

WINE News

*We're going home for the holidays:
Our domestic wine buyers' favorite
wines from California and Oregon.*



DECEMBER 15, 2014 FEATURES

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West Coast Wines We Love

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

These years just go by too fast! It seems like only yesterday we opened our first K&L retail store in Millbrae. That opening date was actually December 31, 1976! Many of you were not even born yet. To put it into perspective, Jimmy Carter was our president and three new companies had just opened their doors: Apple, Microsoft, and Oracle. Our big sellers that opening day were cigarettes at 50 cents a pack and Ancient Age bourbon. We did sell a few bottles of special wines for that evening, including gallons of California Chablis and half gallons of cream sherry.

This December edition is dedicated to some of the best California and Oregon wines we have in our stores. Why? Well, it is our biggest selling category (just ahead of France) and our great buyers Bryan, Michael, Christie, and Trey have done an excellent job of finding the best wines for you. You won't find the "Chablis" or the cream sherry in our stores, but we have many great domestic wines for you. All of these are great gifts, and many of them are ready to enjoy now at a Christmas or New Year's celebration. Please note our special co-branded wines that we offer.

TREY'S TOP PICKS *In West Coast Pinot Noir and Chardonnay*

2013 Kalinda "Clone 828 Reserve" Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$29.99) This was one of the best finds from our domestic buying team this past year! The fruit for this wine comes from a cooler vineyard site with a north-facing slope. Dijon clone 828 usually matures early and show lots of structure, color and complexity, as well as great acidity, red and blue fruits and palate presence. Because of its roundness and completeness, 828 makes an excellent single-clone bottling. Exotic, spicy and ripe aromas jump from the glass. The mouthfeel is lush, explosive and layered, and the finish is spicy, silky and long. This is flat-out delicious Pinot Noir!



2013 Au Contraire Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$16.99) Au Contraire is a brand new project that has turned out a fabulous debut Chardonnay from Russian River Valley.

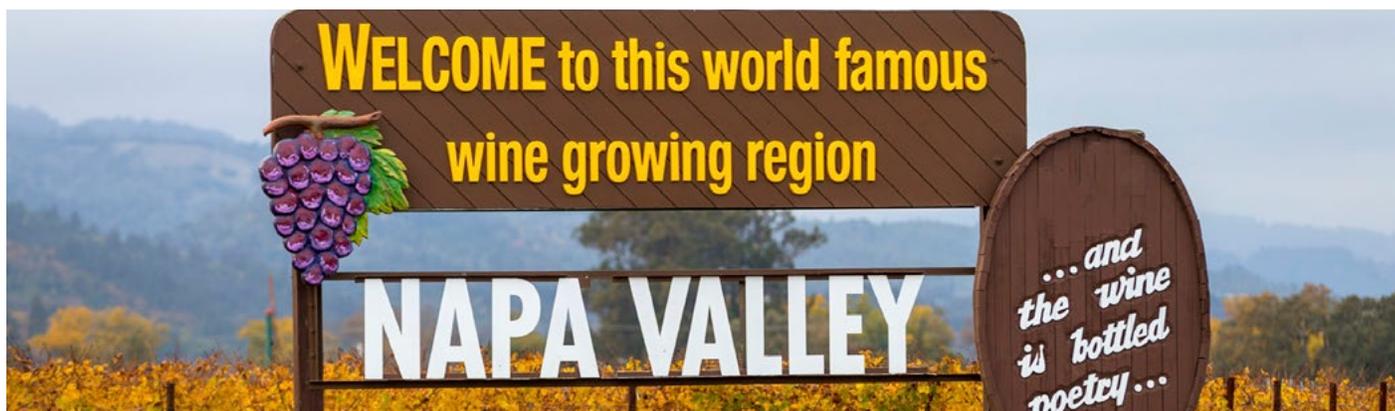
The fruit is sourced from vineyards in the heart of the Russian River Valley appellation, and also from Green Valley of the Russian River Valley, closer to the Sonoma Coast. I love the balance and freshness of this wine. In the mouth the wine is creamy, with hints of tropical fruit, lime and toast. Mouthwatering acidity is perfectly harmonized with the fruit and the finish is long and lingering. Whether you're taking one to a holiday celebration or opening a few for your own bash, this is a choice everyone will love. Excellent buy!



2013 Brewer-Clifton/K&L Wine Merchants "B-C. Kessler-Haak" Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$39.99)

Fans of Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir will love this wine. From the Kessler Haak vineyard, this is loaded with red fruits, Asian spice and cola notes. The texture is lush and round while the finish is supple and smooth. Even though this Pinot is still young it is drinking great right now and should develop even more complexity with extra time in the bottle. A very cool wine to serve friends as it is a unique item that can only be found at K&L!

—Trey Beffa



Napa Valley Holiday Favorites and Party Picks

By Christie Brunick

It's that time of year again...to splurge and save! Before you go to your Rolodex to look up the same old big-name wine brands you buy for your company gifts every year, give these a run for your money!

Ehlers Estate

One of my all-time favorite Napa Valley wineries, one that has a small production but a great reputation, is Ehlers Estate, located in St. Helena. Grapes have been cultivated on this coveted site since the mid-1800s. Founded by the Leducq family, Ehlers Estate is now 100% organically farmed and is certified Biodynamic. The wines scream sophistication, polish, and perfection. And better yet, 100% of proceeds from sales of Ehlers wines go directly to the Leducq Foundation, created in 1996 to support international cardiovascular research.

The first of three wines I'm going to mention is hardly ever released to retail accounts, but being the savvy buyers we happen to be, we got our hands on a tiny amount of **2013 Ehlers Estate Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$27.99)**. With aromas of fresh summer pomelo fruit and hints of musk melon, this hits all the right notes. Bright and fresh but not lean and thin, this sees only neutral oak and is very lifted and seamless, not grassy like so many Napa Sauvignon Blancs can be. Great juicy acidity brings balance and intrigue to a wine that can be enjoyed with or without food. The **2011 Ehlers Estate "One Twenty Over Eighty" St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon (\$35.99)** is aged in 50% new French oak and blended with 8% Merlot and 7% Cabernet Franc. This wine will be sold out within the month, so act fast! The color is a deep ruby in the glass, bursting with aromas of blackberry, raspberry, chocolate covered black cherries, and rhubarb. There is amazing integration of oak here, fine tannins, juicy acidity, and not a touch of heat from alcohol. I love the polish, food friendliness, and balance of this wine, but it still delivers that velvety soft texture we all love from St. Helena. Saving the best for last, the **2011 Ehlers Estate "1886" St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon (\$97.99)** is the estate's smallest-production wine, with the most Bordeaux-like style and ageworthy quality. When I put my nose into the glass it's like I can actually smell the minerality of this vineyard, like wet rain on gravelly rocks with sweet herbs growing between the cracks. I'm so impressed with how pure and straightforward this wine is, simply what great Napa Cab should be; elegant and powerful at the same time. Please have this on Christmas Eve with your red meat of choice—you won't be disappointed.

Frog's Leap

A few weeks ago I had lunch with one of the legends of Napa Valley, Mr. Frog's Leap himself, John Williams, who has more passion for his ideal Napa wine than almost any other winemaker I've known. Williams wanted to be able to drink his wine with his food and have it be in perfect harmony. And today, his wines are exactly where he wants them to be: perfectly food-friendly, interesting, ageworthy, and varietally correct.

I would especially like to mention the **2012 Frog's Leap Napa Valley Zinfandel (\$27.99)**, because this is how Zin was made back in the good old days. Bright and focused fruit with wonderful acid and not over-oaked and overly alcoholic like so many of its counterparts. This is a Zin that will never go out of style! Bright and savory purple fruit and herb aromas and fresh blackberry, currant, and cassis on the palate with slight hints of tobacco leaf and cocoa nibs on the finish. This has juiciness without over-extraction and wonderful integration of oak tannins. 91 points *W&S*.

Spellbound

The last two wines are my value holiday staff picks because they come from a great family in the business that knows the quality-to-price ratio well. Robert Mondavi Jr. hits it out of the ballpark again with the **2013 Spellbound California Chardonnay (\$11.99)**. This is the richest, creamiest, toastiest vintage of this wine I've tasted! You really cannot beat the value here. Lots of buttered popcorn, crème brûlée, caramel-dipped apple, and freshly buttered toast. This is a lot of wine for the price! If you're a Cali-Chard fan this is one not to miss. I'm obsessed with Robert Mondavi Jr.'s latest addition to the Spellbound family.

Finally, if you love California Cab, but don't want to pay sky-high Napa Valley prices, you've met your match! The **2013 Spellbound California Cabernet Sauvignon (\$11.99)** is sourced from some of the best vineyards in California, but because of the family's history and business, this Cab doesn't cost an arm and a leg for high quality juice. This is a great everyday red full of richness and depth, and soft enough on the palate to drink on its own or with food. Supple tannins and acid make it a super juicy, food-friendly crowd pleaser. BBQ anyone?

A TASTE OF 2013 *From California and Oregon*

While 2012 is currently the vintage to talk about from both California and Oregon, both states have had a good run over the last couple of years. In fact, 2013 is said by many to be a better vintage in both states. There are a few excellent 2013 wines currently available:

2013 Matthiasson “Linda Vista Vineyard” Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$23.99) Steve and Jill Matthiasson are on all the sommeliers’ and reporters’ hot list, and the San Francisco Chronicle named Steve winemaker of the year in 2013. The fruit from this wine comes from the Oak Knoll District. As per Matthiasson’s style, the wine is very crisp and clean with pure fruit, low alcohol and high acidity and minerality. Due to the high acid vintage, 40% of the wine was allowed to go through malolactic fermentation.

2013 Evesham Wood Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$18.99) Evesham Wood was founded by the Raney family in 1986; the winery has been one of the top producers of fine Pinot Noir ever since. In 2010, the Raney family decided to sell to friends, the Nuccios, who continue the legacy. In order to emphasize terroir, the winery only sources fruit from dry-farmed vineyards. With lively red fruit, an abundance of cinnamon and spice and a lovely backbone of acidity, this is great value Willamette Valley Pinot Noir.



2013 Cep (Peay Vineyards) Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$27.99) Winemaker Vanessa Wong and brothers Andy and Nick Peay continue to produce excellent wines for their second label, CEP. This wine shows beautiful bright red fruits with lovely spice and integrated acidity. Peay’s vineyards are on the true Sonoma Coast just four miles from the Pacific Ocean. Pinots from this site consistently offer great minerality and a distinct earthiness. The wine is made up of fruit that didn’t make the cut for the Peay label but still shows beauty and elegance. This is one of the best values in Pinot Noir from California, drinking way above its price tag.

2013 Eyrie Vineyards Dundee Hills Pinot Gris (\$16.99) Eyrie was the first winery to ever produce Pinot Gris in the U.S., and Jason Lett has continued his father David’s brilliance at making this amazing wine. Fresh, vibrant and clean with lovely citrus fruit. A joy to drink and a wine everybody will love.

—Mike Jordan

STANDOUT CABS *From an Incredible Year*

The consensus is that 2012 is a Napa Cabernet vintage for the ages, with wines that show rich, ripe fruit, long-term aging potential, and great mass appeal. In addition, higher production than 2011 means there will be plenty available for those interested in storing precious cases for future enjoyment. Here are some of my favorite 2012 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons.

2012 Von Strasser “Rudy” Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.99) Wines from this esteemed estate often go for over \$50, which makes this \$20 namesake offering quite the standout. Rudy von Strasser, co-owner and winemaker, was the first ever American intern to work at Château Lafite-Rothschild. The “Rudy” Cabernet Sauvignon is one of our best values in domestic red wines, with notes of delicious blackberry and blueberry fruit, light spice, and a soft mouthfeel. It is a killer at parties or even for a casual night at home.

2012 Buehler Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$21.99) For a juicier, ripe, and showy Cabernet, look no further than Buehler. Flavors of dark chocolate, cassis, and plum tantalize the palate. The Buehler Cab spends 18 months in French and American oak. The vines for this wine are over

30 years old, and they help provide a nice depth and length to the finish. I enjoy this immensely for the price point.



2012 Ladera Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$34.99) Ladera has existed in its current form since 2000, but the winery has stood since 1886. The winery was entirely renovated and great success has followed. Their 2012 Napa Cab, blended with all four other Bordeaux varietals, shows great structure and balance between ripe fruit and earthiness. A lovely mélange of nuanced flavors and aromas burst out of the glass. Intense and complex.

2012 Joseph Phelps Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.99) From the same vineyards as their flagship bottling, Insignia, Joseph Phelps also offers this entry-level Cabernet. This 2012 bottling is a stellar deal for \$60, given that the current Insignia release goes for more than three times that amount. The wine is full-bodied and intensely expressive with notes of tobacco, cedar, and dense, darker fruit. Due to the sweet and silky tannins, it is enjoyable now with light decanting, or worth cellaring for 10-plus years. 91-93 points AG.

—Patrick Cu

Collaborations: Teamwork Pays Off

By Bryan Brick

The K&L co-branded project continues to grow. It's an opportunity to work with some of our favorite wineries in the United States. They supply great fruit and years of winemaking expertise, and we help out with our team of experienced palates and an intimate knowledge of our customers. The results speak for themselves and the values we offer in this area are outstanding.



2013 Bethel Heights/K&L Wine Merchants Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir (\$24.99) On our recent trip to Oregon this summer we certainly found plenty of great wines and met with a multitude of amazingly talented people. Many of the wines we found on that trip have already come in and sold out. One of the most exciting opportunities from that trip was to work closely with our friends at Bethel Heights to put together a Pinot Noir exclusive to K&L as part of our burgeoning co-branded project. This is a blend of the young, vibrant fruit of the

bordering Bjornson Vineyard, planted in 1996, and the more nuanced, ethereal fruit from the old Wädenswil block at Bethel Heights Estate, planted in 1977. We thought it was a perfect middle ground between the sappy, rich black fruits of Bjornson and the more earthy, sage and subtle red fruits from the Estate. We loved how the nose really spoke of classic Oregon Pinot, focusing on forest floor, *sous bois* and floral tones rather than chunky fruit. The wine is seamless in texture at this point, with a feminine frame and well-integrated acid/tannin interplay. A bit of aeration, either by untwisting the convenient Stelvin closure or popping this into a decanter, will really help to heighten the lovely tones of loganberry, evergreen, black currant, white sage, new leather and lavender found here. Thanks to the entire Casteel family for helping make this wonderful wine that we couldn't be prouder to have our name on!

2013 Ancient Peaks/K&L Wine Merchants Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon (\$24.99) Last year's Ancient Peaks/K&L Zinfandel bottling was such a hit that we could have done another vintage and we all would have been ecstatic. However, I really wanted to show off the winery's incredible Cabernet vines and I didn't know if they had enough Cab to let us have some. Turns out they did. Now we just had to blend it! The good news is that all the components were fantastic, a true testament to just how great of a job Ancient Peaks is doing right now. What we agreed upon for the final blend was as follows: 80% Cabernet Sauvignon from two separate blocks, 10% Malbec to add mid-palate weight and density, 8% Merlot for finishing complexity and length, and 2% Cabernet Franc. This blend was easily the best on the table, showing both the style of Ancient Peaks and the collective palate of K&L. This has a well-integrated and pretty nose of plum and cassis. The medium-full weighted palate showed plenty of ripe, plush blue/red fruit interplay along with tobacco, gravel and pencil lead. Bright and juicy with a lovely layer of oak toast, adding a nice confectionary spice to the long and energetic finish. We couldn't be happier with the wine and we truly hope you enjoy it as much as we do.



2011 Qupé "Sawyer Lindquist Vineyard - K&L Selection" Edna Valley Syrah (\$21.99) Arguably the most popular of the co-branded wines among our staff last year was the 2010 version of this wine, so it had a lot to live up to this year. The good news is that the staff is every bit as excited about it this year, and we hope that enthusiasm will rub off on you. Bob Lindquist was more than happy to work with us again this year and put together this 100% Syrah bottling from biodynamically grown vines in the cool Edna Valley appellation. Unmistakably Syrah from the first sniff, this has a nose of bold cracked black pepper, fried bacon, fresh sage and licorice ropes. This lovely Syrah has plenty of power but no gruffness, sort of like a well manicured beard, it's burly but attractive. Full of complex and intertwined flavors of beef blood, Asian plum, black currants and a load of smoky, savory goodness. Long and finishing with good energy and lift this is a Syrah that certainly stands out from the pack and overdelivers on its price tag. Perfect for hearty winter braises and potluck gatherings.

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We host regular evening and Saturday tastings at each K&L store as well as many special events throughout the year. For the complete calendar go to KLWines.com/Local-Events.

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