Uncovering the Best Values in California Cabernet Sauvignon

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Every fall I publish my big Napa Valley report and every year I hear the same comment from readers. Quite understandably, consumers are increasingly frustrated by the continuing escalation of prices for Napa Valley’s finest wines. But top-flight California Cabernet doesn’t have to cost a fortune. These are three rules of thumb for getting the most out of your budget, along with a selection of wines that deliver exceptional quality for the money.

1) Focus on Napa Valley’s ‘Super-Seconds’

A total obsession with quality and heated competition has pushed Napa Valley’s most ambitious estates to bottle only the very best under their top label(s). What about the rest of the production? At the top properties, it is often terrific. These wines all deliver superb quality and relative value. The best of the wines below compare favorably to the flagship labels at many other estates. With the exception of David Abreu’s red blend Rothwell Hyde, all of these wines can be had for less than $100 a bottle.

Top Picks

Abreu Rothwell Hyde
Blankiet Prince of Hearts
Bryant Family Vineyards DB4
Dalla Valle Collina dalla Valle
Dominus Cabernet Sauvignon Napanook
Joseph Phelps Cabernet Sauvignon
O’Shaughnessy Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
Shafer Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five
Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Lyndenhurst
Seavey Cabernet Sauvignon Caravina
2) Stretch Your Horizons

There is no getting around the fact that top Napa Valley Cabernets are often expensive, sometimes painfully so. Readers willing to look beyond Napa Valley’s high-rent district will find plenty of far more affordable choices. Knights Valley, which lies in Sonoma County and borders Napa Valley’s Calistoga AVA, is a terrific source for affordable Cabernet Sauvignon, as is nearby Alexander Valley. The same is true of Sonoma’s newly created Moon Mountain AVA, which is perched on the Sonoma side of Mt. Veeder. The Santa Cruz Mountains produces Cabernets of rare distinction, minerality and pedigree. In Santa Barbara, Cabernets can be deep, pungent and full of earthy/savory character, while Paso Robles yields Cabernets rich with voluptuous, racy fruit. In short, the choices are many.

Top Picks

**Sonoma:** Anakota Cabernet Sauvignon Helena Montana, Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Montecillo Vineyard, Beringer Cabernet Sauvignon Knights Valley Reserve, Dehlinger Cabernet Sauvignon, Kamen Cabernet Sauvignon

**Santa Cruz Mountains:** Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon Estate, Mount Eden Cabernet Sauvignon, Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Fellom Ranch

**Santa Barbara:** foxen 7200 Cabernet Sauvignon Vogelzang, Goodland Wines Cabernet Sauvignon Happy Canyon, Star Lane Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, The Paring Red Blend

**Paso Robles:** DAOU Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, Foxglove Cabernet Sauvignon, Viña Robles Cabernet Sauvignon Estate
One of the fermentation rooms at Heitz Cellar, St. Helena

3) Go Old-School

Much of the explosion in pricing of Napa Valley has been driven by small-production, high-octane Cabernet Sauvignons made by owners with deep pockets. It’s only within the last five years or so that some of the more traditionally leaning producers have been rediscovered. Prices of the best wines in this style have gone up in recent years, but there is still plenty of value to be found.

Top Picks

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

Dunn Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

Dyer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

Forman Cabernet Sauvignon

Frog’s Leap Cabernet Sauvignon

Heitz Cellar Cabernet Sauvignon

Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon
The view from the newly renovated tasting rooms at Joseph Phelps, St. Helena

The Best Values in California Cabernet

★ wines that deliver an especially compelling combination of quality, personality and value

$100 and under

Anakota Cabernet Sauvignon Helena Dakota
Anakota Cabernet Sauvignon Helena Montana
Antica Napa Valley – Antinori Cabernet Sauvignon Townsend Vineyard
Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Fellom Ranch
★Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Montecillo Vineyard
Barnett Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Cyrus Ryan Vineyard
Behrens Family Winery Cabernet Sauvignon Moulds Vineyard
★Blankiet Prince of Hearts
Brandlin Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon
★Bryant DB 4 (Proprietary Red)
Carter Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Fortuna Vineyard
Chimney Rock Winery Cabernet Sauvignon Clone 7
Cimarossa Cabernet Sauvignon Rian
Clos du Val Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District
Corison Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
Dalla Valle Collina dalla Valle
Davies Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon J. Davies
Dyer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon
Fisher Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Mountain Estate Vineyard
Forman Cabernet Sauvignon
Kamen Cabernet Sauvignon
Keever Cabernet Sauvignon
Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon
Moone-Tsai Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
Nickel & Nickel Cabernet Sauvignon John C. Sullenger Vineyard
Oakville Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon
Paul Hobbs Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
Pride Mountain Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Vintner Select
Robert Craig Winery Cabernet Mt. Veeder
Shafer Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five
Mark Herold Cabernet Sauvignon (Brown Label)
O'Shaughnessy Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain
Outpost Cabernet Sauvignon
Stonestreet Cabernet Sauvignon Rockfall
The Grade Cabernet Sauvignon Estate
Wallis Family Estate Cabernet Sauvignon

$75 and under

Ampère Cabernet Sauvignon Ampère Pine Mountain Vineyards
Anderson's Conn Valley Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Estate Reserve
Beringer Cabernet Sauvignon Knights Valley Reserve
Beta Cabernet Sauvignon Chuy Vineyard
★★ Chappellet Cabernet Sauvignon Signature
Cliff Lede Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District
David Ramey Cabernet Sauvignon
★★ DAOU Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve
David Arthur Cabernet Sauvignon Tre Vigneti
★★ Detert Cabernet Sauvignon
★★ Dominus Cabernet Sauvignon Napanook
Drinkward-Peschon Cabernet Sauvignon Entre Deux Mères
★★ Dunn Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
Emerson Brown Cabernet Sauvignon
★★ Frog’s Leap Cabernet Sauvignon
Grassini Cabernet Sauvignon
★★ Jack Quinn Cabernet Sauvignon Agave Rose Vineyard
Joel Gott Wines Cabernet Sauvignon
★★ Joseph Phelps Cabernet Sauvignon
La Jota Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain
Lail Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Blueprint
Mt. Brave Cabernet Sauvignon Mt. Veeder
★★ Mount Eden Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon
Myriad Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Three Twins Vineyard

★ O’Shaughnessy Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

Ramey Cabernet Sauvignon

★ Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon Estate

★ Rivers-Marie Cabernet Sauvignon

★ Seavey Cabernet Sauvignon Caravina

Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Lyndenhurst

★ Teeter-Totter Cabernet Sauvignon

Turley Cabernet Sauvignon Montecillo

Vineyard 29 Cabernet Sauvignon Cru

$50 and under

Arrowood Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County

Beckmen Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon

★ Bedrock Wine Co. Cabernet Sauvignon Montecillo Vineyard

Brander Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve

Crossbarn rossbarn Sauvignon Reservevignon (Sonoma)

★ Dehlinger Cabernet Sauvignon

Dehlinger Claret

★ Domaine Eden Cabernet Sauvignon

★ Goodland Wines Cabernet Sauvignon Happy Canyon

Grassi Cabernet Sauvignon

foxen 7200 Cabernet Sauvignon Vogelzang

★ Heitz Cellar Cabernet Sauvignon

Inglenook Cabernet Sauvignon 1882

Kendall-Jackson Cabernet Sauvignon Grand Reserve
Lewelling Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Wight Vineyard
Lone Madrone Cabernet Sauvignon
Peter Franus Wine Company Cabernet Sauvignon
Philip Togni Cabernet Sauvignon Tanbark Hill Vineyard
Robert Mondavi Winery Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
Somerston Cabernet Sauvignon
Scherrer Cabernet Sauvignon Scherrer Vineyard
★★ Star Lane Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon
Stonestreet Cabernet Sauvignon Estate

$25 and under

★★ Foxglove Cabernet Sauvignon
Louis Martini Cabernet Sauvignon
★★ The Paring Red Wine
Viña Robles Cabernet Sauvignon Estate