


of cellaring, but it seems certain that oak will remain its overriding feature.

   \$20.00

OJAI VINEYARD 1992 California
High-toned oak stands apart from lighter, comparatively narrow fruit in the mildly spicy aromas of this mid-sized wine, and its flavors, while varietal in tone, are similarly on the narrow side; the whole presentation lacks a bit of the heft and sinew that typically mark Syrah. Minor astringency and noticeable acids make for a slightly edgy finish, but a few years of age and service with food will dampen any sense of toughness.

   \$15.00

 **ORION** 1990 Napa Valley
Produced by Sean Thackrey. Exotic, nearly opulent smells of ripe raspberries, creamy oak, spiced plum and sweet smoke make an attention getting introduction to this big, maximally extracted Syrah. Thick and slightly rounded in texture, the wine is both ripe and roaringly astringent in the mouth, and though its fruit gamely struggles to emerge, it is ultimately lost beneath repeated waves of tannin. Capable of lasting for ten to twenty years, it is unlikely to find refinement, and its flavors may never live up to the drama and promise of the nose.

   \$30.00

ORION Old Vines 1992 Napa Valley
Produced by Sean Thackrey. Once again, a premium is placed on extract and sheer substance, but for all of the wine's density and strength, it is fairly sparse in terms of fruit. Ripe and chewy, dry and hot, it is as charmless as it is big and carries far more tannin than its fruit is ever likely to match.


   \$30.00

JOSEPH PHELPS Vin du Mistral Syrah 1991 Napa Valley
Initial notes of ripe berry fruit are slowly pushed aside by ever-growing oak in the rich, slightly creamy aromas, and, not surprisingly, oak again sits heavily atop background berries in the mouth. While plump and rounded on entry, the wine becomes progressively drier and tougher with formidable tannins and lasting oak quashing any fuller expression of fruit. Structured for aging at least ten years, this one lacks the fruity substance for such a journey and might best be tagged for drinking in half that time.

   \$22.00

QUPÉ Los Olivos Cuvée 1992 Santa Barbara County
33% Mourvèdre. Fairly low-keyed in aromas and more herbal than it is fruity, this limp, softly structured bottling shows a similar bent to herbaceousness in its ripe, diffusely fruited flavors. Mildly bitter and mildly hot and never especially revealing of the grape, it seems certain to age rapidly and cannot be expected to improve appreciably with time.

   \$16.00

 **QUPÉ Reserve** 1991 Santa Barbara County
Bien Nacido Vineyard. While oak and peppery spice provide momentary limits to youthful fruit in the nose, that

fruit gradually comes forward and is well presented in the ripe, raspberry and spice flavors of this solid youngster. Medium-full bodied and a little chunky, as befits Syrah, it is less bombastic than others and trades a bit of scale for more immediate fruit. Still a way from drinkability, it needs four to five years of patience.


   \$20.00

RENWOOD WINERY 1991 Amador County
Now, we all know that Syrah is a bigger wine by nature, and that Amador is noted for the sizable renditions of most varietals, but this strapping, alcoholic wine is a bit too big for its own good. In truth, the wine carries itself fairly well considering its 15% alcohol, but its finish is decidedly hot, and varietal berries and spice are largely given over to vague ripe-red-wine qualities. Serviceable perhaps with the heartiest stews or the most flavorful cheeses, it opens no new doors to the ways of Syrah.

   \$18.00

RIVER RUN 1992 Monterey County
Ventana Vineyard. If loaded with flavor and shot through with plenty of rich oak, this fat and heavy-handed Syrah is largely directed by single-minded ripeness. Essentially over-ripe in character with jamminess its central trait, it winds up slightly hot and dry with an unpleasant twist of volatile sourness rising to distort the finish.


   \$9.00

 **SIERRA VISTA Five Star Reserve** 1992 El Dorado
Abundant oak is a key player in this tight young Syrah, and, while bringing considerable richness, it tends to push out ahead of fruit in both aroma and flavor. Ample tannins argue for five or more years of cellaring and should ensure sufficient time for the wine to unfold to its fruity best.

   \$22.00

TRUCHARD VINEYARDS



 **TRUCHARD VINEYARDS** 1992 Carneros
Napa Valley. The second of two successful Syrahs from an unexpected appellation, this generous offering, like its partner from Havens Cellars, is long on depth and rich, well-extracted fruit. Lots of spicy oak and distinct smoked-meat nuances supply extra intrigue, but from nose to finish, the wine is solidly keyed on clean, concentrated fruit. Full and supple, but never fat or heavy, it finishes with fine-grained tannins that ensure age without obliterating earlier appeal. Three or four years should bring things in fine-tuned focus, but a decade of improvement seems well within its reach.

   \$16.00