

# Something Old, Something New

James Laube

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Déjà Vu: I was reunited this year with the exquisite 1985 Château Margaux on its 30th anniversary. Served at a dinner in June at the esteemed Médoc estate to celebrate Vinexpo, the wine reminded me of our first encounter, which made a lasting impression. We first met in 1988 when the '85 Bordeaux vintage passed through the Wine Spectator tasting room at our old offices in San Francisco.

With a release price of \$76, the wine earned a near-perfect 99-point rating in my tasting at the time. Here's what I wrote: "A beautifully structured and proportioned wine, soft yet rich with cascading flavors of ripe plum, cherry and cassis that are perfectly integrated with toasty oak, firm acidity and firm but polished tannins. Finish is long, full and deep."

While Christmas shopping later that year, I happened upon a floor stack of '85 Margaux at Liquor Barn, one of California's first mega-retailers. I decided to buy a few bottles to lay down for my 3-year-old's birth year. I wasn't paying attention to the price, figuring it would be about \$65 a bottle and I would shuffle the receipt into the mix of holiday bills. Swept up in the season, I put eight bottles in my cart.

When I reached the checkout line, I ran into a friend who distracted me as the clerk totaled my bill. I quickly signed my name on the Visa slip and departed. When the bill arrived a month later I was astonished to see a grand total of \$52 charged for the wine. How could that be? I checked the bottles and read the price tag: The wines had been mismarked at \$6.50 a bottle.

Sadly, I don't have any of the bottles left. The tasting this year at Margaux proved that the '85 remains a wine of impeccable balance and sheer beauty. Time has served it well.

**Blind Date: In my experience, aged wines often disappoint. Yet when I recently revisited the 2005 vintage of Napa Cabernet (see page 41), the 2005 Phifer Pavitt Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Date Night (90 points, \$75 on release; 93 points now) provided a surprise. This was the wine's first vintage, and even after a decade it retained its supple, graceful charm and caressing Pinot Noir-like tenderness, while also gaining richness and depth. Though the label doesn't say so, the wine is grown in Pope Valley, from Temple Family Vineyards. I think that makes it even more special.**

Reboot: Producers rarely turn on a dime, but Arista did with the 2013 vintage. This Russian River Valley winery had been making very good wines from vineyards on and around its property, but knew it could improve and in 2013 it did. Owners Mark and Ben McWilliams credit hiring winemaker Matt Courtney the year before.

Courtney is a talented, attentive winemaker mentored by one of the best, Marcassin's Helen Turley. His Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs for Arista are striking, bound to invite comparisons to Marcassin. Each of the 2013 Arista wines displays its own personality, with the Chardonnays ranging from the ultraplush Ritchie Vineyard 2013 (94, \$60) to the silkier, more refined

Banfield Vineyard 2013 (93, \$60), which is especially reminiscent of Marcassin with its generous overlay of oak.

Of the 11 2013 Arista Pinots I reviewed this year, all but one rated outstanding, including the Harper's Rest (94, \$78), which stands out for its sheer elegance. Arista achieved what many wineries only hope for-to take their game to the next level.

When It Rains: Courtney also released his own set of wines this year under the Ferren label. The bottlings-three Chardonnays and one Pinot Noir-are just as riveting as his work at Arista. The Chardonnays, in fact, share similarities with the Arista versions, offering distinctive personalities and enticing spicy oak shadings-evidence of a talented winemaker working with excellent vineyards.

Both labels' Chardonnays also demonstrate a new surge of interest in California's greatest white. Chardonnay has long been a strong and consistent performer, yet in the past couple of years fewer new wines have taken the market by storm or risen to this level of quality. These wines demonstrate the orchestration of vineyard site and grape variety, as well as the ability to coax the most from a wine without overdoing it. It's a heartening sign.

*Senior editor James Laube has been with Wine Spectator since 1981.*

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## 2005 California Cabernet Sauvignon: Hit or Miss

In a challenging vintage, seasoned vintners came through with sumptuous wines

[James Laube](#)

Issue: December 31, 2015

The 2005 Napa Valley Cabernet vintage at age 10 has proven to be a bit of a roller coaster. Many of the wines are very, very good, but there are others that show the imbalance of a supersized crop, with mixed tannin levels. Of the 164 2005 Cabernets I recently tasted blind in *Wine Spectator's* Napa office, 41 earned 90 points or higher, with a total of 112 rated very good or better.

A decade later, the producers who made 2005's classic-scoring wines are familiar names, and their wines offer a glimpse of how the vintage could really shine. Schrader Cellars has a pair at 95 points, both from Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard in Oakville (Old Sparky and CCS), along with Shafer Hillside Select. All three are deliciously pure, deep and layered, displaying the kind of vibrancy and finesse that bodes well for the future.

The second tier of wines also stars veteran Napa vintners whose experience paid off when managing 2005's huge crop. Castello di Amorosa was a relatively new producer that year, but owner Dario Sattui, of the V. Sattui winery family, has been working Napa harvests since the 1970s. Like the Schrader T6, the Tor Clone No. 6 comes from Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard,

long a well-known source of some of Napa's best Cabernet grapes. Tor was another relative newcomer in the 2005 vintage, though owner Tor Kenward already had nearly three decades as a senior executive at Beringer under his belt when it opened.

Nearly a dozen wines hit the 93-point mark, including Arietta H Block, Beringer Private Reserve, Carter Coliseum Block, Corra, Lewis Reserve, **Phifer Pavitt Date Night**, Pride Reserve, Rubicon and Scarecrow, along with another pair of bottlings from Schrader.

The successes of the vintage deliver rich, extracted flavors and polished tannins. Those that missed the mark, however, are withering, leaving hard-edged tannins that straddle dryness and fading fruit.

The 2005 growing season was cool. It started and ended late, saved by an Indian summer. "The secret in 2005 was dropping fruit," says Kenward.

For those who faced challenges in 2005, crop and berry size were culprits, vintners say. The more grapes hanging, the more difficult it was to achieve uniform ripening and, in turn, graceful texture. The size of the yield left many producers scrambling for enough fermentation tanks to hold the crop. Those who thinned aggressively emerged as winners.

"Even with a great deal of green harvesting, we still saw tonnage up 20 [percent] and 30 percent," says Elias Fernandez of Shafer. For those who weathered it, the enormity of the 1997 vintage gave vintners a reference point for how to manage the size and flow of the 2005 crop. And most wineries ended up with more bulk wine than usual.

"Given how big the berries were in 2005, people overbled their tanks in an attempt to gain instant concentration," Thomas Brown of Schrader observes. "We did bleed a bit, maybe 5 percent max, on any given lot. What we've found as we've watched the wines develop is they definitely started out medium-bodied but have concentrated a bit more with every tasting."

Tasting wines as they age is the best way to assess vintages and the value of cellaring them. Napa Cabernets are known to age well, and also show well early on. If there is a disappointment with the 2005 vintage, it comes from the number of wines that haven't benefited from a decade of aging. That's worth remembering when you consider whether or not to lay wines down in the future.

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<http://www.winespectator.com/webfeature/show/id/52132>

## 2005 California Cabernet Retrospective: Hit and Miss at Age 10

## A long, cool growing season and a huge crop created challenges, but seasoned vintners came through with sumptuous wines

Wine Spectator senior editor James Laube reviews 112 California Cabernets from the 2005 vintage.

[James Laube](#)

Posted: September 28, 2015

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The classic-scoring wines a decade later come from familiar names, and offer a glimpse of how the 2005 vintage could really shine. Schrader Cellars has a pair at 95 points, both from Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard in Oakville (Old Sparky and CCS), along with Shafer Hillside Select. All three are deliciously pure, deep and layered, displaying the kind of vibrancy and finesse that bodes well for the future.

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*Reviews and tasting notes for all wines that scored very good or outstanding are listed below.*

## 2005 California Cabernet Retrospective

**PHIFER PAVITT Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Date Night 2005 Score: 93 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: NA**

**Charming, graceful and supple-textured, with fresh, lively currant, blackberry and black cherry fruit. A delight to drink, ending smooth and silky, accented by details of black licorice and plummy cassis. 2005 California Cabernet blind retrospective (September 2015). Drink now. 300 cases made. -J.L.**