

Tasting Report: Napa's Amazing 2013 Vintage

January 19th, 2016



It's hard to believe that Napa Valley made better wines in 2013 than 2012 but it did.

America's premier wine producing region made stunning wines in 2013, particularly cabernet sauvignon-based reds. The best show terrific form and tension, giving them an impressive freshness to their richness and power. This character illustrates a new classicism for the great wines of the region.

"This is the vintage of my career," says Nicolas Morlet, the winemaker of Peter Michael Winery. "The 2013 was the dream vintage for a winemaker. It was when you have balance and beauty in all your wines. The wines can be powerful and elegant at the same time. They have a natural balance in a neo-classic style."



Indeed, I tasted almost 400 wines last week in Napa Valley and I was incredibly impressed with the balance and harmony of so many wines. A few wines were still overpowering or over-extracted. Some were even raisiny and overripe – or what Australian winemakers call "dead fruit character." Yet there were fewer wines in this unappealing style than in my past tastings in the last five years.

"People had to dial in the tannins slightly with the 2013s," said Marc Gagnon of Bryant Family Vineyard, who started with the 2014 vintage at the famous estate. "If winemaker made the wines the same way as 2012, then they may have extracted a little too much. But most winemakers produced great wines in 2013."



Great wines seem to be in abundance in 2013. I gave perfect scores to no less than seven wines. All my 100-point wines showed great character and quality that seemed to almost transcend what or who made them. They exhibited perfect quality in perfect proportions like some of the greatest wines I have tasted in my 35 years as a wine critic regardless. Their terrific quality reminded me of such classic bottles as the legendary 1982 Mouton-Rothschild or even 1961 Latour.

"I have never tasted anything like it," said Tod Mostero, the winemaker of Dominus and Ulysses wine estates, when discussing his perfect 2013 Dominus. "It is the mystery element that blows my mind... It is beyond definition of anything. It is like pure spirit or light."



There really is something emotional about tasting these young great reds from Napa. Of course, I was not tasting the great classics of Napa when they were first released. But I grew up tasting them with my father at our house in Los Angeles. My dad regularly drank such classics as 1958 Beaulieu Vineyard BV Georges de Latour Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon as well as other vintages of the wine from the 1960s. I am lucky enough to still drink some of these wines in Hong Kong including such great Napa cabernets from the 1970s as Heitz Martha's Vineyard 1974 and 1979 Diamond Creek Red Rock Terrace.

I have a feeling that some of Napa's great reds of 2013 will be the same benchmarks in the future.



What I really appreciate in so many of the outstanding 2013 Napa reds is their cool, fresh character. They are rich and ripe but the freshness is always there. Winemakers say that the 2013 vintage had extremely even growing season, never too hot or too cold. There were no high temperatures - heat spikes - in August or September. The grapes ripened to perfection with thick skins and small berries to assure plenty of tannins. Crop size was generous.

It's interesting to note that most winemakers said that the tannin content of the 2013s was about the same as the top wines of 2012. Yet, the 2012s show much more fruit and delicacy than the 2013s. The 2012s are delicious to drink now and will be through their life.



"Technically the 2012 and 2013 are similar but the perception of the wine is different," said Chris Cooney, winemaker of Dana Estates. "The 2012 is a plusher and boarder red while the 2013 is more structured."

Added Dana's general manager Peter Perry: "Wine aficionados will gravitate to 2013 but more people will probably prefer 2012. If you have to drink a vintage young and the 2012s are that. And don't forget the excellent 2014".

I agree with Peter's evaluation. The 2012s are so delicious to drink now and they really are crowd pleasers in every sense of the word. The few 2014s I have tasted from barrel are also knockouts. Yet the 2013 is the vintage of Napa Valley reds that I want to buy my own, cellar and drink. So many exciting bottles of 2013 were made. Buy some.



Photos (from top to bottom): James tasting a range of wines in Napa Valley; A cork of a Dana Estates wine; The Colgin Cellars wine library; Tod Mostero, winemaker and vineyard manager of Dominus and Ulysses in the vineyards; Mountain vineyards in the Prichard Hill Section of Napa Valley; Old bottles of Beaulieu Vineyard BV Georges de Latour Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon; Nick Gislason, technical director of Screaming Eagle.

TASTING REPORT: NAPA'S AMAZING 2013 VINTAGE

January 16th, 2016

Below are about 400 reviews of 2013 and 2012 Napa Valley reds. I finished tasting them last week while in Napa. As I wrote in the [tasting report](#), the 2013 vintage is one of the greatest ever for Napa Valley while the 2012 is very close in overall quality. The 2012s are so delicious to drink now and they really are crowd pleasers in every sense of the word. The few 2014s that I have tasted from barrel are also knockouts. Yet the 2013 is the vintage of Napa Valley reds that I want to buy my own, cellar and drink.

CLOS DU VAL CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY STAGS LEAP DISTRICT

COUNTRY *United States*

REGION *California - Napa Valley*

VINTAGE *2012*

SCORE *94*

TASTING NOTES

Unctuous red with blueberry, blackberry and hints of vanilla on the nose and palate. Full body, very fine tannins and a fresh, clean and beautiful finish. Better in 2018 but already a joy to taste.

CLOS DU VAL CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY

COUNTRY *United States*

REGION *California - Napa Valley*

VINTAGE *2013*

SCORE *92*

TASTING NOTES

A silky and tight red with tile, berry and dusty aromas and flavors. Medium to full body, firm tannins and a fresh, clean finish. Refined and racy. Drink or hold.