



FREE RUN JUICE

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'02 Cabernets: Great 'Winemaker's Vintage

The 2002 vintage in the Napa Valley for Cabernet Sauvignon seems as though it will be outstanding for the second consecutive year. After tasting about 60 of the Cabs from barrel at last week's Passport to Cabernet at the CIA, I believe the '02s will only be slightly eclipsed by the great '01's.

But if one cherrypicks through this vintage – which is a “winemaker's vintage” because of all the tweaking in the vineyard as well as in the cellar due to the long cool season at the start of harvest and several heat spikes at the end – one will assuredly be rewarded.

At the beginning of the crush, acid levels were very high. But the vintage was saved by the heat in what Chris Dearden at Benessere termed “an Ozzy Osbourne onslaught of ripe fruit.”

Nevertheless, the barrel samples I tasted have given me an overall impression that much of the '02 Cabs will be very soft with supple fruit and excellent balance – including, in the end, the right acid numbers.

Here are some of my favorites (before blending, of course) with the most potential for greatness: Staglin, Rudd, Guilliams, Neal, Paul Hobbs Beckstoffer, Robert Craig, Rockledge, Sullivan, Terra Valentine, Trefethen, Truchard, and von Strasser.