

# Wine Spectator

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## 1993 California Cabernet Retrospective

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When three of Napa Valley's top Cabernet producers decided not to make their premier cuvées in 1993, it would have been easy to surmise that the vintage had problems.

Caymus Vineyards chose not to produce its Special Selection for the first time since 1977. Winemaker Chuck Wagner called the vintage quality spotty and said his best wine's color didn't meet his standards for Special Selection. Groth Vineyards didn't make its Reserve for the first time in a decade, citing inferior quality. And Christian Moueix decided Dominus wasn't up to par for the first time in 10 years.

Despite that, the vintage as a whole turned out plenty of excellent wines. "The 1993 harvest is most notable for its non-notable characteristics," said Tony Soter, winemaker for Etude. "It was neither long nor short, hot nor cold, bountiful nor lean." Soter said that compared with those of the other excellent vintages of the 1990s, 1993's distinguishing features tended to be subtle. The '93s are less brooding than the 1990s or the 1991s, yet more refined than the 1992s. But the year comes up shy of the sheer opulence of 1994.

At age 10, most of the 59 1993s I blind-tasted this year are fully mature and complex, with firm tannins. The wines have developed enticing secondary flavors, with hints of cedar, coffee, tobacco, anise and dried fruit. Because these wines were handpicked as among the best, only a few had faded. Among the most advanced were Silver Oak Alexander Valley (86 points), which tends to mature early, and Paul Hobbs Napa Valley Carneros (85).

More than a dozen 1993s, though, have the intensity and vibrancy to age another decade. Overall, with the exception of 1998, 1993 was the weakest vintage of the decade, but it produced enough excellent wines to earn an outstanding (90 point) rating. "Just not as many [great wines] as 1991 or 1992," said Scott McLeod of Niebaum-Coppola, which makes Rubicon. (For notes of the 1993 wines rated for this report, see page 225 of the Buying Guide.)

My top-rated wines -- Araujo Eisele Vineyard (94), Colgin Herb Lamb Vineyard (94) and Dalla Valle Maya (93) -- were also among my favorites when I first reviewed the wines in 1996, the year most were released. The Araujo tasted remarkably young and vibrant, with loads of flavor. The Colgin was ultrarich and concentrated, developing a smooth texture.

The Maya, which is roughly 50 percent Cabernet Franc, was impressive for its depth of flavor, elegance and sheer balance.



Dalla Valle Vineyards

**1993 California Cabernet Tasting Notes**

**See also:**

**California Cabernet's Split Decision**

*A few stars shine in 2000, but overall quality is variable*

**California Cabernet Vintage Chart**

### See Also:

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

2002 California Cabernet

Retrospective: Wines in Top Shape

Monday, June 27, 2011

2001 California Cabernet

Retrospective: Stunning at Age 10

Friday, April 22, 2011

2000 California Cabernet

Retrospective: A *Garagiste* Scores a Victory

Monday, February 9, 2009

Retrospective: 1998 California Cabernets

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Also showing well this time and last were Spottswode (93), St. Clement Oropas (93), Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Fay Vineyard (93) and Viader (93). Another eight wines scored 92: Altamura, Bryant, Chateau St. Jean Reserve, Clos Du Val Reserve, Harlan Estate, Opus One, Ridge Monte Bello and Seavey. All except St. Jean, from Sonoma, and Ridge, from the Santa Cruz Mountains, hail from Napa Valley.

At auction, 1993s never developed a significant following, and prices for most have not increased much since their release. One reason is that the 1994s siphoned off much of the attention. Cult wines, though low in volume at auction, warrant some attention. Colgin has provided quite a return for those who bought it at \$40 upon release; it averaged \$274 per bottle in the second quarter of 2003. Araujo, also released at \$40, has climbed to \$181. Bryant Family, Dalla Valle Maya and Harlan all averaged \$275 or more at auction. Those seeking a complex, mature Cabernet would be well advised to try the top 1993s.

Wine	Score	Price*
1993 California Cabernet		
<b>ARAUJO Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Eisele Vineyard 1993</b>	94	\$40/\$181
Remarkably youthful and vibrant, with spicy currant, plum, black cherry and anise flavors that pick up touches of earth, mocha and cigar box. Enormous complexity, depth and range of flavors. Has hit an ideal drinking plateau now, but could well last another decade. Decant. Drink now through 2012. 1,285 cases made.		
<b>COLGIN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Herb Lamb Vineyard 1993</b>	94	\$40/\$274
Ultrarich, dark and chocolaty, with layers of blackberry, mocha, dill, anise and spice. Sharply focused, developing a silky texture, with a long, rich, detailed aftertaste. Right now the tannins give depth and structure. Drink now through 2012. 400 cases made.		
<b>DALLA VALLE Maya Napa Valley 1993</b>	93	\$75/\$279
Still dark, with high-toned, rich, supple blackberry, currant and black cherry fruit, picking up pretty anise, leather and mineral flavors on the long, intense finish. Has the fruit concentration and tannic structure for further aging. Drink now through 2010. 500 cases made.		
<b>SPOTTSWOODE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993</b>	93	\$42/\$69
Smooth, supple, elegant and graceful, with rich, concentrated currant, anise and blackberry fruit that's beautifully defined. Plenty of acidity and firm, earthy tannins give it balance. Long, lingering aftertaste. Drink now through 2007. 5,150 cases made.		
<b>ST. CLEMENT Oropas Napa Valley 1993</b>	93	\$30/\$NA
Tasted from magnum. Deliciously rich and concentrated in fruit, with deft balance and plenty of currant, anise, plum and blackberry fruit supported by firm, supple, concentrated tannins. Long, intense, complex finish. Drink now through 2010. 650 cases made.		
<b>STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Fay 1993</b>	93	\$40/\$NA
Defines complexity with its tiers of flavors, smooth texture and enticing, taut currant, stewed plum and anise aromas. Stretches the range of flavors, with herb, green and black olive and oregano. Long and detailed on the finish, with smooth (then firm) tannins. Drink now through 2007. 1,500 cases made.		
<b>VIADER Napa Valley 1993</b>	93	\$29/\$44
Wonderful perfumed aromas -- rich, complex coffee, currant, vanilla bean, anise and blackberry -- with flavors to match. Intense, with firm, vibrant fruit and tannins, seemingly with a long way to go. Drink now through 2010. 2,613 cases made.		
<b>ALTAMURA Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993</b>	92	\$25/\$NA

Still shows lots of mocha-scented oak, but that's infused into the core of chocolate, currant and black cherry fruit. Tannins are well-integrated, too; those who prefer well-integrated oak will find it complex and compelling, as the fruit flavors are vibrant and lively. Drink now through 2007. 1,200 cases made.

**BRYANT FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Pritchard Hill 1993** 92 \$50/\$275

Appealing for its up-front cherry, plum, pomegranate and wild berry fruit. Rich and silky, revealing a sense of elegance and finesse, with a long, polished finish that's almost Burgundian in texture. Drink now through 2006. 1,000 cases made.

**CHATEAU ST. JEAN Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County Reserve 1993** 92 \$47/\$NA

Complex and concentrated, with a mix of currant, earth, anise, toasty oak and waxy nuances, it holds its richness and focus. Finishes with firm tannins but also lots of flavor. Drink now through 2007. 500 cases made.

**CLOS DU VAL Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 1993** 92 \$50/\$27

Seductive aromas of creamy, charred oak marry beautifully with silky currant, anise and black cherry-scented fruit in this smooth, seamless wine. Rich in flavor and elegantly balanced, with a long, complex aftertaste, silky tannins and lots of pretty fruit nuances. Drink now through 2008. 1,600 cases made.

**HARLAN ESTATE Napa Valley 1993** 92 \$85/\$292

Rich and youthful, showing vibrant, earthy currant, juicy plum and black cherry fruit, with shades of anise, blackberry and cedary lead pencil. Finishes with fine-grained tannins and plenty of length, turning elegant and refined. Drink now through 2009. 844 cases made.

**OPUS ONE Napa Valley 1993** 92 \$80/\$120

Aromatically complex, with enticing floral, perfumed fruit and spice, cedar and cigar box scents. Delivers a rich, complex core of earthy currant, mocha, exotic spice and fresh leather flavors. Tannins are well-integrated, with a long, vibrant, pleasantly earthy aftertaste. Drink now through 2008. 25,500 cases made.

**RIDGE Monte Bello Santa Cruz Mountains 1993** 92 \$80/\$92

Just what you hope for and usually get in a maturing Monte Bello. Layers of rich currant, anise, black cherry, lead pencil and pencil shavings, with touches of herb and sage. Smooth, elegant, deftly balanced, with lots of complex flavors that keep you coming back for more. Drink now through 2008. 27,450 cases made.

**SEAVEY Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993** 92 \$28/\$NA

Hard cedar and wood aromas give way to enticing, spicy cherry pie, plum and blackberry flavors that evolve and grow on you. Still very dense and tannic, it truly needs aeration, so decant about an hour before serving. Drink now through 2008. 1,200 cases made.

**DALLA VALLE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993** 91 \$38/\$77

Excellent intensity and focus, with vibrant black cherry and blackberry fruit, new shoe leather (and polish) and sour cherry scents and firm, chewy tannins. Drink now through 2009.

**DUNN Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain 1993** 91 \$33/\$60

Earthy, reductive aromas of anise, tar, mineral and currant lead to similar flavors that are intense, with firm, leather-scented tannins. Supple for a young Dunn Howell Mountain. Drink now through 2007. 1,670 cases made.

**ETUDE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993** 91 \$30/\$58

Intense and vibrant, with rich, mocha-laced currant, mineral, blackberry and lead pencil flavors. Wonderful balance and sense of harmony, with a long, detailed finish and firm, gripping tannins. Drink now through 2009. 1,500 cases made.

**FERRARI-CARANO Trésor Reserve Sonoma County 1993** 91 \$55/\$NA

Dark and intense, with vibrant, youthful, concentrated currant, blackberry, anise, tar and spice aromatics. Shows its strength and depth of flavor, with a long, tannic finish. Drink now through 2006. 2,581 cases made.

**FLORA SPRINGS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Rutherford Reserve 1993** 91 \$45/\$35

Very ripe, with high-toned currant, cranberry, raspberry and wild berry flavors that are juicy, supple, rich and elegant. Finishes with fine length and well-integrated tannins. Drink now through 2007. 800 cases made.

**GALLO OF SONOMA Cabernet Sauvignon Northern Sonoma 1993** 91 \$45/\$NA

Intense and sharply focused, with rich currant, anise and lead pencil flavors that are compact and concentrated. Finishes with firm tannins and a touch of leather and spice. Drink now through 2006. 1,792 cases made.

**WHITEHALL LANE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Morisoli Vineyard Reserve 1993** 91 \$30/\$44

Still showing ample oak, with rich dill, kirsch, blackberry and black cherry fruit that's intense and concentrated, if short on polish and finesse. Ruggedly tannic, but the fruit works through. Drink now through 2006. 1,200 cases made.

**BEAULIEU VINEYARD Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Georges de Latour Private Reserve 1993** 90 \$40/\$41

Elegant and graceful, with pretty cherry, currant and plummy Cabernet fruit and touches of anise and herb. Deftly balanced, with enough firmness in the tannins to merit short-term cellaring. Drink now through 2007. 11,900 cases made.

**CHATEAU MONTELENA Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley The Montelena Estate 1993** 90 \$40/\$64

Tightly wound, with firm, leathery tannins wrapped around a core of currant, lead pencil, mineral and wild berry. Plenty of acidity and tannins, too. Best to decant. Drink now through 2007. 10,000 cases made.

**HEITZ Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Trailside Vineyard 1993** 90 \$48/\$24

Mature, smooth, supple and harmonious, with pretty currant, plum, graham cracker and minty anise notes that are well-knit. Easygoing tannins make this easy to enjoy. Slight hint of oxidation on the finish. Drink now through 2004. 3,496 cases made.

**PETER MICHAEL Les Pavots Knights Valley 1993** 90 \$35/\$105

Still big, potent, mouthcoating and firmly tannic. Tight and reduced, showing firm earth, game, iron and mocha-enriched currant, with a slight whiff of oxidation commingling with tar, currant, raisin and roasted meat flavors. Dare I suggest it's still not ready? Drink now through 2010. 2,016 cases made.

**ROBERT MONDAVI Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 1993** 90 \$66/\$37

Sleek, elegant and long on finesse, with a mature, supple tapestry of currant, plum and dried berry fruit. The chewy tannins firm up and give backbone to the finish. Drink now through 2007. 17,000 cases made.

**MOUNT EDEN Cabernet Sauvignon Santa Cruz Mountains Old Vine Reserve 1993** 90 \$36/\$NA

Still quite hard and chewy, with youthful grape aromas and dense, earthy mineral, currant and leathery tannins holding a viselike grip on the palate. Needs time, but how much more? Decant. Drink now through 2007. 425 cases made.

**JOSEPH PHELPS Insignia Napa Valley 1993** 90 \$60/\$90

A dense, compact, earthy style that definitely needs decanting, with firm, chalky tannins wrapped around a core of earth, tar, leather, mulch and currant. Finishes with mineral and earth flavors that start to grow on you. Can age another decade. Drink now through 2010. 5,486 cases made.

**SHAFER Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Hillside Select 1993** 90 \$60/\$154

A subtle, well-balanced style that weaves together complex tobacco, cigar box, currant and spice flavors. Turns beefy, with leather, mineral and sage notes and firm tannins. Drink now through 2007. 2,000 cases made.

**SNOWDEN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993** 90 \$35/\$NA

At times taut, firm, tannic and earthy, yet with a complex, concentrated array of currant, black cherry, cherry pie, anise and cedar. Tannins flex their muscles on the finish. Needs decanting. Drink now through 2009. 385 cases made.

**STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley S.L.V. 1993** 90 \$40/\$65

Plenty of richness and concentration to the flavors, though the dry, earthy tannins compete strongly with the currant, cherry and anise-scented fruit. Needs decanting. Drink now through 2007. 3,000 cases made.

**TRUCHARD Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Carneros 1993** 90 \$22/\$NA

Youthful and complex, with ripe, rich, lively currant, black cherry and wild berry flavors on a medium-bodied frame. At a fine drinking plateau, balancing ripe fruit with mellowing tannins and a dash of oak. Drink now through 2005. 1,470 cases made.

**BERINGER Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Private Reserve 1993** 89 \$65/\$49

Smooth entry, with polished currant, cherry and cranberry fruit, picking up cedar and anise flavors, though it turns dry and the tannins grip tightly on the finish. Drink now through 2007. 11,500 cases made.

**DIAMOND CREEK Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Volcanic Hill 1993** 89 \$50/\$41

Still shows plenty of restraint, with its Bordeaux-like presentation of tight, earthy currant, overlay of cedar and tobacco and flashes of mineral, leather and tar. Gains complexity on the finish even as the tannins reveal their youth. Decant. Drink now through 2010. 1,400 cases made.

**FISHER Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lamb Vineyard 1993** 89 \$45/\$43

An herbal, earthy style that's well-made, with rich currant, leather, blackberry and clay flavors forming the foundation. Finishes with chalky, concentrated tannins. Drink now through 2007. 488 cases made.

**JUSTIN Cabernet Sauvignon San Luis Obispo County 1993** 89 \$20/\$NA

At an ideal drinking stage, with softening black cherry, currant and plum fruit and smooth tannins. Elegant and balanced, with a touch of anise and sage. Drink now through 2006. 4,000 cases made.

**TERRACES Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993** 89 \$40/\$NA

Tasted from magnum. Smooth, with graceful earth, anise, black cherry and waxy herb notes commingling with cedary cigar box nuances. Finishes with firm tannins. Drink now through 2005. 300 cases made.

**ARROWOOD Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County Réserve Spéciale 1993** 88 \$38/\$NA

High-toned cherry, vanilla and minty menthol aromas add on leather, which carries over to the palate, leaving it wanting for more of the cherry and currant flavors. Balanced, with firm tannins. Best to decant. Drink now through 2007. 1,000 cases made.

**CAYMUS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1993** 88 \$25/\$39

Wonderful coffee bean and vanilla aromas add to the currant, plum and spice nuances. Supple, well-balanced and very nicely proportioned. No Special Selection was produced this year. Best soon. Drink now through 2006. 20,000 cases made.

**CHATEAU SOUVERAIN Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley Library Reserve 1993** 88 \$40/\$NA

Pleasantly earthy, with ripe, spicy, supple plum and black cherry fruit that's well-focused, though it turns dry and tannic on the finish. Drink now. 200 cases made.

**CHATEAU ST. JEAN Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County Cinq Cépages 1993** 88 \$22/\$NA

Supple, even fleshy, with ripe cherry and currant flavors, picking up hints of anise, cedar and herb. Well-balanced, even though the flavors taper off a bit on the finish. Drink now. 9,000 cases made.

**CONN CREEK Anthology Napa Valley 1993** 88 \$30/\$NA

A complex, elegant, thoroughly enjoyable style that offers a mix of currant, black cherry, bell pepper and touches of tar, cedar and forest floor, gaining focus on the finish. Drink now through 2005. 1,212 cases made.

**THE HESS COLLECTION Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 1993** 88 \$40/\$68

Firmly tannic, concentrated and chewy, dominated by earth and anise flavors. Enough red fruits appear, but this is still a very dense, backward, unevolved wine that should benefit from decanting or cellaring. The big question is whether the tannins will subside while the fruit is still pure. Drink now through 2010. 150 cases made.

*\*Release Price / Current Price*