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# Ten Napa Valley wineries that should be better known

[15 comments](#)

Posted by steve on Aug 20, 2013 in [Cabernet Sauvignon](#), [Napa Valley](#), [Opinion](#) | [15 comments](#)

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It happens all the time in wine: famous wineries overshadow the less famous. Bordeaux set the pattern: So luminous is the glare of the most celebrated Classified Growths that some perfectly fine chateaux are obscured. It being the purpose of wine writers to bring under-appreciated wineries to readers' attention, here are my suggestions. I don't mean to suggest that these wineries are coming out of the blue. Insiders know them; it's the general public that doesn't.

**Goldschmidt Vineyards.** Veteran winemaker Nick Goldschmidt's carefully crafted Cabernets rival the best of Napa Valley. But for some reason, they haven't garnered the acclaim of competitors such as Staglin or Dalla Valle. Representative wine: 2006 Game Ranch "Plus" Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville; \$150, 98 points.

**Terra Valentine.** I've been giving this winery high scores since the late 1990s. They do a fantastic job with their Spring Mountain fruit, but you seldom hear of them in the same breath as the cults. Representative wine: 2010 K-Block Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain; \$65, 95 points.

**B. Cellars.** The winery really caught my eye with their 2004 vintage, and I've been a fan ever since. Cabernet is the speciality, although they also try their hand at Syrah and Chardonnay. Representative wine: 2009 Beckstoffer To Kalon Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville; \$165, 95 points.

Summers Estate. Calistoga-based Summers has been crafting terroir wines of distinction since at least the late 1990s. But the last 10 years have really shown the fruits of success, not just with Cabernet but with Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Charbono. Representative wine: 2010 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Calistoga; \$50, 92 points.

Sodaro Estate. I felt this winery's struggle in the mid-2000s, but by the 2008 and 2009 vintages, they started to rock. That may have been due to the involvement of May-Britt and Denis Malbec, the consulting winemakers. Representative wine: 2009 Doti/Sodaro Blocks 2 and 6 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley; \$125, 95 points.



Amici. This is former Beaulieu winemaker Joel Aiken's baby, and while it took him a while to find his footing, he's now established it securely. A flagship wine is certainly the 2009 Morisoli Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford; \$125, 95 points. But for the representative wine, I'm choosing Amici's 2007 Olema Cabernet, Napa Valley; \$20, 97 points. It stood out in a blind tasting several years ago of more than 60 Napa Cabs, almost all of which cost far more.

Prime Cellars. The celebrated winemaker, Ted Henry (Jarvis), and his wife, Lisa, own the brand, and he crafts the wines (she does the marketing). With the sole exception of a so-so 2005 Cab and a 2008 Chardonnay, I've given all their releases 90 points or higher. Representative wine: 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville; \$64, 93 points.

KaDieM. This is a brand new brand, a partnership between friends. The winemaker is Michael Trujillo, who was mentored by the likes of André Tchelistcheff and Tony Soter. The representative wine is their 2009 Inaugural Vintage Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley; \$85, 95 points.

Patland Estate. Winemaker Jay Buoncristiani [ex-Hess Collection] crafts rich Cabs, Syrahs and Malbacs from the winery's estate vineyard and from purchased grapes, notably the Stagecoach Vineyard, which straddles the Atlas Peak AVA. Representative wine: 2009 Stagecoach Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley; \$90, 94 points.

Turnbull Wine Cellars. Turnbull isn't new. In fact, it was one of the first wineries I ever wrote about [in its Johnson-Turnbull era]. Although the winery is set on Highway 29 in the heart of Oakville, its wines tend to pass unnoticed, which is really a pity. Representative wine: 2009 Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville; \$100, 95 points.

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#### 15 Responses to "Ten Napa Valley wineries that should be better known"



*Bill Haydon* says:  
[August 20, 2013 at 9:35 am](#)

Average Price: \$91.40/bottle.

Number of wines at less than \$50/bottle: 1

Average Price of the Remaining 9: \$111.75

<http://venturebrosblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/speedsuits.jpg>



*doug wilder* says:  
[August 20, 2013 at 12:59 pm](#)

I remember the 1987 Johnson Turnbull Lot 67 Cabernet Sauvignon (made by Kristen Belair) was very memorable and reminded me of Heitz Martha's. I also consistently like what Patland is putting out. I would add Emerson Brown and Culler to that list to try if you haven't yet.



*steve* says:  
[August 20, 2013 at 2:29 pm](#)

Bill, I guess you get what you pay for.



4. *steve* says:  
[August 20, 2013 at 2:30 pm](#)

Doug Wilder, they used to call Lot 67 “the poor man’s Heitz Martha’s Vineyard.” The mintiness was said to come from giant old eucalyptus trees that surrounded the vineyard.



5. *George Bato* says:  
[August 20, 2013 at 2:34 pm](#)

What timing, Steve! Just finished a tasting with Nick Goldschmidt. Great guy who loves talking about the nuances and finer points of winemaking from different regions around the world. Funny as hell and very talented winemaker. The new releases of Goldschmidt Vineyards wines were amazing! With less than 100 cases of the GV “Plus” Cabernets made, not a lot to go around, so it won’t break my heart if they stay under the radar.



6. *Bill Haydon* says:  
[August 20, 2013 at 3:33 pm](#)

“Bill, I guess you get what you pay for.”

Yet fewer and fewer people are willing to pay it with each passing year, Steve. I spent a miserable year consulting for a group of Napa wineries, including a few names that would probably shock you. Those wines are literally dead men walking in the market. If I was a salesman in New York or Chicago who had to pay my bills taking those, and other similar, wines around, I would go home and stick my head in the oven.

And while I generally consider your commentary, while undoubtedly pro-California, to be still be thoughtful and nuanced compared to a few of the kool-aid drinkers out there, the sentiment in that quote is a huge part of the difficulties and market travails that they are facing.



7. *tom merle* says:  
[August 21, 2013 at 12:31 am](#)

Bill H: Your incisive commentary points to the core problem of wine criticism: the purveyors never have to buy the wines they feature and consume.



8. *Bill Dyer* says:  
[August 21, 2013 at 8:11 am](#)

Regarding Sodaro wines, please note the transition to Denis and May-Britt was about four months ago, so through the 2012 vintage winemaking was by Dyer Consulting (mainly Dawnine).



9. *steve* says:  
[August 21, 2013 at 8:28 am](#)

Thanks Bill Dyer for pointing that out.



10. *Bill Haydon* says:  
[August 21, 2013 at 9:04 am](#)

Or sell them, Tom!



11. *Henry Patland* says:  
[August 21, 2013 at 9:40 am](#)

Thanks for including Patland Estate Vineyards, we're honored! When will you visit us for a full tasting experience?



12. *Bill R* says:  
[August 21, 2013 at 9:44 am](#)

Steve, nice comments regarding Nick Goldschmidt, could not agree more. You need to be aware he is not an "Aussie", Nick is from New Zealand.



13. *steve* says:  
[August 21, 2013 at 10:21 am](#)

Oops. Corrected.

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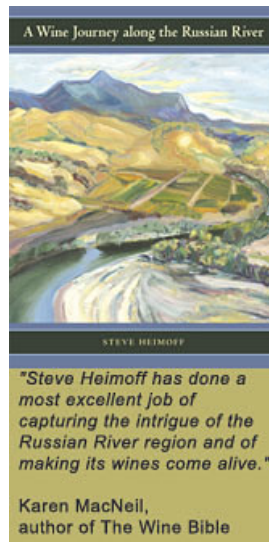
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