

## Napa Cabernet 2019: full vintage report and top-scoring wines

California's premier Cabernet Sauvignon region has delivered a beautifully classic vintage in 2019, showcasing balance, energy and tension. Decanter's Napa correspondent Jonathan Cristaldi reviews the growing season and reveals the 63 wines from across the valley's appellations he rated 97 or above - including five perfect 100-point scores.



Jonathan Cristaldi  
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Energy, freshness and balance characterise Napa Valley's 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon vintage, which will find broad appeal.

The best are incredibly approachable, already showing intricate layers of complexity through the vivid upfront dark fruit, but also boast the structure to cellar for decades thanks to ultra-fine tannins and ample acid tension.

'In time, we believe 2019 will prove to be one of the stand-out vintages of the decade,' proclaims Paul Hobbs. 'It is a return to classic.'

Abundant winter rainfall saturated the ground, which set the stage for uniform shoot and canopy growth. A cool spring rarely saw midday temperatures rise above 22°C, which delayed budbreak in some areas by as much as two weeks.

Temperatures began to rise in early June, and remained even throughout the growing season – a report from the Napa Valley Vintners shows the mercury hovered between 23°C and 29°C.

This is still relatively cool by Napa's standards, which resulted in longer hangtimes and grapes with mouthwatering fresh fruit flavours and bright, natural acidities. Alcohol levels are slightly higher than the 2018s but impressively balanced across the board.

Grower Andy Beckstoffer described the 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon grapes he dealt with as having 'great intensity, deep colour and softer, more elegant tannins.'

The intensity of the fruit – a hallmark of the vintage – is in the darker black berry spectrum on both nose and palate. There is a real generosity and ripeness running through the 2019 Napa Cabs, but balanced by a lovely savoury character, redolent of dried wild herbs, which is another common thread this vintage.

'Energy' is what defines the 2019s for Andy Erickson of Favia. '2018 had great appeal because of the depth and richness. 2019 has a similar level of intensity, but the character of the wine is very bright, more aromatic and precise.'

Immediate appeal but freshness and complexity to last

Consultant winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown agrees. 'While our lush and seductive 2018s have the upper hand now, a few decades will prove that 2019's freshness, weight and complexity will ultimately best them.'

Maya Dalla Valle, of her family's eponymous winery, said berries were smaller in 2019, leading to more concentration in the wines, but that the tannin structure

## Napa Cabernet 2019 vintage verdict: 4.5 stars

A wet winter and cool spring delayed budbreak throughout most of the **Napa Valley**, while a warm, even growing season allowed for slow, phenolic maturity. The resulting **Cabernet Sauvignon**-dominant wines are fresh and vivid, with intense black fruits, savouriness and concentration. Very classic in style, with great balance, energy and tension, they exude upfront drinking pleasure but also have impeccable structure for long-term cellaring.

*We have published more than 225 reviews online of 2019 Napa Cabernets for **Decanter Premium** subscribers which our correspondent Jonathan Cristaldi tasted (non blind) at the offices of the Napa Valley Vintners as well as at wineries and at home. Look out for AVA and value reports this week.*

was more approachable earlier, meaning the wines were ‘very elegant and smooth without being too plush.’

While not as abundant or vibrant as the 2013s, ‘which are a joy to drink right now’, said Kristy Melton of Freemark Abbey, comparisons are being drawn between the 2019s and the 2016 and 2012 vintages, which also offered fresh fruit with good acidities and more easygoing tannins upfront.

By contrast, Matt Crafton of Chateau Montelena explained that ‘2017 was more dynamic than 2019, encompassing both hot and cold vintage characteristics’ while the 2015s ‘had more power and concentration,’ and the 2016s ‘more elegance.’

With ample freshness, concentration and lovely savoury qualities, the 2019 Napa Cabernets offer a lot of immediate drinking pleasure but have the balance, tension and complexity to age gracefully. Snap them up!



98pts | Decanter

**Tasted by:** Jonathan Cristaldi

*(at Napa Valley Vintners office, St Helena, 12 Jun 2022)*

**Part of Napa Cabernet 2019:** full vintage report and top-scoring wines

**Drinking Window:** 2022 - 2045

Tasted with Bart Araujo at Wheeler Farms, the ‘Rolls Royce of custom crush facilities’, as described by Accendo winemaker Nigel Kinsman. Bart and wife Daphne established Wheeler Farms after selling their Araujo Estate (now Eisele Vineyard) to the Artemis Group. Grapes are sourced from Vine Hill Ranch, Sleeping Lady in Rutherford, Eco Tone (a former Abreu property), and a site on Diamond Mountain formerly known as Reverie. Generous blackberry fruit aromas are tinged with wild herbs and heady cedar spices. Broad and expansive on the palate with saturated dark fruit, cassis, graphite and wild herbs. Rustic, elongated tannins glide to a savoury finish.