

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

January-February 2017

Number Sixty-Seven

- ❖ *Round Two From Kalin Cellars- America's Great Iconoclast Traditionalist.* (pages 1-14)
- ❖ *Château Musar- Lebanon's Trailblazing Icon and the World's Most Heroic Wine.* (pages 15-31)
- ❖ *Recently-Tasted Wines From the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise.* (pages 32-48)
- ❖ *The Stunning 1978 Vintage of California Cabernet Sauvignon- Nearly Forty Years Out and At the Peak of Its Powers.* (pages 49-61)
- ❖ *The Loire Valley- Another Slice of the Fine 2015 Vintage and Lots of Old Chinon.* (pages 62-93)
- ❖ *Spain and Portugal- New Releases and Plenty of Mature Wines.* (pages 94-153)
- ❖ *Richard Olney's Extraordinary Life In Wine and Haute Cuisine.* (pages 154-163)

Coming Attractions

- ❖ *Thirteen Years Out, How the Superb 2004 Piemonte Vintage is Faring In Bottle.*
- ❖ *Cathy Corison's Understated and Utterly Refined Rutherford Bench Cabernets.*
- ❖ *François Cotat's Superb, Old School and Very Long-Lived Sancerres (Rosé Too).*
- ❖ *A Taste For Campania's Beautiful and Ageworthy White Wines.*
- ❖ *Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils' Classically-Styled Red Burgundy.*
- ❖ *Anselme Selosse of Champagne Jacques Selosse- Paving the Way in Avize.*
- ❖ *Ric Forman, Gérard Boulay, The 2016 German Vintage, Château Pichon-Lalande, Clos Rougeard, The 1959 Bordeaux Vintage, The Hill of Corton, Champagne Bruno Paillard, Nicole Chanrion, Château Ausone, Off the Beaten-Path Italian Wines, Château Montrose, More 2015 Burgundy, Special Club, The 1971 Bordeaux Vintage, The Bi-Annual Champagne Report and Great Old Giacosas.*

View From the Cellar is published bi-monthly by John Gilman, who is solely responsible for its content. Electronic subscriptions are available for \$120 per year (\$220 for two years), available at www.viewfromthecellar.com. Inquiries may also be emailed to john@viewfromthecellar.com. Copyright 2017 by John B. Gilman, all rights reserved. Content may be utilized by members of the wine trade and/or media as long as either View From the Cellar or John Gilman are fully credited. Please do not share.

THE MAGNIFICENT 1978 VINTAGE OF CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON



The 1978 vintage in California was one of the finest years in what may well have been the greatest decade of wine production in the history of the state. The decade of the 1970s is replete with legendary years, including 1970, 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1978, and as the years have rolled by, none of these vintages have lost any of their luster. When one considers that the drought years of 1976 and 1977 have also aged long and gracefully, it is pretty hard not to conclude that the decade of the 1970s was indeed, the finest in the history of California wine. In many ways, this decade in California wine was analogous to the decade of the 1980s in Bordeaux or the 2000s in Burgundy. It is not at all surprising that the world would first come to truly take note of the quality of California wines in the 1970s. Amongst all of these excellent 1970s' vintages, the three that have stood out most prominently in popular imagination are 1970, 1974 and 1978, and for many years, connoisseurs of California wine have debated the relative merits of each of these exceptional years and lobbied for one over the other at the top of the list of the decade's finest vintages. And of course, in this era, the grape that was king in the vineyards of northern California was certainly cabernet sauvignon, and when one speaks today of the relative merits of each of these fine vintages, it is through the prism of cabernet sauvignon that we take stock of each year's evolution and rightful spot in the hierarchy of California's

greatest years. As memory fades a bit with the passing of time, the excellence of some of these other vintages has receded a bit from the consciousness of many wine lovers, so that today, it is usually the vintages of 1974 and 1978 that are spoken of with the most reverence.

The 1978 vintage was the first return to a “normal” growing season in northern California after two years of extreme drought in both 1976 and 1977. The back to back drought years produced very low yields and the vines stored up unharnessed energy to share with the 1978 growing season, allowing for a generous crop size to be brought into the cellars at harvest time. The vintage started out slowly, with a rare wet spring, but warm and consistent growing conditions prevailed from early summer on up to right before harvest. Just prior to the start of picking, a heat spike arrived and pushed sugars up and wineries scrambled to bring in grapes as quickly as possible to avoid notes of *sur maturité* in the wines. Ripeness levels ended up generally perfect, with only a few late pickers suffering with overripe grapes, and since the very earliest days, the cabernet sauvignons from the 1978 vintage have been characterized by great purity and elegance to their fruit expressions, with plenty of depth and power, but also a velvety palate impression and suave tannins that made many of them fairly accessible after only a decade of bottle age. The 1982 newsletter from Heitz Wine Cellars, heralding the release of their 1978 cabernet bottlings, demonstrates the early appeal that this vintage had, as here discussing the '78 Martha's Vineyard, Joe Heitz wrote that “the 1978 Martha's shows itself true to variety and to the style for which Heitz wines from Martha's Vineyard are known and valued: a slightly minty bouquet, augmented by rich Cabernet Sauvignon varietal fruit and limousin oak,” with the wine “medium to full-bodied” and “still showing some signs of youth, but very drinkable and well rounded.” He concluded that “the wine has a bright future and will continue to show its elegance with further aging.” This description is equally apt for the 1978 cabernet sauvignon crop as a whole, with all of the key players from this generation turning out simply superb wines that offered some early appeal, but with the beautiful balance and depth of fruit to also stand the test of time and improve with long-term aging.

For many years I have wanted to write a feature on the 1978 California cabernet vintage, as this was the great previous vintage that was closest to my entry into the wine trade, when I began my wine journey in the early 1980s. There were still a few 1978s poking around on merchants' shelves when I was getting my feet wet in the business, so I had a chance to taste a few 1978 cabernets and zinfandels in their early days (it was a terrific vintage for zinfandel as well and some of the greatest bottles of zin I have ever tasted were from the '78 vintage), but most '78 cabernets had already disappeared into collectors' cellars by the time I was getting established in the trade. However, I had the pleasure to attend a horizontal cabernet tasting from the vintage on their tenth anniversary in 1988 and can still vividly recall just how beautiful the wines were showing at age ten! When I later bought a fair bit of California cabernet sauvignon for my own cellar from the fine string of vintages from 1984 to 1987, it was with hopes that these younger vintages would match the aging brilliance that the 1978s had achieved from the previous decade. While it is probably too early to say whether or not the best wines from that four year run in the mid-1980s will reach the same levels as the stunning 1978s, the reality is that the world of California wine was changing so dramatically by the decade of the 1980s that even if the best wines from this fine four year stretch turn out to maximize their early potential, they are still likely to be a bit stylistically different from the glorious 1978s- with the exception of the handful of producers of the mid-'80s who had established their wineries in previous decades and

had not succumbed the already mounting pressures of the 1980s to change anything stylistically. So, while I still have high expectations for many of the top cabernets from the 1984 to 1987 period (though most are still too young to have reached their true apogees), I do not hold out the same hope I had when I was buying these wines that they will one day be the second coming of the 1978s.

Consequently, over the last several years, I have been picking up 1978 cabernets whenever I spotted them at auction, with an eye towards eventually putting together this report. It has been a lot of fun locating 1978s buried in auction listings and trying to secure well-stored bottles, and my collection has grown slowly, but nicely with this great cabernet vintage over the last half dozen years. But, these wines do not appear with any great frequency (as so many collectors who own the vintage fully realize the quality of the wines and are loathe to part with them) and it has been a slow, albeit rewarding process to build up a representative cross-section of the vintage. However, as the second half of 2016 was starting to wind towards its conclusion, I was still missing from my own cellar some of the most famous bottlings from the vintage and eventually reached out to my friend Mark Golodetz (whose cellar is deeper and broader than mine) about pooling resources and organizing a 1978 cabernet tasting. At the very end of October, only a few days before I left for my three weeks in Burgundy, we set about to taste through a fine lineup of the fabled 1978 California cabernets here in New York. Sadly, Mark fell ill right before the tasting and did not get a chance to savor his share of these great wines and his presence was sadly missed on that evening, but the other nine of us who gathered around the table were treated to as fine a lineup of *à point* California cabernet sauvignon as one could ever hope to find. The results were a ringing confirmation of the exceptional quality of the 1978 vintage, with the wines nearing forty years of age and absolutely at the peak of their powers, with only one or two exceptions that seemed a bit on the downslope.

While this most recent tasting was broad and deep, it did not include all of the recent examples I have tasted of the superb 1978 vintage (as I certainly have been nipping at bottles of this vintage in my cellar over the last several years!), so I have included below my notes from a few other 1978 cabernets that have appeared in the last handful of reports on American wines, so that this article can serve as a proper reference point for subscribers interested in the state of evolution of the vintage today. As these most recent notes should make clear, the 1978 vintage for northern California cabernet sauvignon is one of the greatest in the history of the state, and rivals the very best of this golden decade of west coast wines, with the 1978s at the very same level of quality as the finest wines of the 1970 and 1974 vintages from this era, with most of the very finest 1978s still in the midst of their peak plateaus of maturity. The vast majority of top 1978s, while now at their apogees, still possess decades life ahead of them and this is a vintage that still merits considerable attention at auction. Where they ultimately stack up with the best 1970s and 1974s, not to mention the finest 1975s (which is a vintage I rank every bit as highly as these more famous three years), is right at the same lofty level and this is clearly one of the greatest vintages of cabernet sauvignon in California history. Most of the top wines still retain a bit of suave tannin on the backend and continue to climb in quality, offering up the potential for at least another quarter century of positive evolution in bottle and many may last quite a bit longer than that additional twenty-five years. But, as a group, they are drinking with grace and great style at the present time and this is a perfect moment for opening and sharing bottles.

I should take a moment to comment on one of the most endearing aspects of the 1978 vintage of cabernet sauvignon, and that is that many of the most important producers in the history of California wine were still at the top of their games in this era and producing world class and utterly classic-styled wines. Keep in mind that this was only two years after the famous “Judgement of Paris” tasting in Paris organized by Steven Spurrier that firmly cemented California’s legacy as one of the world’s greatest wine-producing regions, so these were very heady times for the pioneers of California wine. Some of the most important wineries from this era have continued on crafting classic and long-lived wines in the same vein as their 1978s, with wineries such as Heitz Wine Cellars, Mayacamas Vineyards, Mount Eden Vineyards and Ridge Vineyards continuing to produce classic wines today in the exact same mold as their lofty wines of the past. But, a great many of the era’s top cabernet producers from 1978 have succumbed to the temptation of shifting fashion and no longer produce wines today in the same style as they did back in this golden era, and drinking a lineup of gloriously classic 1978s today serves also to remind us of just what has been lost at some of these very important addresses of yesteryear. What a great wine world it would be today if wineries such as Joseph Phelps Vineyards, Robert Mondavi Winery, Caymus Vineyards, Beaulieu Vineyards and Sterling Vineyards (to name just a few) had continued on the stylistic path that they walked in 1978, rather than shifting their winemaking styles and joining the confectionary crowd of overripe, cookie-cutter modern cabernets. But, though so many of these stars of 1978 have lost their way in the years that followed, their current stylistic malaise should not detract from the truly exceptional and long-lived beauties that were crafted in their cellars in this era, and which continue to rank up at the very summit of California’s greatest vinous accomplishments. Perhaps these great 1978s will serve as the stylistic inspiration for some of these wineries to one day return to their roots and again start to make wines of truly world class quality.

The vast majority of the notes that follow hail from our October 2016 tasting organized here in New York, with the bottles coming from either my cellar or that of my friend Mark Golodetz. The bottle of 1978 Mount Eden cabernet was opened just this past January, as it was a relatively recent acquisition at auction and I did not want to open it before it had a full six months of recovery time after its shipment across the US, and hence, I did not add it into the lineup in October. Beyond these notes from October or January, I have added below my most recent tasting notes on a handful of other important 1978 cabernets that I have written about in previous articles on American wines, so that this article can serve as a proper reference piece on the beautiful 1978 vintage. There are only about a half dozen or so of these wines included, which can easily be spotted by the projected window of drinkability at the end of the note that will start with a year previous to 2016 or 2017. I hope the notes below do justice the brilliant quality of the 1978 cabernet sauvignon vintage, which really is quite analogous in northern California to the quality of the 1982 vintage in Bordeaux, the 1989 vintage in Piemonte or the 1999 vintage of red Burgundy. These are major, major wines and amongst the greatest we have yet seen from the state. Where they ultimately stack up in comparison to the other reference point vintages of California cabernet of the decade of the 1970s is really more a matter of personal taste. They are not quite as ripe and plush as the 1974 vintage, which many think of as the high water mark of this marvelous decade, but they are a bit more elegant overall and for that reason, I tend to give them a very slight nod over the exceptional 1974s. They are also more elegant than the powerful and still fairly youthful 1975s, which are every bit as superb as any other vintage in this marvelous decade (and probably the great sleeper vintage from this era, as

they do not have the same general reputation of the 1974s or 1978s) and for drinking over the next couple of decades, I would have to give the nod to the 1978s over the 1975s. After another twenty years, perhaps the 1975s will catch the '78s, but that remains to be seen. The other two very well-respected cabernet sauvignon vintages of this decade, the 1973s and the 1970s, are now further along their evolutionary arcs than are these other vintages, so it is difficult to make a comparison to the *à point* 1978 vintage. While I have had some absolutely brilliant wines from both 1970 and 1973, I would have to say that looking back to those two vintages at their absolute apogees (which for the most part are now a decade or so back in the past), the best of the 1970 vintage were every bit as magical as the best 1978s, with the finest 1973s just a half step behind these two years. But, to my palate, it is probably time to consider drinking up remaining bottles of both 1970 or 1973 over the relatively near-term, whereas the top 1978s easily have a quarter century or more of peak drinking still ahead of them. They truly are remarkable wines.



1978 Beaulieu Vineyards “Georges de Latour” Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

Of all of the great cabernet producers of this era, Beaulieu Vineyards was probably one of the few wineries that did not really capture all of the potential of the vintage. I have been drinking this 1978 since the mid-1980s and while many bottles were quite tasty back in the day, I have never hit a truly exceptional example. Back in this era, I have always found that BV was more successful in the vintages of 1970, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1976 and 1980 than they were in the more famous years of 1978 and 1974. The only caveat one needs to mention about the great

wines that Andre Tchelistcheff fashioned at BV in the decade of the 1970s is that their style has not proven to be quite as ageworthy as many of their contemporaries, and most of these beautiful wines are now in varying stages of decline. This most recent bottle of the '78 Georges de Latour was okay, but starting to get fairly oxidative and was a bit past its best, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, chocolate, a nice touch of Rutherford dust and coconutty new oak underneath the touch of cookie dough-like maderization. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a solid core and still a touch of backend tannin on the long and moderately oxidative finish. The oxidation here is not yet so bad that the wine is undrinkable, but it is ever present on both the nose and palate and detracts a tad from the enjoyment of the wine. 2016-2025. **86.**

1978 Burgess Cellars “Vintage Selection” Cabernet Sauvignon (Howell Mountain)

Tom Burgess purchased the old Howell Mountain cabernet vineyard of Lee Stewart, one of California's founding fathers, in time for the 1974 vintage, and produced really excellent wines here for many years under his own label. His 1978 Burgess cabernet sauvignon is excellent and still fairly youthful in structure, with the potential for at least another quarter century's worth of positive evolution in the bottle. The bouquet is complex and black fruity, offering up scents of cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of cigar wrapper and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and displays excellent mid-palate depth, with a bit of “mountain cabernet” sturdiness to its chassis of remaining tannin, as well as fine focus and grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. The team at Burgess Cellars never seemed to be able to quite capture the inherent elegance that Lee Stewart realized under his Souverain label from this fine vineyard source, but all of the 1970s' era cabernets from Burgess are very worthy wines. 2016-2040+. **92+.**

1978 Cakebread Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon “JT L1” (Napa)

The 1978 Cakebread “JT L1” cabernet is a superb wine, which was made from grapes purchased from the Johnson-Turnbull vineyard, the year before they began to bottle and market their own wine. This vineyard, up until the mid-1990s, was ringed by eucalyptus trees and was often dubbed the “poor man's Martha's Vineyard” for its extroverted mint and eucalyptus profile. The 1978 Cakebread version is a bit less minty than Johnson-Turnbull's own bottlings, but captures all of the lovely potential of this superbly situated Napa parcel, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of cassis, black cherries, delicate minty tones, dark chocolate, a touch of the chipotle pepper to come, tobacco and a classy base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully focused, with a rock solid core of fruit, impressive elegance, and still a bit of tannin to resolve on the long, balanced and very classy finish. This is a lovely synthesis of the powerful 1978 vintage character with the refined elegance of the Johnson-Turnbull vineyard, and is by a pretty good margin the very finest Cakebread wine that I have ever tasted. 2010-2040. **93.**

1978 Caymus Vineyards “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

Having had some marvelous bottles of Caymus cabernet sauvignon from this era, when Randy Dunn was the winemaker here, my expectations for the 1978 Napa bottling were very high indeed. The wine was good, but not great, and perhaps this was just the bottle? I had sourced this rare bottle at auction five or six years ago, but it was only a single bottle and though its appearance was excellent, I do not know the history of its provenance. The wine remains rather stubbornly young for thirty-eight years of age, delivering a bouquet of cassis, a bit of bell pepper, cigar ash, some tariness and cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and rather four-square in personality, with plenty of depth at the core, still a bit of tannin to resolve

and a long, youthful and not particularly complex finish. This is not bad by any means, but I was expecting just a bit more, particularly for Randy's last vintage at Caymus. Again, maybe it is just this particular bottle, which was the only one I had in the cellar? In any case, the wine needs a bit more time to more fully resolve its tannins and perhaps it will be better down the road. 2021-2040+? **88+**.

1978 Clos du Bois "Briarcrest" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

My early wine trade experience with the wines of Clos du Bois focused on the vintages of the early to mid-1980s, so I had no idea what to expect from their 1978 Briarcrest bottling of cabernet sauvignon. However, when a bottle was available at auction a few years ago, I saw no reason not to bid on it and add it to the potential lineup for this article. The wine turned out to be excellent and one of the great surprises of our tasting. The classy bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up a mature blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, a touch of eucalyptus, cigar ash and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows of a lovely core of sweet fruit, with melting tannins, excellent focus and balance and a complex, very well-balanced finish. Fine juice at its peak, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2030+. **92**.

1978 Clos du Val Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

Though I have a quite a bit of experience with the top cabernet producers of northern California from the decade of the 1970s, one hole in my tasting roster had been the wines from Clos du Val in this era, so I was very happy to see that we had both the regular and the reserve bottlings in our 1978 lineup. The regular 1978 cabernet from Clos du Val was one of the most Bordeaux-like wines of our tasting, with both its aromatic and flavor profile very much recalling the Left Bank on the Gironde. The bouquet is a lovely blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of cedar and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy in profile, with a fine core, just a touch of backend tannin, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long finish. This is really a delightful bottle for current drinking and has years and years of life still ahead of it. 2016-2040. **92**.

1978 Clos du Val "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1978 Clos du Val "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon is also outstanding and shows quite a bit more mid-plate sappiness than the regular version. The nose wafts from the glass in an equally elegant blend of cassis, black cherry, Cuban cigar, dark soil tones gentle scents of violet and a lovely topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined in profile, with a superb core of sappy black fruit, suave, fine-grained and melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the complex and seamless finish. This is stellar and was one of my favorite wines from our tasting, which is pretty high praise, given that we had most of the biggest names from 1978 on the table! Great juice with decades of exemplary drinking still ahead of it. 2016-2040+. **94**.

1978 Conn Creek "Lot 1" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

I last had a bottle of the Lot 1 cabernet from Conn Creek back in 2013 and the wine showed very well and quite a bit more refined than this particular bottle at our October tasting. The bouquet on this most recent example is deep and still quite vigorous, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, a touch of saddle leather, a fine base of soil, gentle tariness and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch four-square in personality, with a good core, fine balance and grip and still a bit of chewy tannin perking up the long finish. My last bottle of this was more vibrant, elegant and velvety on the palate and seemed more complex as well, so I am guessing that this particular bottle might have seen just a bit of

heat somewhere along the way. The last bottle merited 93 points, but this is not at that same level, though still quite drinkable. 2016-2035. **89.**

1978 Diamond Creek Vineyards “Red Rock Terrace” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

1978 is a fabulous vintage for Al Brounstein’s beloved Diamond Creek Vineyards. Mr. Brounstein had only purchased the land for his vineyards on Diamond Mountain in 1967 and the first cabernet vines went into the ground here in 1968, so by 1978 they were now a decade old and starting to reach a good age. This particular bottle of the ’78 Red Rock Terrace was a touch more reticent than the also youthful bottle I drank five years ago, and it may well that this wine is still in need of further bottle age to fully blossom. The bouquet is the most generous aspect of the wine at age thirty-eight, offering up a deep and complex blend of cassis, espresso, stony soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of new leather and a framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very impressively soil-driven in personality, with a rock solid core, fine focus and a long, still moderately chewy finish of mountain cabernet tannin on the backend. Given that the tannins have remained virtually the same from five years ago, I start to wonder just a tad if they will always remain part of the equation. In any event, this wine still needs a bit more bottle age to fully blossom. 2020-2045+. **92+.**

1978 Diamond Creek “Volcanic Hill” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

It had been several years since I last tasted the ’78 Diamond Creek Volcanic Hill cabernet and the wine is cruising along beautifully and almost getting ready for primetime drinking-almost! This is clearly one of the greatest wines ever produced from this estate and it is really still just a touch too young for primetime drinking, but it is getting close and will be absolutely magical once it fully blossoms. The deep, complex and truly superb nose soars from the glass in a mix of cassis, dark berries, meaty tones, cigar ash, a great base of minerality, a touch of soy and a gentle base of road tar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very, very deep at the core, with superb focus and grip, outstanding acidity and stunning length on the ripely tannic and flawlessly balanced finish. It really seems like I underrated this brilliant wine the last few times I tasted it! One of the iconic cabernets of this legendary era in California history. 2017-2050+. **97.**

1978 Heitz Cellars “Bella Oaks Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1978 Bella Oaks from Heitz is another very young and vibrant example of the vintage, and the wine really demands at least an hour of decanting time to blossom if it is to be drunk today. The wine is not overtly structured like the ’78 Burgess Vintage Select, but when first opened it shows an odd lactic or cheesy note that is not necessarily inviting. However, one hour on this characteristic is subsumed in beautiful fruit tones, and the wine begins to drink splendidly. Once blossomed, the nose is a superb blend of red cherries, orange, woodsmoke, a hint of mint, walnuts, a gentle bass note of bell pepper, chipotles, soil tones and a lovely high end of Rutherford spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very fresh, with a fine core of cherry fruit, lovely soil tones, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip. A fine bottle of ’78 that is now nearing its apogee, but which will continue to drink beautifully for a very long time. 2009-2030. **91.**

1978 Heitz Wine Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon “Fay Vineyard” (Napa)

I have now had the pleasure to drink the 1978 Heitz Cellars’ Fay Vineyard bottling on three occasions in the last couple of years, and it is a beautiful example of this top notch vintage. The bouquet soars from the glass in a very pure and *à point* mélange of black cherries, chipotle peppers, eucalyptus, tobacco, a nice touch of chocolate, Rutherford spice tones, woodsmoke and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the

attack, with a great core of ripe fruit, lovely soil tones, impeccable focus and balance, melting tannins and a very long, tangy and vibrant finish. Like so many of the very best examples of the 1978 cabernets, the Fay Vineyard bottling is at its apogee, but shows absolutely no signs of slowing down anytime in the next several decades. This was a very fitting close to this brief, but glorious chapter in the Heitz Cellars' single vineyard cab bottlings. 2010-2035. **94.**

1978 Heitz Wine Cellars "Martha's Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

This most recent bottle of 1978 Heitz Martha's Vineyard was once again truly stunning, though sadly, this was my last bottle of this vintage of Martha's in my cellar. But, what a great moment in its evolution to be drinking it! The bouquet is utterly classic, soaring from the glass in a stunning blend of red and black cherries, blood orange, mint, cigar smoke, a touch of allspice, gentle chipotle notes, a beautifully complex base of soil and a deft touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and utterly suave on the attack, with stunning mid-palate depth, seamless balance, bright acids and great length and grip on the focused and refined finish. While the 1978 is now into its peak plateau, this wine has decades and decades of great drinking still ahead of it! Just a great, great wine and a perfect example why so many people think of Martha's Vineyard as one of California's First Growths. 2016-2050. **97.**



The old stone winery of Heitz Wine Cellars.

1978 Jordan Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma)

Jordan Vineyards was only started in 1976 and this 1978 cabernet sauvignon was only their third vintage at the fledgling winery. This was the sole wine based on Sonoma County fruit in our October tasting here in New York and stood out a bit from the rest of the lineup for this reason, but there is depth and complexity here that is quite impressive. The bouquet shows a

touch of the weediness of Sonoma cabernet in its constellation of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, cigar ash, vanillin oak and the aforementioned gentle weediness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful in personality, with a rock solid core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. In our lineup of top 1978s, the Jordan did not have quite the same elegance of the very best wines of the vintage, but there are excellent raw materials here and this wine will provide plenty of enjoyment for decades to come. 2016-2040. **91+**.

1978 Robert Keenan Cabernet Sauvignon (Spring Mountain)

The 1978 Robert Keenan cabernet is a lovely old bottle that has begun to slowly slide down the far side of its plateau of maturity and has lost a bit of structural integrity on the palate, but still retains a lovely nose and delivers a fair bit of pleasure on the palate. The bouquet remains captivating in its blend of black cherries, chocolate, eucalyptus, a nice base of mountain soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still reasonably complex, with a velvety core of fruit, melted tannins and good length and grip on the now gently deconstructing finish. The wine is surprisingly showing just a touch of uncovered alcohol on the backend today, which I assume is a reflection of the wine starting to disintegrate a bit structurally, as I have a hard time imagining this was much over fourteen percent back in this era! It still has life in it, but it is starting to lose a bit of its attraction now. 2015-2030. **87**.

1978 Matanzas Creek Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

The 1978 Matanzas Creek cabernet sauvignon is a stellar example of the vintage is now at its apogee of peak maturity, but has years and years of life still ahead of it. The outstanding nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, plums, a hint of residual bell pepper, cigar ash, gentle notes of eucalyptus, dark soil tones and a gentle topnote of Sonoma herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a generous core, still a touch of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the very classy finish. 1978 may still rank as the very finest year for cabernet sauvignon in the second half of the twentieth century, as these wines continue to cruise along with all the depth, grace and breed of utter classics! 2015-2035. **92**.

1978 Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder) 375 ml.

I managed to find a single half bottle of the great 1978 Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon, and my will power lasted almost a full year before I just had to pull the cork and see how the wine was drinking. My thinking was that out of half bottle the wine should be in its prime, whereas it is still a tad on the young side in regular-sized format, but the half was also still a bit too young for primetime drinking and I really wish I had left it in my cellar for a few more years! In any case, the wine was showing brilliantly, offering up a deep, ripe and very pure bouquet of black cherries, cigar smoke, a beautiful base of mountain soils, incipient notes of chipotles, just a whisper of petroleum jelly and a nice touch of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still fairly young, with a rock solid core, great purity and focus, moderate tannins and great length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very soil-driven finish. A legend! 2012-2040+. **97**.

1978 Château Montelena “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1978 Château Montelena Estate cabernet sauvignon is a very good bottle of wine, but it is not quite up there with the top wines of this great vintage. The complex and very vibrant nose offers up scents of cassis, cigar ash, lovely soil tones, a bit of shoe polish, espresso and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with a good core of fruit, a bit of firm acidity (from acidulation later in the élevage?) and a long, classy

and modestly tannic finish. This is a very good bottle of cabernet at its apogee, but I was hoping for just a bit more. 2010-2030+. **92.**

1978 Mount Eden Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

As readers may recall from last year's article on Mount Eden Vineyards, the 1978 cabernet sauvignon was the one vintage of their older wines that I had never had good luck with, and the couple of examples of this rare wine that I had tasted in the last dozen years had all ended up being poorly-stored bottles. Such is the luck of the draw with older bottles sourced at auction, but happily, my last remaining bottle of the '78 cabernet sauvignon was pristine and I finally had a chance to drink a truly representative example of this excellent wine. This is now starting to drink very well indeed, but it is one of the long-distance runners from 1978 and there will be no need to drink the wine up in the near future! The bouquet is very black fruity, offering up a deep and complex blend of cassis, a touch of bell pepper, cigar ash, stony soil tones and a lovely topnote of fresh bay leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows lovely sweet black fruit at the core, with fine transparency and focus, just a bit of remaining backend tannin and impeccable balance and grip on the long, pure and complex finish. A beautiful wine. 2017-2045+. **93+.**

1978 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Insignia" (Napa)

Drinking Joseph Phelps reds from the decade of the 1970s is one of the great treats in the world of wine. 1978 was one of the earliest iterations for this Bordeaux-inspired blend from the winery, which was composed of a blend of fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot and twenty percent cabernet franc. The wine was fully mature when I last saw a bottle in 2007, but time has not touched it and today it is every bit as vibrant and expressive. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, sweet blackberries, dark soil tones, a bit of tariness, cigar smoke, a dollop of fresh herbs and a beautiful topnote of mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a superb core, impressive focus and balance, fine-grained and now quite modest tannins, good acids and lovely balance on the long, complex and velvety finish. A beautiful wine at its apogee and one where I clearly underestimated its potential longevity the last time I had a chance to drink it. 2016-2050. **94.**

1978 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Eisele Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1978 vintage of Eisele Vineyard cabernet sauvignon from Joseph Phelps has always been one of the most beautiful bottles from the winery that I have had the good fortune to drink and fully underscores just how great this estate was in its heyday. This most recent bottle at our October tasting was absolutely stunning, soaring from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, Cuban cigar smoke, dark soil tones, dried eucalyptus, a touch of cigar ash and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off marvelous mid-palate depth, with superb balance and focus, still a bit of remaining tannin and outstanding length and grip on the pure and classy finish. An iconic Napa cabernet in full bloom! 2016-2040. **96.**

1978 Robert Mondavi Vineyards "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1978 Robert Mondavi Reserve cabernet sauvignon will always occupy a warm spot in my heart, as this was the wine I drank on my first visit to New York as an adult back in 1986. We drank it at Windows on the World at the top of the World Trade Center and it helped inspire me to move to the city a couple of years later. Beyond its sentimental value for me, the wine is really one of the best Mondavi cabernets of the decade of the 1970s and continues to drink beautifully today at age thirty-eight. The bouquet wafts from the glass in an excellent mélange of black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of eucalyptus, a fine base of Rutherford Bench soil tones and a deft touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and alive

with the vibrancy of peak maturity, with a good core, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the refined and very classy finish. This is at its apogee and is a superb example of the fine '78 vintage. 2016-2040. **94+**.



1978 Ridge Vineyards “York Creek” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1978 Ridge York Creek cabernet sauvignon is a good, solid example of the vintage, with plenty of depth and stuffing, but just a touch of brett that keeps its score down a bit. The bouquet is a black fruity blend of cassis, dark berries, saddle leather, cigar ash, stony minerality and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now nicely resolved on the attack, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, well-balanced and gently chewy finish. There is a sturdiness to the structure of this wine that seems likely to always be part of its equation, but the wine is very nicely balanced, complex and drinks very well at the present time. This most recent bottle at our October tasting showed even better than one I had and wrote up four years ago. 2016-2035. **90**.

1978 Ridge Vineyards “Monte Bello” Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

It is hard to believe that more than six years had passed since I last drank a bottle of Ridge’s flagship 1978 from the Monte Bello Vineyard. The wine has not missed a beat over the ensuing years and is still climbing in quality and will be better with another five years in the

cellar, but it is blossoming beautifully and is awfully easy to drink today! The superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, saddle leather, cigar ash, a beautifully complex base of soil, just a bit of Monte Bello's medicinal overtones (which I also often find in old La Mission Haut-Brion) and a sound base of American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant finish. This is a great vintage of Monte Bello that is still improving and should last for many decades to come! Great juice. 2021-2075. **95+**.

1978 Rutherford Hill Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1978 Rutherford Hill cabernet sauvignon is a very nice wine that has been fully mature for decades, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The ripe and succulent nose offers up a mix of black cherries, a touch of chocolate, cigar smoke, residual notes of bell pepper, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with fairly gentle structure, but sneaky length and grip on the velvety finish. This is not the most profound cabernet to be found in the 1978 vintage, but it is a very well-made wine that continues to drink very well indeed. Good juice. 2010-2025. **88**.

1978 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Cask 23" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1978 "Cask 23" bottling from Stag's Leap Wine Cellars was another wine that I had enormous expectations for prior to our October tasting, but though the wine showed quite well, it was not in our top division in our lineup and was eclipsed in quality by several wines that I would not have predicted to be better than it prior to the dinner. The bouquet shows a touch of brett amongst its complex blend of black cherries, leather, cigar ash, gentle spice tones, a lovely base of soil, smoke and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine focus, a good core, melting tannins and a very, very long, and *à point* finish. I do not want to be too critical, as this is still a very good wine, but I was really hoping for even a bit more! 2016-2035. **92**.

1978 Sterling Vineyards "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

Ric Forman vinified the 1978 Sterling cabernets, but left the winery while their *elevage* was still in process and was not responsible for their bottling. Consequently, the finished wines were never quite up to the same level of quality as the other vintages that he crafted during his historic run at Sterling from 1969 to 1978, but this most recent bottle of the '78 Cabernet Reserve showed as well as I have ever seen it at our tasting in October. The bouquet is quite impressive, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of mintiness, creosote and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with pretty good complexity, fine focus and very good length and grip on the still modestly tannic. This does not have quite the same degree of complexity as the wines Ric crafted from beginning to final bottling at Sterling, but it retains plenty of vigor and has miles to go before it sleeps. 2016-2035+. **90**.