

Napa Valley's 2014 vintage is one of its best years in the last two decades

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Walking to the tasting at Larkmead

I've now tasted more than 400 reds from Napa – mostly cabernet sauvignon-based — and I have to say that they are extremely attractive. Though they are slightly [overshadowed by the magical 2013s](#), this is a vintage not to miss. And even beyond cabernet, from syrah and to pinot, the wines show a wonderful aromatic tension, balanced palate, and vivid finish.

I wrote earlier this year how the [2014s showed their true character of their respective soils and microclimates](#). Profiles were more about the vineyards they came from, rather than the weather patterns of the year. It helps that heat spikes were not a factor during the grape growing season. The wines show a harmony in fruit and structure that will allow early drinking as well as aging. It's much better to drink the 2014s or 2012s now and leave the powerful 2013s to mellow with bottle age. I am a huge fan of 2013, which produced reds that show a superb structure that harkens back to the great vintages of the 1970s, 1960s, and 1950s.

“There is a lot to like in 2014,” said Lou Kapsandy Jr. of Kapsandy Family Winery. “I find the wines very focused. They may not have the flash or the richness of the 2012 or 2013, but they are very focused. They are very balanced.”



Tasting at Abreu with winemaker Brad Grimes

I've also tasted a number of 2015 barrel samples, a vintage marked by a greatly reduced crop level (about 30% to 40% less on average) and a short and hot grape growing season. I am cautiously impressed. I thought that the reds would be old-school style with high alcohols and raisin character, but the two dozen wines I have tasted show focus and tension without the high-octane sensation. “The 2015 was a very compressed growing season so the reds have more tannin and acidity than expected,” said Thomas Brown, the respected winemaker of Schrader as well as other wines. “The wines do not have an overripe character. It reminds me of the 2005s.”

Many will remember this vintage as the year of the earthquake, which wrecked havoc in most of Napa Valley on August 24. Besides structural and ancillary damage, some winemakers believe that the seismic trauma changed the water table, giving a thrust of water to deep rooted vines a few weeks before the harvest. This reduced the effects of the drought in 2014, so they say. I can't say for sure whether that's really the case, but I can say that the 2014s are sensational. Go get some. —*James Suckling, CEO/Editor*

Clos du Val Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Hironnelle Vineyard 2014

Score: 91

Aromas of blackcurrants and hints of dried flowers follow through to a medium body, firm and lightly chewy tannins and a medium finish. Give it two to three years to soften and come together.

Clos du Val Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Estate 2014

Score: 91

Fresh currant-leaf and berry character follow through to a medium body, a solid center palate of fruit and soft, delicate tannins. Consistently an outstanding bottle. Drink or hold.