

2024 Monterey International Wine Competition

Director's Platinum Tasting Notes

ACTA, Alexander Valley (Sonoma County, California) Red Wine "Deeds" 2021 (\$80)

The spicier side of Cali style Bordeaux blends is on full display here, and that spice character works beautifully with the ripe berry fruit. It makes for a fine solo glass, or will go great with a grilled ribeye steak. **94**

Barefoot Bubbly Peach Sparkler (\$10)

Purely petulant peachiness will give you an idea of what's going on here... It's a veritable Bellini in a bottle without the cloudiness. It's a little harder to find than you might expect, but if brunchy cocktails are your thing, it's worth seeking out. **94**

Carol Shelton, Dry Creek Valley (Sonoma County, California) Petite Sirah

"Florence Reserve" 2018 (\$40) – Properly inky and rich, here's a petite that's built for wild game. Black fruit, tar and brown spice get a little boost from the oak character, and it finishes long and well integrated. Something fatty with set it off perfectly – particularly if you choose to enjoy in the near future. **94**

Carol Shelton, Rockpile (Sonoma County, California) Petite Sirah "Rockpile

Reserve" 2018 (\$45) – As is typical with this variety, some bottle aging is in order here. This is just peeping round the corner of its tannin profile to say "psst... come and check this out...", so if you decide to open it within 5 years of the vintage date, be sure to decant well before serving with strong cheeses or wild boar. **94**

Castle Rock (California) Pinot Noir "California Cuvee" 2022 (\$12)

A moderately extracted style, with layered cherry, strawberry, toast and fall spice aromatics. Bright acidity translates the aromas to flavors well, with a silky midpalate and a long finish with oak spice push. Nice! **94**

Crane Terrace, Lamorinda (Contra Costa County, California) Syrah 2017 (\$60)

I love a Syrah that's fully ripe but keeps acidity intact – that acid tends to maintain a peppery character that plays well off the black and blue fruit profile. That's the case here, both on the nose and in the mouth, with the pepper remaining bright throughout. It's built for beef, but will serve well with pig on a spit or other rich meats. **94**

Dark Horse (California) Pinot Noir 2022 (\$10)

Cool climate feel, soft weeds, talc and a little pepper over strawberry and red cherry. Bright coastal acidity, toasty oak, tiered spice dances well with the fruit. A nice choice on the moderate extraction. **94**

Eberle, Paso Robles (California) Chardonnay Eberle Estate Vineyard 2022 (\$30)

A bright Chardonnay for fans of toasty oak and spice that take the lead over the fruit character without completely obliterating it. This is made in a drink me now style that is looking for a creamy fish dish to make it sing – dive right in. **94**

Halter Ranch, Adelaida District (Paso Robles, California) Petite Sirah Estate

Reserve 2021 (\$90)– A variety that doesn't often match the sound of its name – until this bottle comes along to defy expectations. It's as pretty as Petite Sirah gets, with elegant black and blueberry fruit, restrained tannins and a mix of pepper and fall spice. There's great finish push as well – serve this with grilled meats or medium strength cheese. **95**

J. Lohr, Paso Robles (California) Cabernet Sauvignon “Hilltop” 2021 (\$35)

A juicy, rich style that keeps just a touch of herb character intact. This serves to make the blackberry and cassis pop with pleasure on the palate, with supple grip and well-chosen oak spice layers filling the mouth and finishing long in mouthwatering fashion. Well done! **94**

Jeff Runquist, Amador County (California) Verdelho, Estate Grown 2023 (\$27) –

While this doesn't transport me to Portugal, it's undeniably delicious, showing that the grape can find suitable homes elsewhere. It's all about the citrus, with a little floral lift in the nose that takes the sharp edge of the lemon down just a tad. Don't overchill this – you'll miss out on some real nuance. **94**

Jeff Runquist, River Junction (San Joaquin County, California) Viognier 2023 (\$25)

A nicely subdued Viognier – not at all overwrought with toomuch of one element or another. Lemon oil, honeysuckle and stonefruit aromas lead to a viscous palate where the lemon oil and peach are nicely balanced, finishing long and clean with a nice clove spice note. The acidity ties this all together – pasta al limone would be a perfect fit. **94**

Locatelli, Paso Robles (California) Red Wine “Cielo Rosso” Estate 2021 (\$40)

There's lots of structure here for the long haul in your cellar. It's just beginning to show itself through a sturdy backbone, with mixed berry fruit, brown spice, moderate oak toast and a dash of heat that enhances rather than intruding. Give this plenty of time to unfold... meaning hours in the decanter if you go in early. **95**

Long Valley Ranch, Monterey County (California) Pinot Noir “Estate Vineyards” 2021(\$18)

This shows rich damp and dry earth tones over cherry, rhubarb, and spice aromatics – vibrant acidity carries the flavors with fine-tuned balance between the spice and earth tones. Fully integrated finish push will keep you coming back for more! **95**

Macchia, Lodi (California) Old Vine Zinfandel “Ambiguous” 2022 (\$22)

Lovers of this variety prize it for rusticity, which this wine delivers in full throttle fashion. The American oak character adds a bright dill edge to the brambly fruit, and the flavors are bright throughout. There’s some alcohol heat present, but that will likely endear fans even more. Stylized! **94**

Macchia, Lodi (California) Old Vine Zinfandel “Generous” Mohr-Fry 2022 (\$30) – A zesty, lusty style of Zinfandel that works by fine tuning the elements – but not too much. Bright dill character props up the cherry and berry fruit and keeps everything bright through the finish. Try some medium strength cheese with this one – it won’t disappoint! **94**

Macchia (California) Teroldego “Tremendous” 2022 (\$25)

A rustic edge and a telltale spice profile is a clear calling card for those familiar with this producer. Bright American oak character is a fine choice for the bold, brambly red fruit, with the dill notes it provides giving that fruit lift. Bright and a little brash – in a good way! This is ready to drink now with grilled meats – go for a mixed platter. **94**

Navarro Vineyards, Anderson Valley (Mendocino County, California) Pinot Blanc 2023 (\$21)

A lot of California Pinot Blanc leans toward Chardonnay in character, usually due to microclimate issues, but this one leans solidly in the direction of Alsace, with bright citrus, tart apple, racy acidity and real vibrancy of character. I could drink this all day. Beautiful! **96**

Navarro, Anderson Valley (Mendocino County, California) Rosé of Pinot Noir 2023 (\$27) – Dry Rosé... summer is coming, and you’ll want some of it around, so I’ll save you some time with the search through oceans of the stuff and direct you to a great one. This is floral and fresh on the nose, with tart strawberry and cherry fruit, soft herb notes and a popping citric finish that stops short of being edgy. Why dream of warm weather when you can have a glass of it now? **94**

Omaha Steaks, Dry Creek Valley (Sonoma County, California) Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2021 (\$50)

Nothing shy here – this is all about big fruit, easy spice and hedonism from the nose through the palate, where solid structure knits the fruit and oak together well. Decant this for an hour or two, or cellar a while. Delicious! **94**

Perrucci Family, Santa Cruz Mountains (California) Sangiovese 2020 (\$) – There are just a handful of California producers that have made a solid commitment to Sangiovese, and I think I’m tasting a new addition to the group here. Deep cherry fruit with a dash of blueberry and enhanced by light brushy tones and pulsing acidity that gives everything great push in the finish. **94**

Presque Isle (Lake Erie) Pinot Grigio 2023 (\$16)

I've often whined about domestic Pinot Grigio offerings being rather unremarkable as a group, but this wine has me singing a different tune. Floral, citrus and peach aromatics translate nicely on the palate, and bright acid keeps the flavors pumping end to end. I'd drink this happily any time. **94**

**Reustle Prayer Rock Vineyards, Umpqua Valley (Oregon) Tempranillo
"Winemaker's Reserve" 2021 (\$48)**

Bold aromas of blackberry, orange blossom and powdery spice are very attractive, and lead to a palate that's spot-on Tempranillo, I'd go so far as to say it's masquerading as a Ribera del Duero in style, with a sturdy structure, earthy minerality and bright blackberry/black cherry fruit. Give this a few years in the cellar or decant well if going in near term. **96**

**Rodney Strong, Sonoma County (California) Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2018
(\$60)**

This has serious written all over it right from the start, with subtle layered aromas of fruit, spice, toast, herb and earth. The parade continues on the palate, with good integration already showing from beneath the sturdy backbone. This is just beginning to show its charms – cellar for 5 years for starters **95**

Rodney Strong, Chalk Hill (Sonoma County, California) Chardonnay 2021 (\$30)

Bright and balanced, this is a major crowd pleaser that will cross every aisle with compromising principles on any side. Bright apple and citrus fruit get just the right oak treatment, and the whole thing just works. A model of what a wine built for virtually everyone can be. **95**

Rodney Strong, Sonoma County (California) Red Blend 2021 (\$25)

The "Blended Red Other" category of red wines has one job – to be delicious. This wine hits the mark with a firm structure carrying mixed berry fruit, brown spice, toasty oak and a nicely integrated finish. Think beef or bolder when pairing... **94**

Tackitt Family Vineyards, Edna Valley (California) Albariño 2023 (\$30) Lemon, lime and a jazzy honeyed note get your attention on the nose, and carry through on the palate with a little spiced peach added in for good measure. It's on the ripe edge of the varietal spectrum, but it's firing on all cylinders. Nice! **94**

Tackitt Family Vineyards, Paso Robles (California) Rosé "Risqué" 2023 (\$28) –

The "Risqué" part of this wine is the blend – it's a mix of Bordeaux varieties, and it's been blended into beauty. A tasty glass of pink, with soft strawberry, lemon and stony mineral notes that finishes long and bright, begging another sip. Serve with warm days and cold salads of all kinds. **94**

V. Sattui, Napa Valley (California) Brut “Prestige Cuvee” 2021 (\$50)

Wow! Pure lemon oil aromas leap out of the glass, setting you up for the citrus mix to come. There’s a lot going on here, and this succeeds by going right up to the border of austerity, but turning toward generosity at the last moment. Here’s a toast to that! **94**

V. Sattui, Napa Valley (California) Cabernet Sauvignon Vittorio’s Vineyard 2021 (\$88)

A vanilla, sarsaparilla and fall spice over black fruit nose kicks things off here, enticing you to experience the big boned black fruit and spice on the palate. Give this some cellar time to unwind itself a bit – it’s going places...**95**

V. Sattui, Napa Valley (California) Chardonnay 2022 (\$39)

Bold spice and bright acidity are on full display here, with sweet apple and pear fruit, soft oak accents and lingering spice in the finish. If you find yourself on the fence between a Chardonnay and a Viognier, this is a find middle. **94**

V. Sattui, Mount Veeder (Napa Valley, California) Dry Riesling 2022 (\$34)

A proper Riesling through and through, crisp and dry with a honed mix of citrus and stonefruit and a huge finish push that will keep you coming back for more until the bottle is empty. We need more of this domestically – it’s possible to make it great as testified to here, and it deserves more intrepid tasters. **94**

V. Sattui, Napa Valley (California) Entanglement GSM 2021 (\$48)

A very pretty, attractive wine that stops you at the rim of the glass and tells you that you’re going to want to spend some time there before sipping. Layered berry, black cherry, powdered brown spice and a little orange zest draw you in, and the palate delivers with fine grained tannins letting each of the promised elements speak clearly. It’s delicious now and will age well over the next ten years. **95**

V. Sattui (Napa Valley) Malbec 2021 (\$52)

A deeply extracted Malbec, maybe with a little assistance from some Petite Sirah, but quite successful with plush berry fruit, fall spice and hints of savory meaty character. Very much a crowd pleasing style that’s ready for grilled meats of all kinds. **94**

V. Sattui, Howell Mountain (Napa Valley, California) Zinfandel Black Sears Vineyard 2021 (\$61)

This is my kind of Zin! All the best characteristics are here – berry fruit, pepper, bright acidity, viscous texture and a well-integrated finish – and as a package they please from beginning to end. Serve with grilled burgers or steaks, or something more elegant if you dare... **95**

Whitehaven, Marlborough (New Zealand) Sauvignon Blanc 2023 (\$20)

Even tasting blind, I can recognize this pure sense of place offering. It's TBNZ – text book New Zealand – in character, with grass and gooseberry that's bright but reined in aromatically and palatally, with a rich texture and a citrus burst in the finish. Always delicious, and easy to find to boot. **94**

ZD Wines, Napa Valley (California) Cabernet Sauvignon 2021 (\$78)

It's rare these days to find an acid driven Cabernet that carries real ripeness and varietal characteristics with this much class. Classic blackberry, cassis, fall spice and faint dried herbs ride supple tannins through a finish with great push and a bright acid kiss as a finale – which certainly won't be the finale until the bottle is empty. Love this!
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