

California Cabernet Spotlight

California Cabernet fans have two options at the moment: The first is to keep grabbing up the late-release 2021s from that benchmark vintage; the other is to tread carefully with 2022, sticking primarily to mountain AVAs.

The 2022 California Cabernet vintage was marked by a severe heat event over the Labor Day weekend, with highs of 118° F that stretched out over a week. Simply put, anything that was anywhere close to being ripe when the heat dome hit had the stuffing knocked out of it.

The mountain AVAs weren't spared the heat, but it was somewhat mitigated by their elevation. Lokoya, Philip Togni, Mount Veeder Winery and Brandlin all found success in 2022.

Meanwhile, 2021 is the vintage that keeps giving. And there are some great relative values to be had, including the likes of Etude's sleek and shimmering Oakville bottling, sourced from Vine Hill Ranch, as well as the old-school Farella bottling from Coombsville. 2021s from stalwarts such as Dunn and Mayacamas are included here as well, along with a notable newcomer, Bergman, where the 2021 was made by Graeme MacDonald before Nigel Kinsman was hired the following year.

And there will be plenty more to come. My annual Cabernet report will appear in Wine Spectator's Nov. 15 issue, and will include reviews for more than 500 wines.—*James Molesworth*

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2022 California

Cabernet

MERRYVALE

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2021

93 points | \$90 | 550 cases made | Red

A solid, grippy, well-toasted style, offering black currant, fig and blackberry reduction notes laced with tar, walnut husk and bittersweet cocoa through the finish. For those who like a little burl with their Cabernet. Best from 2026 through 2038.—J.M.



Hot Wines

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in Wine Spectator Insider. They are high-scoring wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

MERRYVALE

Profile Napa Valley 2021

95 points | \$235 | 625 cases made | Red

Offers the vivid and alluring fruit of the vintage, showing lovely notes of mulberry, blackberry and cassis that are rich and stylish as they glide along, with hints of warmed anise, apple wood and violet. A cocoa accent adds a toasty edge to the finish, along with a late tug of warm earth, but the fruit wins out easily. Impressive. Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Best from 2026 through 2038.—J.M.

