



CONNOISSEURS' GUIDE to California Wine™

Cabernet Sauvignon

When we started *Connoisseurs' Guide*, almost two decades ago, our first advertisement (which appeared in the now defunct *Vintage* and *Wine World* magazines) promised the Guide would be the scorecard for the increasingly complicated California wine scene. And, over the years, virtually each issue has brought new players and new changes in the pecking order.

This issue is no different. The wines reviewed here in scramble the Cabernet lineup yet again. Here are some of the late changes:

GEYSER PEAK The emergence of this winery as an important player on the wine scene is now complete with the arrival of their *1991 Reserve*, which earns ☼☼☼.

HEITZ We, and a very small group of other brave reviewers, have been complaining about mustiness in Heitz Cabernets for a half decade now. With the Heitz Cabernets of 1989, the *Martha's Vineyard* bottling returns to form, but the *Bella Oaks* does not. At \$60, the '89 *Martha's* is vastly overpriced, but at least it is clean. If the '90 is on target as well, Heitz will be a top contender for "comeback player of the year".

STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS Like Heitz, SLWC has been all too much of a fallen hero in recent vintages. The problems have been the twin curses of pervasive herbaceousness, often bordering on the vegetal, and a tendency to exhibit a bizarre mix of leathery, cedary, sometimes earthy characteristics. In this issue, SLWC offers '90 *Fay Vineyard* which steps neatly around those difficulties and earns ☼☼☼. But, its '91 *Napa Valley* shows its unwanted side to excess. Will the real SLWC please stand up?

TRUCHARD A wonderful addition to the lineup, Truchard is making lovely Cabernets and Merlots. No longer a rookie, the winery has earned its way into the ranks of the rising stars.

VILLA MT EDEN Is their delicious *1990 Grand Reserve* a harbinger of things to come or simply a one-time event arising out of a great vintage?

this issue . . .

CABERNET SAUVIGNON . . . 65

Each year turns into a report card on the fortunes of California Cabernet producers. In this issue the score is in on 97 of their recently released offerings.

semillon 76

While mainly seeing service in California as a blending grape with Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon is an important varietal for many Northwest wineries.

INEXPENSIVE CHARDONNAYS 78

We go on a quest for tasty Chardonnays in the \$7 to \$10 price range and manage to find some priceworthy offerings.

best buys 80

COVER PHOTO: Geyser Peak's Executive Winemaker, Australian-import Daryl Groom, is shown checking out a load of grapes arriving at the crush pad.

* * March 1994 * *

