THE CALIFORNIA LIST

EDITION 1
THE CALIFORNIA LIST
The wine world is full of classifications. They may be hierarchical rankings of vineyards, or ratings of historic performance in the secondary market, but these classifications can help shape how consumers and the wine trade engage with a region.

When it comes to California, we wanted to create a list of our own. A list that did not focus on individual wines, but on the Producers that have been the most important in creating and driving the California wine category in the UK. A list of exceptional California Producers renowned for their quality and overall impact in the UK.

We could not create this list without a team of Judges with a profound depth of experience of California wine. This was not a wine competition, indeed there was no formal tasting as part of the judging process, but an exercise in bringing together a group of experts with diverse perspectives and opinions. The California List is intended to be a snapshot of California wine in the UK market at a single moment in time, so the inaugural List, this Edition 1, reflects the current state of play.

In the years to come, we will undertake this process again to discover new producers who the Judges believe are now worthy of a place on the List, and perhaps even some who no longer hold their spot.

Our thanks goes to the wonderful panel of Judges we assembled for Edition 1. Their enthusiasm and ‘polite discourse’ on the final make up of Producers was a great thrill for us to be a part of:

JANCIS ROBINSON MW, wine writer and founder of Jancis Robinson Purple Pages website.

STEPHEN BROOK, wine writer, Californian wine specialist and author of over 40 books on wine.

SARAH KNOWLES MW, wine buyer at The Wine Society.

MARK ANDREW MW, co-founder of Noble Rot restaurants.

RONAN SAYBURN MS, head of wine at 67 Pall Mall and Chief Executive of the Court of Master Sommeliers Europe.
More detail on the Judging criteria can be found at the back of this Booklet. Although all of the brands considered were awarded specific scores, we will not be publishing those scores. The Judges agreed a threshold score and all brands that scored above that made this Edition 1.

We hope you enjoy exploring Edition 1 of The California List and that it extends your knowledge and enjoyment of California Wines.

DAMIEN JACKMAN AND JUSTINE MCGOVERN
UK TRADE DIRECTORS
CALIFORNIA WINE INSTITUTE
LONDON, 22 MARCH 2022
I feel particularly close to the history of California wine in the UK. As honorary secretary of the Zinfandel Club, formed in the late 1970s by the late Harry Waugh and John Avery MW with Hugh Johnson and hotelier Paul Henderson to educate British wine lovers about what was going on on the west coast, I met my husband. In late 1980 I was charged with organising the club’s most ambitious tasting to date, a showing of all the California wines then available in the UK in the US embassy, when access to its site in Grosvenor Square was dead easy. Nick was bringing in a range of varietals made at Souverain but, intriguingly, explained at the tasting that he was about to re-open L’Escargot restaurant in Soho with an all-American wine list. The rest, as they say, is history.

John Avery was the first important British wine merchant to cotton on to the fact that great wine was being made in California. He’d gone there as early as 1964 to research a university dissertation on the packaging of premium California wine and went on soon afterwards to import wines from Beaulieu. Harry Waugh, the invertebrate traveller employed by Averys’ great rivals Harveys of Bristol, was very well aware too. In the eighth edition of Harry Waugh’s Wine Diary, published by Christie’s in 1978, he describes how, on the night they landed in San Francisco from Honolulu, ‘men only’ Lafite dinner was laid on for him by the Napa Valley’s wine-loving hosts Belle and Barney Rhodes who were clearly already good friends. Then the next night, in San Francisco, he was treated to an evening he describes as ‘like drinking American wine history’. It began with an 1875 Angelica sweet wine and a flor sherry experiment from Beaulieu attempted in 1947 and included a 1958 Hanzell Chardonnay he describes as ‘epic’ and notes it had bested many a Montrachet in its time. He was clearly already a veteran of Bordeaux v California blind tastings.

It was in the late 1970s that California wine really took off in the UK, long before Australian wine did. I see that in my first book, The Wine Book published in 1979, I
He also opened an ambitious restaurant, The Vineyard at Stockcross in Newbury, Berkshire with an associated wine import company specialising in California.

Back in 2020, at around the time of the Essential California tasting of California wines in London, also attended by an impressive number of visitors from continental Europe, Damien Jackman and Justine McGovern, California Wine Institute representatives in the UK, decided to create a classification of the best California wine producers. Inspired by the role played by the likes of the 1855 Classification in Bordeaux and Langton's Classification of Australian wine, they asked me, Mark Andrew MW, Stephen Brook, Sarah Knowles MW and Ronan Sayburn MS to come up with one. We set to work individually in September 2020 and two months later held one long Zoom session to agree on a final list.

We were asked to nominate producers (not individual wines) and managed to whittle down our choices to the ones revealed here, all of which belong, as Robert Mondavi was wont to say extremely often, in the company of the finest wines in the world. We hope this Edition 1 may help British wine professionals discover just what California has to offer them. (Of course there are many more sensational wine producers in California but we had to limit ourselves to those who have had a commercial presence in the UK for at least 5 years.)

The idea is that the classification is updated every two years or so. We just hope we can do it without the acrimony and lawsuits currently dogging a rather longer-established wine classification in France at the moment.

JANCIS ROBINSON MW
LONDON, 12 FEBRUARY 2022

devote a whole three pages (!) to California and just one to Australia. A favourable exchange rate helped, as did tv ads for Paul Masson California wines starring Orson Welles, no less. (This was pre-internet and he was able to insist they were shown strictly in the UK)

A well-dressed young Old Etonian called Geoffrey Roberts trained as a barrister but saw a business opportunity that was likely to provide much more fun. He started to import a portfolio of California wines from some of what were then the top addresses, also in the late 1970s. His tastings were grand affairs and were attended by the principals, some of whom seemed to enjoy an excuse to change out of their jeans and into city finery. (I’m looking at you, Janet Trefethen). Other names I remember were Robert Mondavi, Mayacamas, Schramsberg, Joseph Phelps, Ridge, Rutherford Hill, Freemark Abbey, Spring Mountain, Heitz, Dry Creek, Edna Valley, Chalone, Calera, Sterling and many more.

Britain’s more open-minded wine drinkers were intrigued by this new cohort of fine wines, spurred on by the surprising results of Steven Spurrier’s Judgment of Paris in 1976. When Nick opened L’Escargot in 1981 the California (and Oregon and Washington) wines went down a storm. Robert Mondavi himself had turned up on the opening night, which resulted in an article in the Sunday Times. Management consultant-turned-hotelier Paul Henderson made top California wine a feature of the celebrated, and extremely diner-friendly, wine list at Gidleigh Park in Devon. The British rather congratulated themselves on their open-mindedness.

But Geoffrey died far too young, the dollar (and California wine) became much more expensive, and wines from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa moved into much of the space created by California wine. The next major UK importer of fine California wine was British businessman Peter Michael, subsequently knighted, who established his own eponymous winery on the boundary of Napa and Sonoma (embarrassingly falling off the edge of our maps in The World Atlas of Wine).
THE LIST
Nathan Roberts and Duncan Arnot-Meyers helped reinvigorate interest in the cooler climate areas of California and get wine lovers excited in more restrained expressions of Chardonnay, and especially Syrah.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- Trout Gulch Chardonnay, Santa Cruz Mountains
- Watson Ranch Chardonnay, Napa Valley
- Que Syrah Vineyard Syrah, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

Chiselled, refined, precise, elegant and always delicious, the Arnot-Roberts wines have been among my favourite Californian bottles since the moment I first tasted them. For my personal taste, the drinkability and finesse of their collection of wines puts them in my top 3 Californian wineries.

**MARK ANDREW MW**

Duncan Arnot Meyers and Nathan Lee Roberts virtually pioneered new wave California, seeking out unusual grape varieties and making delicate, truly 21st Century wines from them.

**JANCIS ROBINSON MW**
Jim Clendenen proved the quality potential available from wines of Santa Barbara County, and helped the world recognize the balance, aging potential, and savoury depth possible from the region’s Pinots and Chardonnays. He also served as mentor to many of the area’s top producers.

**NOTABLE WINES**

*Chardonnay and Pinot Noir* Santa Barbara County

*Sanford & Benedict Chardonnay and Pinot Noir*
Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County

*Bien Nacido Chardonnay and Pinot Noir*
Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County

Jim Clendenen did more than most winemakers to excite British drinkers about Californian wines, and his Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs rightly sit on the shelves of the UK’s best wine shops.

MARK ANDREW MW

A true pioneer of Santa Barbara, with a sure-footed Burgundian approach and an effortless sense of balance.

STEPHEN BROOK

The wines from ABC always overdeliver offering fantastic quality, authenticity and balance at prices that don’t break the bank, and with distribution that enables them to dominate as a natural global ambassador for Californian fine wine.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Bond devotes itself to finding and showcasing premium hillside sites of Napa Valley, making wine only from what the team considers the region's Grand Cru for Cabernet Sauvignon.

**NOTABLE WINES**
- **Quella** Napa Valley
- **Melbury** Napa Valley
- **St. Eden** Napa Valley
- **Vecina** Napa Valley
- **Pluribus** Napa Valley

Never easy to get hold of, but always a hedonistic pleasure to drink, the Bond wines represent a very Californian type of vibrant, silky red wine that always delivers.

**MARK ANDREW MW**

Meticulously made.

**JANCIS ROBINSON MW**
Cain Five brings together the five Bordeaux varieties in a wine grown from the steep slopes of the Mayacamas Mountains. It has consistently demonstrated that Napa Valley red wines can deliver nuance and complexity beyond simple fruit.

**NOTABLE WINE**

- **Cain Five Cabernet Blend**
  Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley

- **Cain Cuvée Cabernet Blend**
  Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley

- **Cain Concept Cabernet Blend**
  Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley

Followed loyally by Justerini & Brooks for many years. Lovely wines from Napa’s most thoughtful winemaker, and they’re consistent too.

*Stephen Brook*
The unique vision of Cardinale has been, since its founding, to make a single wine of Cabernet Sauvignon that showcases the best of Napa Valley. It brings together fruit from sites throughout the region to deliver one singular wine per vintage.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley
- **Intrada Sauvignon Blanc** Napa Valley

Part of the hugely successful Jackson Family Wines portfolio, Cardinale’s winemaker Christopher Carpenter focuses his efforts on a single Cabernet each year. Often based on Mountain grown fruit, with a small proportion of merlot creating a cellar focused wine with great intensity, balance and minerality.

**SARAH KNOWLES MW**

An admired and consistent luxury brand.

**STEPHEN BROOK**
Caymus is known especially for their Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, made from a blend of what they consider their best barrel selections of the vintage with a focus on dark fruits, intensity, concentration, and impact.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley
- **Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley

*Dependably delicious, I’m always excited to find mature vintages of Caymus ‘Special Selection’, one of my favourite Californian reds.*

MARK ANDREW MW
Chanin has devoted itself to single-vineyard wines of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grown in Santa Barbara County and made in a fresher, lighter, and textural style. They source fruit only from organic and sustainably farmed sites.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Los Alamos Chardonnay** Santa Barbara County
- **Sanford & Benedict Chardonnay and Pinot Noir** Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County
- **Bien Nacido Chardonnay and Pinot Noir** Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County

As a disciple of Jim Clendenen, for whom he worked, Chanin favours the same elegant and precise style. Fine quality here.

**STEPHEN BROOK**

*Gavin Chanin is a thoughtful and extremely talented winemaker, whose ability for crafting harmonious, delicious wines is matched only by his flair for creating beautiful label art!*

**MARK ANDREW MW**
Having made the award-winning Chardonnay that took top score at the Judgment of Paris in 1976, Chateau Montelena helped demonstrate California’s potential for the variety, while also delivering quality Cabernet Sauvignon.

**NOTABLE WINE**

- **Chardonnay** Napa Valley
- **Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley

*Behind the fairy-tale ivy strewn castle façade is the home of one of Napa’s oldest producers. Made famous at the now folklore-esq Judgement of Paris tasting where their Chardonnay came out top, nearly 50 years on and their Cabernet and Chardonnay continue to set a high benchmark for the region.*

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Devoted to three rocky, hillside sites of Napa Valley, Colgin quickly became some of the most admired and coveted wines of the region, showcasing the power with seamless complexity possible from Cabernet Sauvignon.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Tychson Hill Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley
- **Cariad Cabernet blend** Napa Valley
- **IX Estate Cabernet blend** Napa Valley

Ann Colgin’s cult status winery is rooted in her hillside vineyard sites, meticulous attention to detail and a commitment to achieving the highest possible quality.

**SARAH KNOWLES MW**

Luxury, but not ripeness, taken to the limit. LVMH, who acquired 49% of this beautifully situated winery on Pritchard Hill recently, know a good thing when they see it.

**JANCIS ROBINSON MW**
Dedicated entirely to 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from the St Helena benchlands of Napa Valley, Cathy Corison celebrates the complexity possible in a fresher, more restrained style. She’s been a long-time advocate of organic farming and preserving older vineyards as well.

**NOTABLE WINES**
- **Kronos Cabernet Sauvignon** St. Helena, Napa Valley
- **Sunbasket Cabernet Sauvignon** St. Helena, Napa Valley
- **Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley

*Cathy is perhaps my favourite Californian winemaker. Humble, honest and ahead of her time, the Corison wines represent everything I believe Napa should aspire to. They are terroir-driven beacons of authenticity.*

MARK ANDREW MW

*Cathy Corison’s Cabernets are some of the finest in Napa with restraint well balanced by pleasure with the ability to age beautifully for decades.*

SARAH KNOWLES MW

*Greatly admired for being atypical wines of restraint rather than power. Stylistically consistent and can age well.*

STEPHEN BROOK
Grown on the eastern slopes of Napa Valley in the Oakville portion of the Vaca Mountains, Dalla Valle delivers age-worthy Cabernet Sauvignon. Their top-tier wine, the Maya, incorporates a healthy portion of Cabernet Franc as well for aromatic distinction unique from the region.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Maya Cabernet blend** Oakville, Napa Valley
- **Napa Cabernet Sauvignon** Oakville, Napa Valley
- **Collina Dalla Valle Cabernet blend** Oakville, Napa Valley

*Magnificent wines.*

**STEPHEN BROOK**

This quality focused family estate has 20 acres in the eastern hillsides of Oakville. Farmed organically since 2007, and biodynamically since 2019, founder Naoko Dalla Valle describes herself as a farmer and is hands on in the vineyard while her daughter Maya has taken on the mantle of winemaker since 2017, with great critical acclaim.

**SARAH KNOWLES MW**
Al and Boots Brounstein, who established Diamond Creek, were among the first in California to recognize the nuance possible from single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon grown in the mountains of Napa Valley. They helped lead the way in offering distinctive terroir-focused wine.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Lake Cabernet Sauvignon**  
  Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley
- **Volcanic Hill Cabernet Sauvignon**  
  Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley
- **Gravelly Meadow Cabernet Sauvignon**  
  Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley
- **Red Rock Terrace Cabernet Sauvignon**  
  Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley

Not only a stunningly beautiful and fascinating estate to visit, but also home to some of the most evocative and terroir reflective wines in the world. They age superbly and are my benchmark for great Californian red wines.

MARK ANDREW MW

On sadly rare, but notable occasions I have delighted in trying decades old cabernet from Diamond Creek cementing them in my mind as a benchmark for Napa Cabernet in all its layered complexity.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Grown in the coldest portions of the Sta. Rita Hills in Santa Barbara County, Domaine de la Côte quickly established itself as one of California’s best-known proponents of Pinot Noir. They have since also added very small volumes of one of California’s most sought-after Chardonnays.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Bloom’s Field Pinot Noir**  
  Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County
- **La Côte Pinot Noir**  
  Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County
- **Estate Pinot Noir**  
  Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County

The wines of Raj Parr and Sashi Moorman at DDLC and Sandhi were exactly the antidote UK drinkers needed after years of being told Californian wine was about ripe fruit and big alcohol. Their vibrancy, precision and terroir-driven elegance still delight me every time I open a bottle. The ‘La Côte’ is a candidate for California’s best Pinot Noir.

MARK ANDREW MW

*Refreshing, savoury edged Pinots that are always a pleasure to drink and scream terroir.*  

SARAH KNOWLES MW
DOMINUS ESTATE

Dominus represents the unique combination of a signature site planted on a historically significant property that is stewarded by one of the world’s pre-eminent winemakers. Christian Moueix has made Dominus on his Napanook site one of Napa Valley’s most distinctive wines.

NOTABLE WINES

**Dominus Cabernet Sauvignon** Yountville, Napa Valley
**Napanook Cabernet Sauvignon** Yountville, Napa Valley

*Superbly polished, reassuringly elegant, fine Napa Cabernet.*

SARAH KNOWLES MW

*Wines that age beautifully and so deftly tread the line between elegance and vivid fruit.*

MARK ANDREW MW
Proving the power and aging potential of mountain tannin for Cabernet Sauvignon, Dunn and his work on Howell Mountain helped demonstrate how complex a single variety can be from the region. The wines show themselves best after at least fifteen years of age.

NOTABLE WINES

Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon
Howell Mountain, Napa Valley

Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon
Napa Valley

Randy Dunn crafted many of the best Napa wines I have drunk, and while the style has got riper in recent years, I’m still a sucker for the combination of density and freshness that is always present in the Howell Mountain bottling.

MARK ANDREW MW

Classic and long-lived. Old-school and balanced.

STEPHEN BROOK
EISELE VINEYARD

A historic site on the eastern side of Calistoga, the Eisele Vineyard was one of the first in the region to be labelled and recognized as a single vineyard wine. Across various owners and winemakers, the site has demonstrated the finesse and longevity possible from rocky, benchland soils.

NOTABLE WINES

Eisele Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon
Calistoga, Napa Valley

Altagracia Cabernet Sauvignon
Napa Valley

Eisele Vineyard Syrah
Calistoga, Napa Valley

Purity and finesse are the hallmark of these wines, which I have always found to be among the most elegant examples of Napa.

MARK ANDREW MW

Francois Pinault’s team has maintained the superb quality established by the Araujo family.

STEPHEN BROOK
An early advocate of organic farming, John Williams has also made a staunch commitment to dry farming in Napa Valley. Founded on Zinfandel, Frog’s Leap showcases the lighter side of that cultivar, making wines of Cabernet and Merlot as well, all of which serve a meal and age impressively.

NOTABLE WINES

Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon
Rutherford, Napa Valley

Rachel Rossi Reserve Sauvignon Blanc
Rutherford, Napa Valley

Merlot Rutherford, Napa Valley

Zinfandel Napa Valley

On the site of an old frog farm, John Williams was an early adopter of organics, dry farming and modern sustainability technology creating some of Napa’s best value and consistent wines. From his Zinfandel to his Cabernets his light touch and commitment to showcasing the purity of the variety means that these are always a personal favourite of mine.

SARAH KNOWLES MW

Reliable and sensibly priced biodynamic winery, with well distributed Cabernet and Zin, especially in restaurants.

STEPHEN BROOK
Harlan Estate

With a focus on regenerative farming for estate-only wines, an impressively long-tenured vineyard and winemaking team, and a 200-year business plan, Harlan was founded with the vision to make the California equivalent of a Bordeaux first growth. Today, it is one of the most sought-after wines in the world.

Notable Wines

Harlan Estate Cabernet Napa Valley

A Napa premier cru, as Bill Harlan intended? Possibly. More powerful than top Bordeaux, but persuasive on its own terms.

Stephen Brook

Rightly considered among the world’s best red wines, the best vintages are a force of nature that display incredible nuance and finesse.

Mark Andrew MW
Heitz Cellar’s Martha’s Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon has long been one of Napa Valley’s most famous wines. It and their other single-vineyard Cabernets demonstrate the age-worthiness possible with finesse from the region. They also make a rosé of Grignolino that has been made longer than any other rosé in California.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Martha’s Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon**
  Oakville, Napa Valley
- **Linda Falls Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon**
  Howell Mountain, Napa Valley
- **Trailside Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon**
  Rutherford, Napa Valley

Famed for being among the first in Napa to declare a single vineyard designation, it was a pleasure to taste older vintages of Martha’s Vineyard at a visit in 2019 alongside various vintages of their other two single vineyard Cabernets from Howell Mountain and Rutherford all of which showed great class and individuality.

SARAH KNOWLES MW

A legendary winery. Older vintages of their Martha’s Vineyard bottling certainly deserve the praise.

MARK ANDREW MW
HIRSCH VINEYARDS

One of the first to plant in the mountains of the far Sonoma Coast, Hirsch Vineyards grows Pinot Noir at high elevation on ridgetops within view of the Pacific Ocean. Hirsch has also shown biodynamic farming is possible in the region.

NOTABLE WINES

Estate Chardonnay Fort-Ross Seaview, Sonoma Coast
San Andreas Fault Pinot Noir Fort-Ross Seaview, Sonoma Coast
Bohan-Dillon Pinot Noir Fort-Ross Seaview, Sonoma Coast

Hirsch Vineyard is a spectacular site that proves beyond question the quality potential of the extreme Sonoma Coast, and their winery produces some of the state’s finest Pinot Noir. Added to that, Jasmine Hirsch is a great communicator and wonderful ambassador for Californian wine.

MARK ANDREW MW

With incredible precision and finesse, Jasmine’s Pinots are undoubtedly some of California’s finest.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
HYDE DE VILLAINE

A partnership between famed Burgundy producer Aubert de Villaine, and long-time Napa grower Larry Hyde, the Hyde de Villaine wines offer a marriage of French elegance with California fruit.

NOTABLE WINES

**HDV Chardonnay** Los Carneros, Napa Valley

**Belle Cousine Cabernet Blend**
Los Carneros, Napa Valley

*Burgundian legend, American wife, and her cousin Larry Hyde. A partnership that results in very stylish Chardonnays.*

**STEPHEN BROOK**

*Consistently delicious Chardonnay from a wonderful vineyard, that has long been available to UK drinkers.*

**MARK ANDREW MW**
The history of Inglenook is almost unsurpassed in California. Its founder, Gustave Niebaum purchased the property in the late 1800s and helped uncover the best varieties for the region as well as advances in viticulture. Owner Francis Ford Coppola restored the property to its original name of Inglenook, today offering some of the region’s most respected wines.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Rubicon Cabernet Sauvignon** Rutherford, Napa Valley
- **Cabernet Sauvignon** Rutherford, Napa Valley
- **Blancaneaux Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne** Rutherford, Napa Valley

Taste the fascinating conjunction of Rutherford dust and the techniques of the winemaker at Château Margaux in Bordeaux - with the little bit of Coppola dust sprinkled on the top.

_Jancis Robinson MW_

A Rutherford classic.

_Stephen Brook_
Founder Joseph Phelps was known for his innovative drive and ability. In the 1970s, he released the first commercial American bottling of Syrah helping to instigate broader curiosity for Rhone varieties. Even more impactfully, he also launched California’s first Bordeaux blend bottled with a proprietary name, Insignia. The simple act of giving the wine its own name helped highlight the uniqueness of California wine.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Insignia Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley
- **Backus Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon** Oakville, Napa Valley
- **Freestone Vineyards Pinot Noir** Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

Highly respected and iconic winery in Napa Valley curating benchmark wines.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
KISTLER

Kistler established a celebrated expression of especially California Chardonnay, though also Pinot Noir. The wines also helped bring attention to distinctive clonal selections and more coastal, as well as high elevation vineyards of Sonoma County.

NOTABLE WINES

Durell Vineyard Chardonnay
Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

Laguna Ridge Vineyard Chardonnay
Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Kistler Vineyard Chardonnay Sonoma County

A true pioneer of fine Sonoma Pinot Noir and, especially, Chardonnay. Kistler has now been joined by many others, some of whom have cooler sites, but Kistler lead the way.

JANCIS ROBINSON MW

Many years ago, the Kistler wines were what I’d pour to impress drinkers who were sceptical about the quality of California Chardonnay. Now they are justly revered around the world for their combination of hedonistic richness and energetic verve.

MARK ANDREW MW
When John Kongsgaard established his eponymous winery in the 1990s, he brought with him an already influential approach for Chardonnay. He is known for having bottled the first unfiltered, extended barrel-age example from the variety in the state.

**NOTABLE WINES**

The Judge Chardonnay Napa Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

For me, Kongsgaard produce California’s finest and most authentic Chardonnays, marrying sunkissed ripeness and succulent texture with an exquisite sense of tension and detail. They are world class white wines that are befitting of the stunning location where they are made.

MARK ANDREW MW

These wines always have sunny ripeness that makes them great ambassadors for California wine, but grit and soul too. Nice labels too!

JANCIS ROBINSON MW
Kutch

The first vintages of Kutch featured higher octane styles of Pinot Noir but over time he has shifted to a more restrained expression with a focus on freshness and has also added Chardonnay to his portfolio. He is especially known for his wines of Sonoma County.

NOTABLE WINES

McDougall Ranch Pinot Noir
Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

Falstaff Vineyard Pinot Noir
Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

Jamie Kutch was the first of the new generation of Californian wineries to find their way to the UK, and he has built a strong following among our collectors, sommeliers and merchants for his beautifully crafted Pinot Noirs. The Kutch wines are always beautifully representative of their vineyard source, and few winemakers are more committed to honing their craft than Jamie.

MARK ANDREW MW

Jamie Kutch works extremely hard - all his own work - to produce textbook transparent Pinots and to let the world know about them.

JANCIS ROBINSON MW
LITTORAI

Ted and Heidi Lemon helped change farming practices on Pinot Noir grown in cool climate regions of Sonoma and Mendocino counties. Their influence has helped shift more vineyards to organic and biodynamic farming, which they practice on their estate sites as well. Though they are known for Pinot Noir, Littorai also makes savoury Chardonnay and racy Chenin Blanc in small volumes.

NOTABLE WINES

**Pinot Noir** Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

**The Pivot Vineyard Pinot Noir**
Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

**B.A. Thieriot Vineyard Chardonnay**
Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

One of California’s great winemakers, Ted Lemon has always brought a Burgundian sensibility to bear on his delicious wines, without them ever lacking in Californian joy and generosity. His commitment to biodynamic viticulture and artisanal winemaking have always endeared him to those of us that seek out authentic wines.

MARK ANDREW MW

Burgundy-trained, modest but deeply committed to biodynamic cool-climate wines. Very influential.

STEPHEN BROOK
With a focus on a lighter, more restrained style, Matthiasson makes wines only from sites where they also help lead the farming. With vineyards in both Napa and Sonoma Counties, they tend to focus on the cooler parts of Northern California.

NOTABLE WINES
- **Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley
- **Linda Vista Chardonnay** Napa Valley
- **White Blend** Napa Valley

Steve and Jill Matthiasson are truly leaders of the younger generation of California wine producers, experimenting with the most sustainable techniques and Steve is a highly respected consultant viticulturist to boot.

JANCIS ROBINSON MW

Farmers first, Steve and Jill Matthiasson have grown an eclectic range of wines that showcase their skill and focusing on elegance and balance.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Mayacamas established itself with a reputation for more old-world style Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay grown from the coolest stretch of the Mayacamas Mountains. It is a historic site planted at high elevation and is made in the celebrated wineries concrete tanks and aged in its hillside cave.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Cabernet Sauvignon** Mt. Veeder, Napa Valley
- **Chardonnay** Mt. Veeder, Napa Valley

One of the most venerable names in Californian wine has been lovingly restored to its former glory, and now the new releases are every bit as exciting as the great wines of Mayacamas’ storied past. An absolute must for anybody building a cellar of Napa’s finest wines.

**MARK ANDREW MW**

Housed in the original stone winery, this mountainside Napa estate continues to make some of California’s most cellar worthy wines.

**SARAH KNOWLES MW**
Mount Eden Vineyards

One of the most renowned wineries of the Santa Cruz Mountains, Mount Eden Vineyards connects all the way back to some of the first Chardonnay and Pinot Noir ever brought to California in the 1800s. The wines are grown on ridgetops surrounded by conifer forest. Today they are also known for their Cabernet Sauvignon.

**NOTABLE WINES**
- **Estate Chardonnay** Santa Cruz Mountains
- **Estate Pinot Noir** Santa Cruz Mountains
- **Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** Santa Cruz Mountains

A rival to Ridge’s Santa Cruz Mountain Cabernets and Chardonnays in quality if not in style.

STEVEN BROOK

Fantastic people, incredible place and delicious wines. It is rare that a winery produces top drawer examples of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, but Mount Eden nails all three varieties every vintage.

MARK ANDREW MW
Opus One was founded as a celebrated collaboration between Baron Philippe de Rothschild of Château Mouton Rothschild and Robert Mondavi to make one wine, a Bordeaux Blend based on Napa Valley Cabernet. It was released as the most expensive wine of the region at the time and continues to be one of its most well-known and celebrated.

**NOTABLE WINES**

**Cabernet Blend** Oakville, Napa Valley

I’m sure I’m not the only wine lover for whom Opus One was their first ‘super premium’ Californian wine. To this day, a bottle of Opus is a treat, always striking the balance between Californian ripeness and the structure of Bordeaux. Opus is an iconic wine that represents an important chapter in the Californian wine story.

MARK ANDREW MW

A masterclass in superbly balanced Cabernets of admirable consistency, but also in large volumes.

STEPHEN BROOK

A partnership that has created a world class Californian wine with a perceptible French thumb print.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Peter Michael helped reveal the quality possible from single-vineyard Sauvignon Blanc in California. Their age-worthy Cabernet-based cuvées grown on the slopes of Knights Valley have also demonstrated the prestige possible from the variety in Sonoma County. From the far Sonoma Coast, they also make Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Ma Belle-Fille Chardonnay**
  Knights Valley, Sonoma County
- **L’Après-Midi Sauvignon Blanc**
  Knights Valley, Sonoma County
- **Ma Danseuse Pinot Noir**
  Fort Ross-Seaview, Sonoma County
- **Au Paradis Cabernet Blend**
  Oakville, Napa Valley

Britain’s ambassador to the California wine scene is the owner, Sir Peter Michael, who invested in this winery twixt Sonoma and Napa decades ago.

*JANCIS ROBINSON MW*

Undeniably rich and full-throttle, there are bottles of Peter Michael wines that couldn’t taste any more stereotypical as the bombastic Californian fine wine. And yet, it’s impossible not to be impressed by the density and power of their best wines.

*MARK ANDREW MW*
Radio-Coteau makes some of the most exciting and savoury Syrah in California. Their Pinot Noir focuses on dynamic, cooler-climate sites from Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. Both capture the more savoury and mouth-watering side of California wine.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **La Neblina Pinot Noir** Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County
- **Las Colinas Syrah** Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County
- **Savoy Vineyard Chardonnay** Anderson Valley, Mendocino

Proving yet again that with the right sites and skills delicately perfumed and elegant Pinots are a joy from Sonoma.

**SARAH KNOWLES MW**

Lovely wines of elegance and balance, the Pinots in particular are delicious and well worth seeking out by fans of a more restrained style.

**MARK ANDREW MW**
Bringing more than 40-years of experience to the variety, David Ramey helped transform expectations for California Chardonnay by integrating techniques from the best of Burgundy into the character of California fruit. He works with iconic vineyards of both Napa and Sonoma counties.

NOTABLE WINES

Ritchie Vineyard Chardonnay
Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay
Los Carneros, Napa Valley

Chardonnay
Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Syrah
Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County

David Ramey is one of California’s most highly regarded winemakers who has pioneered viticultural and vinification techniques influencing others and creating a style for his wines that is entirely his own.

SARAH KNOWLES MW

Best known for often glorious ripe Chardonnays, but fine reds too. Very influential.

STEPHEN BROOK

For many years the Ramey Chardonnays flew the Californian flag in the UK, but the red wines are excellent too.

MARK ANDREW MW
Ridge holds a unique place in California wine. Monte Bello is considered one of the best wines of the world, showing what the state can do with mountain Cabernet. But they also elevated the perception of Zinfandel field blends, focusing on the quality of old vineyards especially in Sonoma.

**NOTABLE WINES**

**Monte Bello Cabernet Blend** Santa Cruz Mountains

**Estate Chardonnay and Cabernet**
Santa Cruz Mountains

**Lytton Springs Zinfandel Blend**
Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County

**Geyserville Zinfandel Blend**
Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County

California’s first growth in every way - and via American oak too! I so admire Ridge’s long-standing commitment to old vines and to exporting to the UK through thick and thin, as well as their non-rapacious pricing policy. Brilliant wines, brilliant winery.

JANCIS ROBINSON MW

A truly world class winery that is a reference point for consistency, value and wines that will thrill everyone from the beginner to the connoisseur. The winery that has done more than any other to convince the UK that California belongs at the wine world’s top table.

MARK ANDREW MW

Ridge is the gold standard for high quality across a wide range of wines. A tasting with Eric and Paul at Monte Bello will always stand out as one of the most enlightening and gratifying tastings of my career.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Founder Robert Mondavi helped put California wine on the world stage. His re-discovery of the To Kalon vineyard also elevated interest in wines grown on the Oakville benchlands of Napa Valley. And his Fumé Blanc demonstrated its worth taking white wine seriously.

NOTABLE WINES

To Kalon Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon
Oakville, Napa Valley

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

Fumé Blanc Napa Valley

What Robert Mondavi did for California wine is incalculable and it’s always worth acknowledging this via one of this producer’s dependable bottles.

JANCIS ROBINSON MW

It’s impossible to deny the legacy of Robert Mondavi and the impact that he and his wines had on the wine world.

MARK ANDREW MW
Roederer Estate continues to be regarded as one of California’s premier sparkling wines. They were one of the first instances of an established Champagne house investing in an estate designed for sparkling wine in California. Their effort also helped draw attention for the Anderson Valley of Mendocino, where they are located.

NOTABLE WINE

**Brut** Anderson Valley, Mendocino
**Brut Rosé** Anderson Valley, Mendocino

Stylish sparkling that sits alongside classic traditional method wines from around the world.
SARAH KNOWLES MW

Together with Schramsberg, probably the best Californian fizz, as it has been for many years.
STEPHEN BROOK
SANDHI

Founded in 2010 by renowned sommelier Raj Parr and made in partnership with winemaker Sashi Moorman, Sandhi makes savoury and fresh Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from historic vineyards of Santa Barbara County.

NOTABLE WINES

**Bentrock Chardonnay**
Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County

**Sanford & Benedict Chardonnay**
Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County

**Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay**
Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County

**Santa Barbara Chardonnay** Santa Barbara County

The ‘Sanford & Benedict’ Chardonnay from Sandhi was the first new generation white from California that grabbed my attention, and I was not alone. The electric energy of the Sandhi wines convinced a new generation of drinkers and sommeliers to approach California with fresh eyes (and palates), and they have been instrumental in changing the perception of Californian wine in the UK.

MARK ANDREW MW

These Chardonnays ably walk the tightrope of modern and traditional winemaking creating extremely fine, often saline edged Chardonnays.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Originally founded in the 1800s by Jacob Schram, Schramsberg has continued to be recognized as one of California’s top sparkling wine houses. It is unique for offering some cuvées released only after extended tirage. It is regularly featured at state functions and poured for United States’ presidents.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- J Schram Vintage North Coast
- Blanc de Blancs North Coast
- Blanc de Noirs North Coast
- Brut Rosé North Coast

*Full-bodied fizz, reflecting their origin, but with power and finesse too.*

**STEPHEN BROOK**

Lovely to see one of the early successes of modern Napa Valley being handed down successfully from one generation to the next.

**JANCIS ROBINSON MW**
Though Screaming Eagle remains a bit of an enigma, keeping its location largely secret and eschewing estate tours, the wines continue to be among California’s most coveted. They focus on regenerative farming, and only commercially release the best of each vintage with their flagship Cabernet-based wine, as well as a Merlot-based blend known as The Flight.

NOTABLE WINES
Screaming Eagle Cabernet Sauvignon
Oakville, Napa Valley

The Flight – Merlot Blend
Oakville, Napa Valley

Screaming Eagle Sauvignon Blanc
Oakville, Napa Valley

The benchmark ultra-high quality boutique winery that inspired a generation of imitators. Quintessentially Californian in the best possible way.

MARK ANDREW MW
Seghesio is known for both old vine field blends of Zinfandel, and their dedication to Italian varieties. Their wines include historic clonal selections brought from Italy in the late 1800s. The vineyards include some of the plantings of the original Italian-Swiss Colony of that time, as well as the oldest plantings of Sangiovese in the United States.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Old Vine Zinfandel** Sonoma County
- **Home Ranch Zinfandel** Alexander Valley, Sonoma County

Championing arguably California’s flagship variety - Seghesio focus on no holds barred single-vineyard Zinfandels that carefully tread the line showing the much-loved power and character of this variety with surprising balance, which gets even better with age.

**SARAH KNOWLES MW**

Producer of a set of forceful single-vineyard Zins that almost always show fine balance.

**STEPHEN BROOK**
Shafer established a noteworthy style of lush, generous, yet also age-worthy wine with their Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon. They also showed that it was possible to not only ripen the variety but make compelling wines in the area now known as the Stag's Leap District.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon**
  Stag’s Leap District, Napa Valley
- **Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay**
  Los Carneros, Napa Valley
- **Relentless Syrah**
  Napa Valley

With a distinct Shafer-style that runs through the range, this family winery produces wines with distinction and particularly well-integrated velvety tannins on the reds, where the “Hillside Select” tops the set.

SARAH KNOWLES MW

Plush and glossy, and therefore not always the first Californian wines I would reach for, they are nevertheless a benchmark for the style and ‘Hillside Select’ is an impressive wine.

MARK ANDREW MW
For more than forty years, Silver Oak has made one of America’s most-loved Cabernet Sauvignon from both Napa Valley and Alexander Valley. More recently they created the first production facility to successfully earn the Living Building Challenge, one of the world’s strictest sustainability certifications.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley
- **Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon** Alexander Valley, Sonoma County

From their stunning state of the art winery this pair of hand-crafted polished cabernets showcases the unique styles from Napa and Alexander Valleys. These wines also tread the line with balance and youthful vibrancy on release yet also the ability to age well for decades.

*SARAH KNOWLES MW*

Very enjoyable crowd-pleasing Cabs from two counties.

*STEPHEN BROOK*
SINE QUA NON

The epitome of a cult winery, Sine Qua Non is known for its limited production wines made from a blend of Rhone varieties. The wines also inspire collectors for the ever-changing art pieces featured as labels and created by winemaker-artist-owner Manfred Krankl.

NOTABLE WINES

Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Blends
Santa Barbara County

Manfred Krankl’s Sine Qua Non is the textbook example of a cult winery. Tiny volumes of limited edition (one time only) bottlings, strictly controlled mailing list distribution, prices that rocket on the secondary market after release, and wonderfully artistic packaging.

JANCIS ROBINSON MW
Spottswoode is known for its forty-years of estate grown Cabernet Sauvignon. The winery has also made a strong commitment to climate action, social responsibility, and sustainability by ensuring their business, employee, and farming practices all support these efforts.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** St. Helena, Napa Valley
- **Lyndenhurst Cabernet Sauvignon** Napa Valley

_One of my absolute favourite producers anywhere, run with real care and integrity, an early adopted of organic viticulture and an early signup to the estimable International Wineries for Climate Action._

_JANCIS ROBINSON MW_
The famed red wine to win the Paris Tasting of 1976, Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars showed the world Napa Valley could make outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon. Founder, Warren Winiarski has gone on to influence winegrowing in not only California but even Colorado and Australia. He continues to fund research initiatives to support both the history and future of the wine industry.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon**
  Stag’s Leap District, Napa Valley
- **Fay Cabernet Sauvignon**
  Stag’s Leap District, Napa Valley
- **Artemis Cabernet Sauvignon**
  Stag’s Leap District, Napa Valley
- **Karia Chardonnay**
  Napa Valley

Arguably one of Napa’s most iconic wineries whose cabernet was so successful at the now legendary Judgment of Paris tasting yet nearly 50 years on are still crafting very classic collector worthy cabernets.

**SARAH KNOWLES MW**

The Judgement of Paris was obviously the start of this winery’s fame, but for many years after that Winiarski proved that it wasn’t a flash in the pan. Today the wines remain a welcome sight on wine merchant shelves and restaurant wine lists across the UK.

**MARK ANDREW MW**
The Staglin family is known most especially for their estate wines of Cabernet Sauvignon, but they have had just as significant an impact through their philanthropic efforts supporting brain health research, as well as other initiatives.

**NOTABLE WINES**

*Family Vineyard Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon*
Rutherford, Napa Valley

*Salus Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon*
Rutherford, Napa Valley

The Staglins may not have been in Napa Valley for generations but they have provided the backbone, and finances, for so many great initiatives.

*JANCIS ROBINSON MW*

*With a state-of-the-art underground winery this organically farmed single vineyard estate produces a wonderfully polished and precise Cabernet.*

*SARAH KNOWLES MW*
Though Tablas Creek did not start the Rhone-wine movement in California, they’ve done more than any other producer to advance it. Tablas Creek now grows all 18-varieties of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, many of which they brought into California for the first time. Their investment in regenerative farming has also helped transform what others see as possible in Paso Robles.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Esprit de Tablas** Adelaida District, Paso Robles
- **Cotes de Tablas** Adelaida District, Paso Robles
- **Patelin de Tablas** Adelaida District, Paso Robles

With one boot firmly in the vineyards of Château de Beaucastel in the Rhône valley Tablas Creek lead the way in championing the Rhône varieties, selecting Paso Robles as the ideal region. Curating a huge range of characterful and fascinating wines, Tablas are continuing to be a pioneer as the world’s first regenerative organic winery.

SARAH KNOWLES MW

The right place at the right time for Rhone varieties. Charming wines, especially whites, expertly made.

STEPHEN BROOK
TURLEY

Turley’s commitment to preserving older vineyards, to Zinfandel, and to organic farming helped build a movement in the state for each. Their investment in old vines extends to other varieties as well. Their Hayne Vineyard Petite Syrah, grown in the benchlands of St Helena, is considered by many to be one of the most important wines in the state for how it shows Napa can do more than just Cabernet.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **Hayne Vineyard Petite Syrah** St Helena, Napa Valley
- **Cedarman Zinfandel** Howell Mountain, Napa Valley
- **Kirschenmann Vineyard Zinfandel** Mokelumne River, Lodi
- **Juvenile Zinfandel** California

With total devotion to Zinfandel and especially old vines Larry Turley and Tegan Passalacqua now make more than 40 wines showcasing the nuances of this often-pigeonholed variety. Some of the most complex aromatic reds that develop incredibly over time.

SARAH KNOWLES MW
Established by the late Jess Jackson, Vérité made a name for itself through its devotion to deliver three different Bordeaux blends – one Merlot-based, one primarily Cabernet Sauvignon, and the third focused on Cabernet Franc. The wines take inspiration from the famed French region to showcase the distinctiveness and diversity of Sonoma County.

**NOTABLE WINES**

- **La Muse Merlot Blend** Sonoma County
- **La Joie Cabernet Blend** Sonoma County
- **Le Désir Cabernet Franc Blend** Sonoma County

*California reinterpretations of classic Bordeaux regional styles. Much more California than Bordeaux, but impressive depth of fruit.*

STEPHEN BROOK
Williams Selyem was among the first to make the world realize California could deliver outstanding Pinot Noir. Co-founder Burt Williams helped bring attention to some of Sonoma’s preeminent vineyards and newer growing regions. Today they continue to make single-vineyard wines from an array of sites throughout the cooler, western-side of Sonoma.

NOTABLE WINES

Foss Vineyard Pinot Noir
Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Russian River Valley Pinot Noir
Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Estate Vineyard Chardonnay
Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

The estate that put Californian Pinot Noir on the map in the 80s and 90s.

STEPHEN BROOK

For a long time Williams Selyem made perhaps the best Pinot Noir in California. The winery’s iconic label still turns heads and the ‘Coastlands’ or ‘Estate’ bottlings are worth seeking out.

MARK ANDREW MW
JUDGING CRITERIA
The Judges were asked to evaluate over 150 producers on three key criteria: Quality, Availability, and Impact.

- **Quality** (out of 15 points) was the most important factor and had the greatest weighting in the scoring process. The Judges focused on how well a Producers' wines and price points compare to their Californian and world peers.

- **Availability** (out of 5 points) spoke to how widely accessible the Producer’s wines were in the UK on and off-trades, and how long their wines have been in the market.

- **Impact** (out of 5 points) allowed for more of the subjective thoughts of the Judges to come into play by reflecting how important a particular Producer has been in building the overall California wine category.

The final version of The California List was decided after all scores were totalled and a robust zoom discussion by the Judges narrowed the contenders down to the final group that have made Edition 1 of The California List.

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**QUALITY**

Quality of the Producer’s wines at their price points when lined up against their Californian peers. Out of 15 points.

- **Guiding Points**
  - Grading the overall quality of the Producer, not just their best wine
  - 9 pts would be a Producer of good quality wines
  - 11 pts would be a Producer making wines that stand shoulder to shoulder with its global peers
  - 13+ pts would be a Producer of outstanding wines across the board

**AVAILABILITY**

Has good distribution throughout on and off trade in the UK. Is the Producer well known and accessible to UK consumers? Out of 5 points.

- **Guiding Points**
  - Producers of cult wines that may be of outstanding quality but are not readily accessible to UK consumers would fail to score highly in this category
  - A brand that has been widely available in the on and off trade across the UK for more than 10 years would score very highly in this category

**IMPACT**

How important has this Producer been for building the category of California wine in the UK? Did it make you take notice of California wine? Does the Producer contribute to the story of its region and California winemaking? Out of 5 points.

- **Guiding Points**
  - Did a Producer make an impact on your personal wine journey throughout your career, and make you take note of California wine.
THE CALIFORNIA LIST REGIONS