

Wine Spectator

10 Striking California Cabernets

New reviews of Cabs and blends from Sonoma and Paso Robles

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It's worth searching outside of Napa for Cabernet Sauvignon. Across California, vintners are taking the grape more seriously, investing in their vineyards and finding the right sites for growing Cabernet, and the results are showing in the bottle. This group highlights noteworthy versions from Sonoma and Paso Robles, two of the regions with the most potential.

Tucked between Alexander Valley to the northwest and Napa to the south, Knights Valley is one of the warmest appellations in Sonoma and is quickly establishing a reputation for its Cabernet. Car racer Kevin Buckler used grapes from the Bavarian Lion Vineyard for his Adobe Road label. Delectus' Cabernet Franc from the late, cool 2009 vintage shows that this variety may have a future there as well.

Ram's Gate, a new Carneros winery that combines the experience of wine industry veteran Jeff O'Neill and winemaker Jeff Gaffner, and Kamen, founded by Hollywood screenwriter Robert Mark Kamen, both carry Sonoma Valley designations. Other wines to look for include Dehlinger's Claret, from the cooler Russian River Valley, and Hidden Ridge's 55% Slope, from vineyards on the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas Mountain range.

Further south, Paso Robles Cabernet is not to be overlooked. Justin's Reserve bottling packs plenty of structure and flavor. Daou, an exciting new project by brothers Georges and Daniel Daou, is a tremendous value at \$28.

RAM'S GATE Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley 2009 Score: 91 | \$48

Broad-shouldered, with a rich core of herb-, dill- and oak-laced dark berry, mocha and roasted herb flavors, this veers toward dry with firm, gripping tannins and a prominent display of new oak. Needs time. Best from 2014 through 2024. 250 cases made. —J.L.