

Napa Valley...King of Cab

by Butch Steadman
Dorignac's Director of Wine & Spirits



I love California Cabernet. And, while many winemaking regions produce excellent examples of this noble red grape, for me there is nothing like a glass of Napa Valley Cab. Obviously, I'm not the only big fan as Cabernet Sauvignon is the most widely planted red grape in Napa Valley, where it is called the king of red wine grapes.

The most famous wine region in California, Napa Valley began winemaking in the 1830's when George C. Yount recognized the areas wine grape growing potential and planted vineyards in what today is know as Yountville. In 1861, Charles Krug founded the first commercial winery and by the late 1880's Napa Valley had more than 160 vineyards.

In the early 1900's, Napa Valley experienced two devastating blows; the infestation of phylloxera, a root louse which killed many of the areas vines, and prohibition. While these two events shut down many wineries and halted the areas wine industry, it was only a temporary setback. After WWII wine production took off again.

Napa's wine industry continued to blossom, but it was not until 1976 that the region saw national recognition and acclaim when Stags Leap Wine Cellars 1973 S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon took top prize in the Paris Tasting, beating many renowned Bordeaux wines and shocking wine experts around the world.

Today, the area boasts over 250 wineries and has more than 40,000 acres of vineyards. The climate, soil and growing conditions lend themselves beautifully to growing a variety of top-quality wine grapes including Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Zinfandel and Syrah among others. However, for the most part it is the reds that truly stand out with 70% of the land planted to red grape varieties, nearly half of which are Cabernet Sauvignon.

For me, what sets Napa Valley Cabernet apart from others is its robust, yet accessible style. I find that many Cabernet based wines from other regions need years of aging to truly be enjoyed. While Napa Cabernet certainly have the ability to age 10 years plus, most are still round and supple enough to enjoy young.

Cabernet Sauvignon is a complex grape capable of producing wines that age beautifully. While their aromas and flavors vary from region to region, common descriptors include cherry, black currant, cedar, cassis, spice, tobacco, fresh herbs, bell pepper, mint and leather.

Young California Cabernet is the perfect match for grilled steak and pot roast, while an older mellow Cabernet will compliment prime rib, lamb and veal chops. Napa Cabernet also pairs well with cheeses including Brie, Danish Blue, Camembert and Sharp Cheddar.

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