

Syrah, and its flavors of berries, spice, pepper and earth keep it squarely on the varietal track. A little tough and hard in the latter palate just now, it pinches off a bit in a noticeably tannic finish that needs the smoothing of another four or five years of age.

   \$20.00

**PRESTON VINEYARDS** 1992 Dry Creek Valley  
While a bit removed from the substantial stuff found in the '91 version (☼☼☼), this likable wine is made in a lighter, more fruit-oriented style. Easy-going cherry and blackberry fruitiness stays at center stage throughout, and oak is added for a touch of sweetening. Soft, medium-bodied and slightly low in tannin, this is one for drinking early even if it can keep for up to five years.

   \$18.00

**QUPÉ Bien Nacido Reserve** 1993 Santa Barbara  
Easily the richer of Qupé's two "Reserve" Syrahs, this nicely made wine favors refinement over pure power and presents its ripe, slightly spicy, berryish fruit in a rounded and rather polished style. The wine has plenty of body, but never seems tough or heavy, and its lingering finish is more concerned with fruit and spice than with tannin. Soft enough to encourage near- to mid-term drinking, it offers needs no more than a few years of improvement in bottle.

   \$20.00

**QUPÉ Los Olivos Reserve** 1993 Santa Barbara County  
Cherries and brushy spice are combined in light and uncomplicated aromas that set the stage for the youthful, slightly undersized flavors that follow. A pleasant enough wine, but one that is a little short on the solidity expected of Syrah, it is helped along by a dollop of sweet oak and finishes with uncommonly light tannins. Useful as a foil to simple grilled meats, it lacks the basic substance to accompany the hearty fare typically called for with Syrah.

   \$20.00

**QUPÉ Los Olivos Cuvée** 1993 Santa Barbara County  
**33% Mourvedre.** Starting on a fairly quiet note, the clean aromas slowly open to reveal modest, ripe-berry fruit and pleasant oaky sweetness. Smaller in scale than most of the wines reviewed here, it follows as a medium-bodied effort whose mildly plummy flavors are colored with hints of spice. Slightly thin and slightly acidic at the end, it should probably be consumed sooner than later lest its limited fruit begins to dry.

   \$16.00

**RIVER RUN VINTNERS** 1993 Monterey County  
**Ventana Vineyard.** If offering a teasing glimpse of ripe cherries, this bottling takes obvious herbaceousness as its major theme. Bothered by a bit of momentary earthiness in the nose, the wine mixes mild oaky spice and fruit with elements of green bean and brushy, forest-floor elements in both its aromas and flavors. It is generally soft in balance yet runs into some acidity stiffness in its comparatively low-tannin finish.

   \$15.00

**SOBON ESTATE** 1993 Shenandoah Valley  
(Amador County). The warmer climes of Amador would seem likely to bring out the sturdy side of Syrah, and the point is proven here. A big, ripe, rough-cut wine that errs on the side of alcoholic excess, this bottling comes through with lots of sweet berry and plum aromas and lush, ripe fruit flavors. Hardly a pretty wine, it finishes with waves of tannin, yet, through it all, its richness is undeniable. Use it with the heartiest of stews or, better yet, as a foil to heavy English cheeses.

   \$10.00

**TERRE ROUGE** 1992 Amador County  
A muscular, fully fleshed-out Syrah, this well-made effort teams bold, berryish fruit with a wealth of good oak and a bit of peppery spice that, in combination, make a strong and fairly complex varietal statement. Very tannic and just a little hot in the latter going, yet showing glimmers of the underlying suppleness to come, it is at once rich, mouthcoating, tough and tongue-curing and it needs relegation to the cellar for at least three to five years of improvement.

   \$20.00

## TRUCHARD VINEYARDS



**TRUCHARD VINEYARDS** 1993 Carneros  
**Napa Valley.** Richer Syrahs often come with formidable toughness that makes them difficult to enjoy despite their generosity, but that is assuredly not the case here. This plump and weighty offering delivers the goods in terms of fruity richness and handsome oak, yet does so with a sense of uncommon polish. It is exceptionally well-balanced and, for all of its size, shows a bit of brightness and bounce even now. Although certain to tempt earlier drinking, it deserves three or four years of patience and might grow for twice that long.

   \$18.00

**WELLINGTON VINEYARDS** 1993 Russian River Valley  
**Alegria Vineyards.** Never in the game with respect to fruitiness, this lean, thinly filled bottling seems stripped of its heart and only an oaky shell remains. The essence of Syrah is completely missing here and will not show up with age. The winery has taken it off the market but, if you come across a stray bottle, you should ignore it.

  

**ZACA MESA WINERY** 1992 Santa Barbara County  
**Chapel Vineyard.** Light in color, aroma and flavor, this hard-to-like offering is all too sparse in fruit, and its overtones of jammy ripeness never translate into richness. Fairly quick in flavor, it winds up on the taut and narrow side with stiff acidity pushing through in its otherwise dry, underfruited finish.

   \$20.00