alcohol** 14.9%

Arrow&Branch, Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard, Oakville 100

US$300 **arrowandbranch.com**

A seductively complete wine – compact, tension-filled, vibrant and energetic. Holds immense power and integrity, with pristine blackberry, red cherry, plum and blue fruit compote, laced with rich savoury spices and tannins that are firm and grippy, building then resolving through the long mineral-driven finish. **Drink** 2025-2050 **Alc** 14.8%

Harbison Estate, Horseshoe, Oakville 100

Bursting with blackcurrants, toffee spices and brown baking spices, all wrapped in a layer of elegant cedarwood. Medium- to full-bodied, it showcases classic black cherry and graphite notes, ripe plum and cacao nibs, along with a touch of orange oil. This is precise, pure and lively, with a structure that's built for extended cellaring, thanks to its wealth of super-fine tannins. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 14.1%

Futo Estate, Oakville Estate, Oakville 99

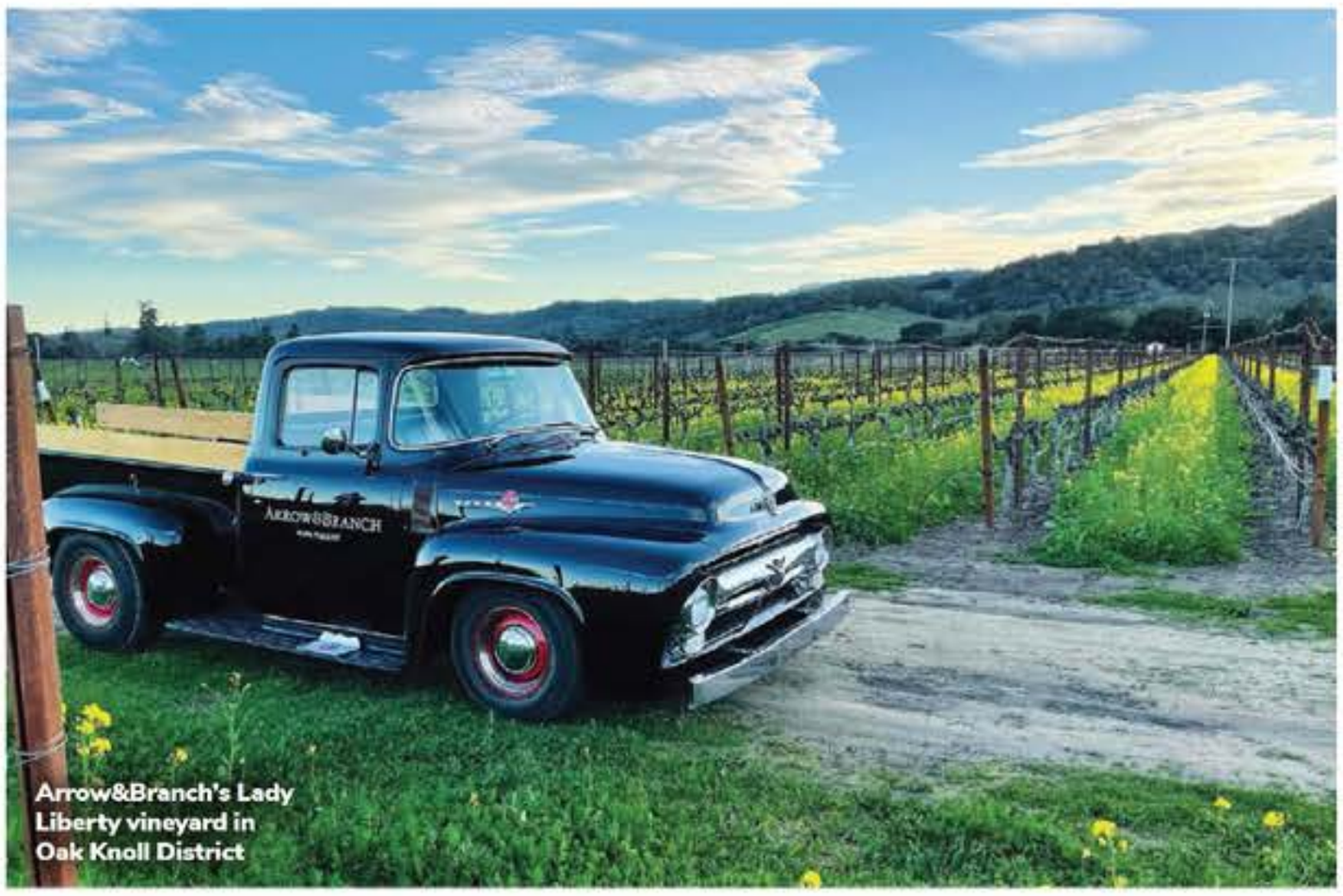
POA £ **Four Corners Wine**

Unfolds with layers of savoury Oakville sagebrush, bay laurel and fresh tobacco. Expressive cocoa-powder tannins add texture, while a striking minerality that evokes crushed volcanic stones is intertwined with a saline edge. The acidity carries a bright, saline-mineral tension. This wine is charged with an electric energy, balanced tension and a wealth of expressive fruit, making it both extremely impressive and utterly inviting. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 14.2% ►

② **Louis M Martini, Mt Veeder** 99
Fresh and bright, with black fruit, sagebrush, violets and tobacco, accented by spearmint and cardamom nuances. Full-bodied and compact, with incredible palate intensity and depth, its robust, powerful mountain tannins are firm yet beautifully balanced by mouthwatering acid tension. The inky black fruit is laced with ironstone minerality, carrying through to an incredibly long finish. Stunning and structured, with remarkable ageing potential. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 15.1%

Matthiasson 99
The first 2022 Napa Cabernet I tasted that avoids the warm, juicy ripeness often associated with the vintage. Instead, it stays true to its character, showcasing beautifully pure black cherry and blue fruit aromatics, with a cooling menthol note and coiled energy. Framed by crisp, crunchy tannins and gorgeous, lacy acidity, leading to an impressively long finish of violets and fragrant bay laurel. Precise and focused. The blend contains 4% each of Petit Verdot and Merlot. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 13%

③ **Cliff Lede, Poetry, Stags Leap District** 98
POA £ **Four Corners Wine**
Unfolds in a perfect arc of flavours, beginning with wet slate, graphite, black cherry and dark cassis, building toward a crescendo of wonderfully textured tannins that drive the mid-palate with intensity and precision. Eventually, the structure resolves into a beautifully perfumed finish, revealing red florals, espresso bean and even hints of guava and blood orange. Long and captivating. The blend contains 3% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc and 2% Merlot. **Drink** 2025-2038 **Alc** 13.6%


Arrow&Branch's Lady Liberty vineyard in Oak Knoll District

Colgin, IX Estate, Pritchard Hill 98
Enticing black cherry and blackberry fruit is laced with elegant cedarwood spice. The structure is impressive yet refined, with suave, leather-scented tannins, fresh tobacco and layers of incense, rich cocoa nibs, sandalwood and lavender on the finish. Full-bodied, this is built for long-term cellaring, yet offers remarkable upfront pleasure now. The blend contains 20% Cabernet Franc, 6% Merlot and 6% Petit Verdot. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 14.9%

Corison, Kronos Vineyard, St Helena 98
Earl Grey tea laced with vanilla and hints of fresh cedar. The tannins are elongated, firm and taut, with a mineral-scented quality that builds with skyscraper-like intensity on the finish, delivering remarkable length and uplift. One of the few 2022 Napa Cabs with the structure and complexity to cellar for multiple decades. A multidimensional and utterly captivating wine. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 14%

Morlet Family Vineyards, Morlet Estate, St Helena 98
Super-fragrant, offering blackberry fruit lifted by sweet tobacco, wet-stone minerality, loamy earth and a hint of violets. One of the few wines of the vintage displaying a distinctive blue-fruit character. Full-bodied, with ripe, stylish, crisp tannins that exhibit an aromatic quality reminiscent of walking through a wet redwood grove. Offers sustained length, energy and deep, penetrating richness, balanced by a lovely sweetness. Impressively structured and balanced. **Drink** 2025-2038 **Alc** 15.4%

Ad Vivum, Sleeping Lady Vineyard, Yountville 97
Incredibly fresh and lifted on the nose, offering bright cherry and blackberry fruit alongside fresh tobacco and dusty cocoa powder. The palate opens with upfront

Steve Matthiasson, Matthiasson Wines

Jason Exposto, Futo Estate

satiny fruit, displaying real finesse as super-fine, powdery tannins build to a crescendo, finishing up with a chalky mineral character. This is absolutely gorgeous, with Left Bank structure, lifted floral notes and a lingering mineral-driven finish. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 14.5%

● AXR, AxR1 97

US$280 **axrnapavalley.com**

Incredibly delicious upfront, offering an easy-drinking pleasure that's unusual for this wine. Lifted notes of crème de cassis and black cherry are laced with sage, high-toned sweet paprika, a hint of maple syrup and coffee bean. These build on the full-bodied palate, framed by firm, fine-grained, sappy and violet-scented tannins, with a developing dried floral character and expressive crushed stone minerals coming together in the long and satisfying finish. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 14.9%

Favia, Oakville 97

Alluring aromas of crunchy dark berry fruit and savoury sagebrush, underpinned by red dust minerality that layers itself seamlessly on the palate. The structure is powerful and intensely fragrant, with loamy earth, robust tannins and full-bodied volume. A firm spine of mineral-laced acidity drives the wine forward, bringing salinity, tension and remarkable energy to the long, compelling finish. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 15%

Di Costanzo, Caldwell Vineyard, Coombsville 94

£82.50 (ib) **Justerini & Brooks**

Subtly succulent fruit with an emphasis on cool blue and spiced plum, rather than the cherry and currant notes more typical of cooler years. Despite the vintage's richness, the wine maintains impressive acid tension and iron-scented tannins that are firm yet inviting. The finish is layered and expressive, offering heady tobacco, white pepper and pressed floral notes. A beautifully balanced and captivating wine, it delivers depth, refinement and elegance in equal measure. **Drink** 2025-2038 **Alc** 13.4%

Mid-term appeal

⑤ Stony Hill, Côte Rouge, Spring Mountain District 99

Super-lifted redcurrant and black cherry fruit leads the way, wrapped in rich, forest notes that evoke a walk among redwoods after a rainstorm. Medium-bodied yet immensely stylish and polished, it offers impressive depth, with layered red fruit and juicy acidity framed by smoked paprika and a finish that seems to last forever. Exhibits deep power, fantastic concentration and a perfect balance of acidity and soaring tannins. Rounded out with a dash of Merlot. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 13.8%

Bure Family, Estate, St Helena 98

A wine that delivers utter deliciousness and rip-roaring structure, this is super-elegant and balanced, showing profoundly rich tannins and purity of black cherry and blackberry fruit, rich tobacco spices, toasty cedarwood, fennel, cacao nibs and crushed violets on the long finish. **Drink** 2025-2050 **Alc** 14.8%

Harlan Estate, The Maiden, Oakville 98

A slightly toned-down version of Harlan Estate, with more focused plum and red cherry fruit, alongside saline-velvety ►

tannins that carry a firmer, more assertive presence. These tannins will benefit from some additional time in bottle. Still, the site's identity shines through, offering a combination of depth, refinement and long-term ageing potential, just in a somewhat more structured, restrained form. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 14.5%

Lithology, Alejandro Bulgheroni 98
Exceptionally silky and fresh, with sinewy tannins that are both firm and seamlessly integrated. With some air, layers of scrumptious, toasty oak spice weave around creamy blackberry, plum and cherry fruit, creating a beautifully textured and complex expression. The blend includes 14% Cabernet Franc. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 15.1%

⑥ **Nickel & Nickel, State Ranch, Yountville** 98
US$140 **farniente.com**
Compact, full-bodied, with intense, chewy tannins that balance muscular power with freshness. Leans toward the dark-fruited profile reminiscent of the 2019 vintage, combined with the vibrant acid tension of 2021. The grapes were mostly harvested before the heatwave, ensuring ripeness balanced by an excellent core of juicy, firm acidity. A finely tuned, powerful Cabernet that captures depth and vibrancy in equal measure. **Drink** 2025-2038 **Alc** 14.6%

Signorello Estate, Padrone 98
Remarkable freshness and approachability. Combines richness, power and elegance. Absolutely stunning. The mid-palate is densely packed, leading into a classic Napa Cabernet finish, with vibrant, crunchy dark berry fruit, graphite, cassis and exquisite tobacco spice. The wine's balance and precision are extraordinary, making this the finest Padrone I've tasted to date. The blend includes 10% Cabernet Franc, 7% Merlot and 3% Malbec. A masterpiece. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 15.3%

Accendo Cellars 97
Immediately charming and approachable, offering early-drinking pleasure. Full-bodied and structured, packed with juicy red and black berry fruit, rich, loamy earth and a dusty red mineral character, all framed by ripe, firm yet inviting tannins. Layers of leather, cedarwood and scorched herbs round out this delicious, complex expression. The blend includes 8% Cabernet Franc. **Drink** 2025-2037 **Alc** 14.8%

'The 2022s are approachable, plush and opulent'

⑦ **Acumen, Peak, Atlas Peak** 97
Delivers both power and elegance. Polished tannins support the medium- to full-bodied framework, making this wine incredibly enticing and approachable. Black and blue fruits dominate, layered with lavish mountain garrigue, salted dark chocolate and crunchy currant fruit. The mid-palate builds with impressive density and tension, leading to a long, expressive finish that's marked by sage, coriander, white pepper and ironstone minerality. A remarkable showing. Blended with 7% Petit Verdot. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 14.5%

B Cellars, Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard, Oakville 97
US$350 **bcellars.com**
A superb, silky and satiny expression. Absolutely bursts from the glass with rich red fruit tones intertwined with black and blue fruit nuances. Suave tannins lay a solid foundation that supports the dark berry fruits, exotic spices and saline-mineral tension, while mocha notes and zesty blood orange peel bring further complexity. This is a true heartbreaker of a wine, its seamless polish and satiny texture defying the challenges brought on by that late-season heat. **Drink** 2025-2036 **Alc** 16.1%

Signorello Estate, just north of Napa city

● **Cathiard Vineyard, Founding Brothers** 97
US$225 **cathiardvineyard.com**
An exceptional wine with a super-compact and incredibly suave tannin structure, displaying velvety, crunchy red-toned fruits laced with nuances of walnut husk and coriander spice. The medium- to full-bodied palate is driven by tension and vivacious fruit, kept in balance by profound tannins and a crisp acid backbone. A standout of the vintage, this is certainly cellarworthy. Crafted from 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Franc. **Drink** 2025-2038 **Alc** 14%

Kinsman Eades, Anjea, Yountville 97
This Anjea bottling comes from the Sleeping Lady vineyard. It's notably floral and expressive, showcasing more structure and freshness than might be expected, with super-fine, precise tannins that carry distinctive Earl Grey tea nuances. The palate is elegantly framed, with pretty red berry fruit, blackcurrant and brown spice minerality, creating a wine of real refinement and depth. **Drink** 2025-2037 **Alc** 14.7%

Stephanie Putnam of Raymond Vineyards, and Philippe Melka (see p50)

Scarecrow, Rutherford 97
US$795-$995 **Benchmark Wine Group, Falling Bright, The Wine House, World Class Wine**
This wine simply screams Rutherford, leading with that classic dusty mineral character alongside notes of redcurrant and blackcurrant, a hint of cassis and perfumed florals. On the palate, it's elegant, opening with forest berry fruit and dark cacao, underscored by firm, structured tannins with a distinct mineral edge. Polished, complete and stylish. The blend contains 2% Malbec. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 14.5%

Arkenstone, Heimark Vineyard 96
POA £ **Four Corners Wine**
Dynamic and polished, with a rich core. Beautifully perfumed and floral. High-toned violet and lilac notes are complemented by crème de cassis, crème de menthe and espresso bean. Full-bodied and expressive on the palate, with ultra-fine, powdery tannins that frame succulent, rich blue fruit tones that will evolve into darker notes with time. An undercurrent of freshness shines through, highlighting the wine's vibrancy and balance. **Drink** 2025-2038 **Alc** 14.8%

Tor, Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard, Oakville 96
Highly fragrant, showcasing high-toned spearmint, redcurrant, rose petal and sandalwood. Medium- to full-bodied, the palate is defined by soaring tannins that grip and build. As the wine unfolds, blackcurrant fruit begins to emerge, intertwined with layers of coriander spice and fresh tobacco. The freshness on the finish is remarkable. An impressively balanced and structured wine. Includes a dash of Cabernet Franc. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.9%

Shafer, One Point Five, Stags Leap District 95
US$115 **shafervineyards.com**
Polished and expressive, with classic black cherry and blackcurrant fruit, graphite and cedarwood. Soft and supple, juicy and red-fruited on the palate, with emerging blue fruit nuanced by star anise and corriander cream. The tannins are present, but gentle and feather-like, gliding to a sweet-spiced finish. Rounded out with 3% each of Petit Verdot and Merlot, and 2% Malbec. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 15.3% ►

Paul Hobbs, Beckstoffer Las Piedras Vineyard 93

POA £ **Alliance Wine**

A full, generous and sweetly fruited red that shows impressive mid-palate concentration. A bright, herbal bay laurel note provides aromatic lift, framing a citrussy-crisp acidity that brings grip and tension. Cherry fruit and graphite meld seamlessly with cedarwood, carrying right through to an extended, refined finish. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.8%

Short-term pleasure

⑨ **Pott, Her Majesty's Secret Service** 98

US$200-$300 **Pogo's, Winesavailable.com**

Full, round and lush. Stylish, polished and incredibly perfumed. Dazzles with aromas of red and black cherry fruit, cherry leather and tobacco spice, all elevated by elegant violet notes. Medium- to full-bodied, it offers super-fine tannins and a core of graphite minerality that anchors the finish, which is scented with even more of its signature floral elegance. A beautifully balanced and expressive wine, it captures both refinement and vibrancy. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 14.8%

Patria, Monarch 97

US$95 **patriawines.com**

Utterly delicious, bursting with juicy blackberry and blueberry fruit layered with graham cracker spice, cedarwood and chocolate. Medium- to full-bodied, it carries a classic Rutherford dust quality, seamlessly laced around rich, dark, succulent fruit. The finish delivers fantastic mineral intensity and a firm spine of racy acidity. A standout – hold the 2021s and drink this soon! Patria is a collaboration between consultant winemaker Tony Biagi and importer Kimberly Jones, who first connected through their work with PlumpJack Winery. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.6%

Robert Mondavi Winery, The Reserve To Kalon Vineyard, Oakville 97

£164.99 **Saghi**

Exudes classic Cabernet character, with blackberry fruit, graphite and a hint of new cedar on the nose. The full-bodied palate is defined by precise, fine-grained tannins and a polished structure. The quality and depth are exceptional, delivering a quintessential Mondavi Reserve. Though the wine is approachable now, the tannin structure is still pretty pronounced, so it's worth

Julien Fayard (see p50)

waiting a while before broaching. The blend contains 7% each of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. **Drink** 2027-2042 **Alc** 15.5%

Julien Fayard Wines, Sleeping Lady Vineyard, Yountville 96

Beautifully elegant and highly aromatic, with graphite woven around pure blackberry fruit, wild herbs and loamy earth. Medium- to full-bodied, with very fine-grained tannins and perfect mineral-acid tension, it showcases excellent fruit purity, with perfumed violets and blood orange nuances on the finish. Excellent picking decisions in this year led to a wonderfully balanced wine. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.8%

JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset, Phi 95

A bold yet classically structured wine – a

Chimney Rock Winery in Stags Leap District

pure, unadulterated expression of Napa Cabernet. It delivers blackberry fruit, graphite minerality and elegantly framed cedarwood spices, all seamlessly woven into fine-grained tannins. Medium- to full-bodied, it builds with good tannic intensity, leading to a long, savoury-spiced finish. Precisely crafted and deeply expressive. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 15.5%

● **Black Stallion Estate Winery, Gaspare Vineyard, Oak Knoll District** 94

Super-polished and wonderfully decadent, showcasing a great balance of fine-grained, mineral-laced tannins and ripe black cherry and blackberry fruit. Nuances of tobacco, thyme and sage add intrigue, while notes of mocha and crushed cocoa nibs contribute a surprising freshness, framed by vibrant blood orange acidity. A solid effort. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 15.5%

PHOTOGRAPHS ALEXANDER RUBIN (4), WILDLY SIMPLE PRODUCTIONS LLC, MATTHIASSON WINES, MJ WICKHAM, HARLAN ESTATE, JOHN CROWE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, BOB KREISEL/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Merus, Napa Valley 94
Polished and stylish, embodying classic Cabernet Sauvignon character. Blackberry and black cherry notes dominate, with nuances of graphite, fine cedarwood and sandalwood spices. Medium- to full-bodied, it boasts satiny textures and velvety tannins that are firm yet well integrated, forming a solid foundation. The long finish is marked by cola spices, hints of violets and a subtle pop of vanilla bean aromatics. A refined and expressive wine with 19% Merlot in the blend. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.6%

Venge Vineyards, Annapurna, Stags Leap District 94
The second vintage from the 1.8ha Annapurna Vineyard. Offers a rich, plush, dark-fruited profile balanced by powerful yet subtly sweet Stags Leap tannins. Black tea nuances and a fantastic saline-graphite mineral backbone frame the ripe plum, black cherry and blackberry fruit, which emerges on the bright, refreshing and slightly spicy finish. **Drink** 2025-2034 **Alc** 14.9%

Decanter PREMIUM

Many more great Napa Valley Cabs?
In addition to the 40 wines shown here, to find Jonathan Cristaldi's notes and scores on 460 more 2022 Napa Cabernet Sauvignon wines he tasted for Decanter for this comprehensive vintage report, go to decanter.com/premium, or scan the QR code

⑪ **Gemstone Vineyard, Yountville** 93
A black-fruited wine with gorgeous violet notes and coriander spice. Supple and inky, it reveals layers of blue fruit compote, dark chocolate and chalky tannins that build to a refined cocoa powder and wet slate finish. Incredibly approachable and downright delicious, delivering richness and elegance from the first. **Drink** 2025-2036 **Alc** 14.9%

Chimney Rock, Estate, Stags Leap District 92
£105 **Hallgarten Wines, Hic, Strictly Wine, Vinvm**
US$100-$140 **Widely available**
Classically styled, this showcases ripe blackberry fruit, graphite and rich, toasty oak spices, intertwined with perfumed florals. The medium-bodied palate is elegantly structured, with firm yet fine tannins that possess an impressive level of staying power. Crushed stone minerality builds alongside hints of white pepper and sage, carrying through to a long, refined finish. The blend includes 20% Merlot and 4% Petit Verdot. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.5% D

Cru Americana
10 standout vineyards, California and beyond

Summer whites
South African Chardonnay & Provence whites tasted

Plus Pinot Noir: 20 smart US buys ✤ Wine lover's guide to the Tamar Valley

Decanter

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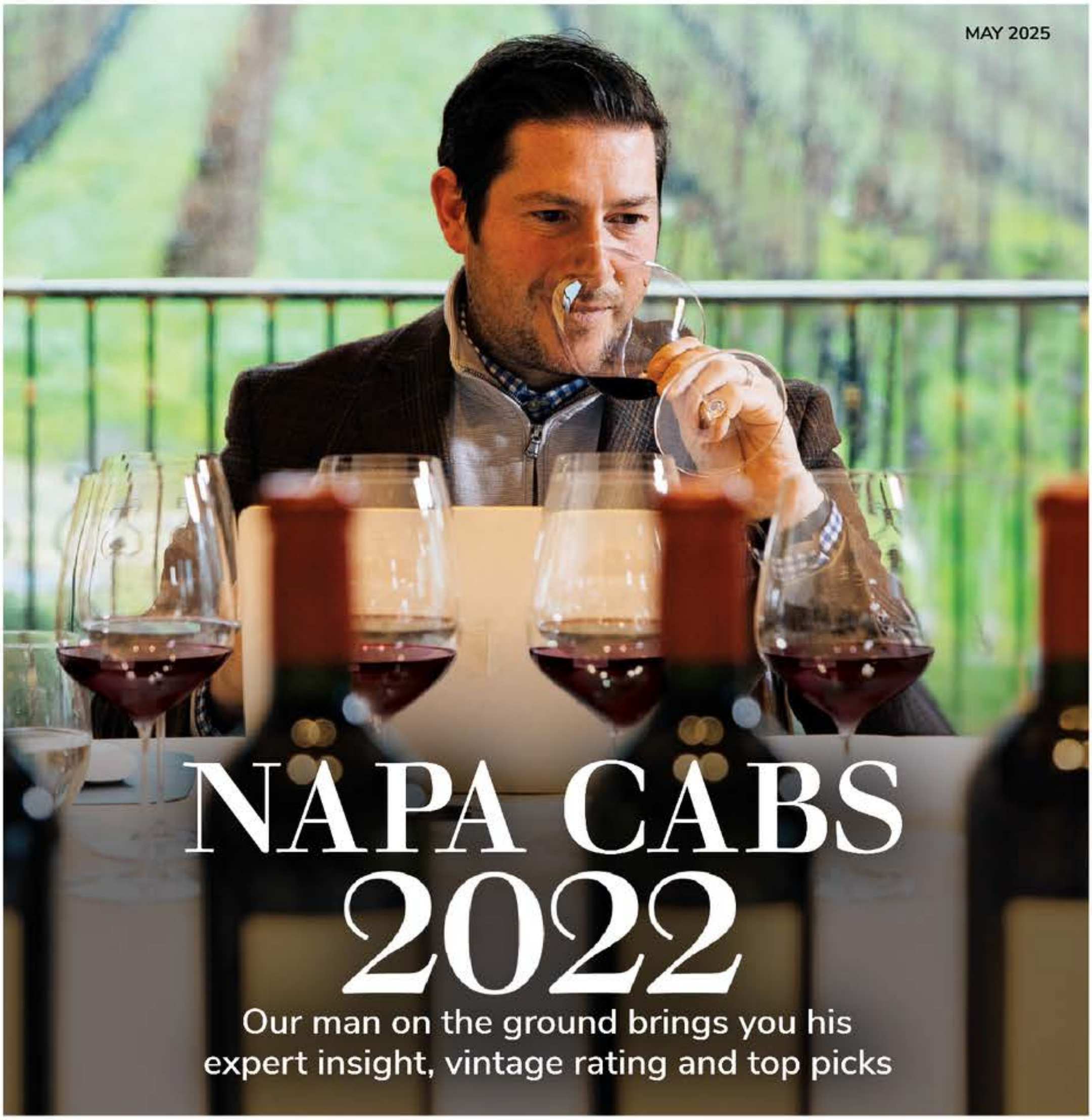
MAY 2025



NAPA CABS 2022

Our man on the ground brings you his expert insight, vintage rating and top picks