CABERNET Kingdom

Drink in the best this international superstar variety has to offer.

BY THE EDITORS OF *WINE ENTHUSIAST*

PHOTOS BY JENS JOHNSON

It's hard not to love Cabernet Sauvignon, but with so many good options available, it can be tough to know where to begin.

From traditional French examples and iconic Bordeaux estates to New World cult classics that hail from Napa, Australia and beyond, consider this your go-to resource for the world's favorite red-wine grape. You'll get a global view of the best the variety has to offer, no matter what corner of the world you turn to. Explore the top regions, the typical representations and bottles to stock up on, and discover the beautiful bounty of this versatile variety.

California

Napa Valley

André Tchelistcheff, a legendary Russian-born, European-trained winemaker, was among the earliest champions of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. He honed in on the region's ideal set of circumstances, from varying volcanic and alluvial-influenced soils to its warm summer days and cool nights.

"When [Tchelistcheff] first tasted Napa wines, he decided that Cabernet Sauvignon grown in this climate was destined to become one of the great wines of the world," wrote Leon Adams in *The Wines of America* (McGraw-Hill, 1973).

Tchelistcheff persuaded his employer, Georges de Latour, to build a cellar to age Beaulieu Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon in oak barrels for at least two years. That was followed by another two years of aging in bottle. The 1936 Georges de Latour Private Reserve introduced fine Napa Cabernet to the world.

Some 30 miles long and four miles wide, Napa Valley's long, narrow shape masks considerable variations in elevation, temperature and topography throughout its 16 American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), from Coombsville to Calistoga. Cabernet Sauvignon is planted on more than 24,000 acres, 51% of the region's acreage planted to wine grapes.

Napa Cab reflects the region's warmth and sunshine. It offers a diverse exuberance of red to black fruit with plenty of power and concentration, and captures the variety's compelling savory components of cedar, clove and sage. *—Virginie Boone*

97 La Jota Vineyard 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon (Howell Mountain); $150, *Cellar Selection.*

97 Venge 2017 Beckstoffer Missouri Hopper Cabernet Sauvignon (Oakville); $125, *Cellar Selection.*

96 Clos du Val 2016 Hirondelle Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (Stags Leap District); $120, *Cellar Selection.*

95 Heitz 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley); $63, *Editors' Choice.*

Central Coast

From the 1960s into the '90s, the Central Coast's reputation for Cabernet Sauvignon was tenuous, as cooler regions typically produced reedy, herbal wines. Santa Cruz Mountains powerhouses like Ridge Vineyards and Mount Eden Vineyards never wavered from their classic, savory styles, but it was the rise of Paso Robles in the early 2000s that put Cab back on the region's map.

With hot summer days, Paso Robles puts out lush Cabernet bottlings of concentrated fruit characteristics and velvety tannins. They offer a familiar profile that many have come to expect from a California Cabernet Sauvignon.

Meanwhile, as viticulture knowledge grew in Santa Barbara County, a wave of plantings took root in the Happy Canyon AVA of the eastern Santa Ynez Valley. Those Cabs combine suave fruit with elegant dried herb and turned earth tones. *—Matt Kettmann*

97 Crown Point 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon (Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara); $150

97 J. Lohr 2016 Signature Cabernet Sauvignon (Paso Robles); $100, *Cellar Selection.*

95 Daou 2017 Soul of a Lion Cabernet Sauvignon (Adelaida District); $125

93 Vina Robles 2017 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (Paso Robles); $26, *Editors' Choice.*

Lake and El Dorado Counties and Livermore Valley

Livermore, Lake and El Dorado may not have the same ring to them as Napa, but these Northern California wine regions punch above their weight when it comes to high-quality Cabernet Sauvignon. They have value going for them, too, as these wines are usually priced well below their more famous counterparts.

Southeast of San Francisco, the Livermore Valley enjoys coastal valley growing conditions similar to Napa. These factors, which include gravelly soils and sloped vineyard sites combined with warm days and cool nights, favor quality Cabernet Sauvignon production.

To the north of the Bay Area, Lake County, especially the Red Hills District, and El Dorado County in the Sierra Foothills boast high-elevation vineyards on volcanic soils. This means low yields of Cabernet grapes, for firm tannins and great fruit concentration in the resulting wines. *—Jim Gordon*

94 Obsidian Ridge 2017 Half Mile Cabernet Sauvignon (Red Hills); $65, *Editors' Choice.*

93 Shannon Ridge 2016 Ovis Cabernet Sauvignon (High Valley); $60.

92 Michael David 2017 Earthquake Cabernet Sauvignon (Lodi); $26, *Editors' Choice.*

90 Josh Cellars 2017 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (Lodi); $22, *Editors' Choice.*