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10 Distinctive California Reds

New reviews of Syrah and blends from Sonoma and Napa

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

California Syrahs come in a range of styles, both as varietal wines and in blends. Here are a few that show off the diversity of the grape, hailing from the cool Sonoma Coast to the warm hills of Napa Valley.

Leading the way is a pair of Syrahs from Bedrock. Both wines come from cool-climate vineyards but display different styles, with Griffin's Lair Vineyard—located near the Petaluma Gap—showing an aromatic, spicy and herbal side, while the Hudson Vineyard, in Carneros, highlights a dark and dense approach, with ripe fruit and rugged tannins.

Longtable is a new wine from vineyard owner Jeff Straus and Quintessa winemaker Charles Thomas. Their inaugural release is a blend of predominantly Syrah, with Grenache, Mourvèdre, Petite Sirah and Counoise. It comes from Straus' vineyard on Napa's Mount Veeder. Only 50 cases were made of this rich, Rhône-style blend.

Though the case production for many of these wines is small, the flavors are big, with quality to match, and all are worth seeking out.

BEDROCK Syrah Carneros Hudson Vineyard South T'n'S-Blocks 2012

Score: 92 | \$45

Rich and rustic, with explosive fruit built around the blackberry, wild berry, plum and cherry flavors. The tannins grip and hold, but subtle berry notes seep through and become more beguiling. Best from 2015 through 2028. 300 cases made. —J.L.

BEDROCK Syrah Sonoma Coast Griffin's Lair Vineyard 2012

Score: 92 | \$45

Offers purity of flavor, with a firm, rigid backbone of loamy earth and chewy tannins, complemented by a wild savory side. Blackberry, black licorice, dill, anise and cedar notes form the core. Ends with rich, gravelly tannins. Drink now through 2028. 250 cases made. —J.L.

RAM'S GATE Syrah Sonoma Coast 2012 Score: 92 | \$40

Robust, chunky and chewy, with pure, dense blackberry, blueberry, black licorice, rock, loam, dried herb and cedar notes. Takes a while to unravel but never loses focus or appeal. Gains all the way. Best from 2015 through 2028. 401 cases made. —J.L.

TOR Syrah Napa Valley Rock Hommage Allan 2012 Score: 92 | \$54

Dense and powerful, with full-blown, extracted blackberry, black licorice, loamy earth, bay leaf and dried herb flavors. Delivers notably extracted and chewy tannins. Best from 2016 through 2028. 275 cases made. —J.L.



Thomas Sanders

Morgan Twain-Peterson of Bedrock and his dog, Caritas.

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LONGTABLE The Gathering Mount Veeder 2010 Score: 91 | \$75

Offers a rich mix of grapey berry flavors, dried herb and spice accents, and cedar and sandalwood notes, with touches of bell pepper and loamy earth, all folding together on the finish. Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Petite Sirah and Counoise. Drink now through 2025. 50 cases made. —J.L.

BEHRENS FAMILY Sainte Fumée California 2011 Score: 90 | \$55

A rustic, chewy style, with dusty, extracted and spicy flavors of dark berry, gravel, black licorice, cedar and tobacco, firming on the finish and ending chewy. Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cinsault. Drink now through 2025. 299 cases made. —J.L.

DEHLINGER Syrah Russian River Valley Goldridge 2011 Score: 90 | \$40

Firm, with rich dark berry, mocha, spicy bell pepper and dried herb notes, this offers up a complex mix of flavors that are well-defined and supported by chewy tannins. Best from 2015 through 2026. 290 cases made. —J.L.

EPIPHANY Syrah Napa Valley Stagecoach Vineyard 2011 Score: 90 | \$49

A rustic style that's rich and spicy, with a gamy edge to the dark berry, mocha, dried herb and sage flavors. This flashes a touch of oak and ends with firm, chewy tannins. Drink now through 2024. 225 cases made. —J.L.

MARTINELLI Syrah Russian River Valley Vellutini Ranch 2011 Score: 88 | \$75

Deftly balanced, with dark, rich, extracted blackberry, cedar, loamy-gravelly earth and pencil lead notes. This is slow to unfold but maintains a graceful balance of fruit and spice. Ends with rustic tannins. Drink now through 2024. 94 cases made. —J.L.

PORTER CREEK Syrah Russian River Valley Timbervine Ranch 2011 Score: 88 | \$42

Pleasantly herbal, with dill, cedar, black licorice and smoky dark berry flavors that are dry and chewy on the finish, ending with cleansing tannins. Drink now through 2026. 450 cases made. —J.L.

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