



The Wine Corner

California's best Cabernets

By Pierre DuMont

Each month noted wine expert Pierre DuMont features an interesting wine or group of wines from around the world. Pierre, though French, is Scottish at heart, thus he is always in search of great bargains to share with his readers. His philosophy is: "Any idiot with \$50 can buy a great bottle of wine. It takes brains and good information to buy a great \$10 bottle." His aim is to give readers the information needed to make smart wine purchases.

Part 1 of 2 parts

California's Cabernet Sauvignon wines are so well known and so widely respected that it hardly seems necessary to have a society dedicated to their promotion. But the fact is that the wine business is a difficult one and competition is fierce.

So the California Cabernet Society was formed to promote the state's most famous wine. Every year their grand tasting in May gives wine writers a chance to sample more great Cabernet wines in one place than any other tasting in the nation.

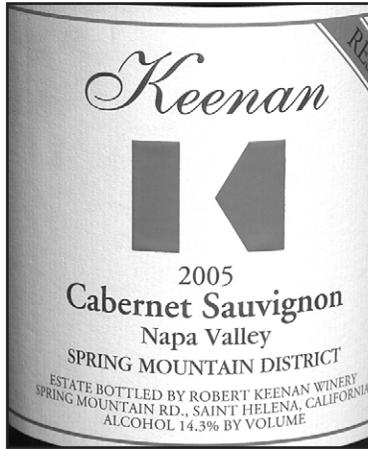
And every year a colleague and I sample the wines as we look for the current year's best wines and best buys. This year there were some perennial winners like Diamond Creek and Silver Oak that never seem to disappoint, and also some exciting new up-and-comers. The following wines (in no particular order) are the finest of over 100 wines presented.

• 2005 Keenan Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve

This wine is a huge blockbuster with no blending grapes added. Only 450 cases of this wine were made from selected lots of the Keenan Vineyard on Spring Mountain in Napa. It has a sweet bouquet of mint, black currants, and new oak. The body is rich and full with a serious wallop of tannins to ensure longevity. While it's possible to drink now, it will be much better with several years of age. www.keenanwinery.com

• 2005 Diamond Creek Cabernet Sauvignon Gravelly Meadow

Since the late 1970s, Diamond Creek has been producing some



The 2005 Keenan Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve was judged among the finest Cabernets at this year's California Cabernet Society tasting.

of the New World's finest Cabernets. Many years they rival the top wines from Bordeaux. This wine has a very Bordeaux-like nose of earth, leather, and cherries. At first the fruit is reticent on the palate and the wine appears to be closed. But when decanted and given an hour of aeration it opens up beautifully. This stunning wine will cellar well for two decades. www.diamondcreekvineyards.com

• 2004 Martin Estate Cabernet Reserve

This classic Cabernet is produced on the Rutherford estate formerly run by the legendary Georges de La Tour. It shows deep ruby/purple color and displays impressive levels of concentration and fruit. Medium to full-bodied, and well balanced, with cassis, licorice, and spice characteristics, this classic beauty should last for decades. www.martinestate.com

• 2006 Carter Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon "Coliseum Block"

This winery was new to me but the wine was a standout. It is a huge, dense, highly extracted wine with tons of tannins making it similar to a mountain-style Cabernet. Legendary winemaker Nils Venge serves as consultant. He has crafted this wine to require 4-5 years of aging to be accessible and it will last for 30 years. www.cartercellars.com

• 2006 Ty Caton Cabernet Sauvignon Caton Vineyard

This newcomer to the Cabernet

Society is an exclusive estate producer from Sonoma Valley. This wine has an enchanting exotic nose of tropical fruit (even bananas) similar to the South African wine Pinotage. On the palate it is classic California Cabernet with black currant, loamy soil, and cherry flavors. The wine is accessible now but should improve for some years. www.tycaton.com

• 2004 Silver Oak Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

The American Oak barrels that Silver Oak winery prefers give a lovely vanilla scent to the wine that mixes with black currants and cherries. On the palate it is balanced and measured with blackberry fruit and touches of leather and earth. This well made wine is textbook California Cabernet. www.silveroak.com

• 2005 Cornerstone Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain

This was my first taste of Cornerstone and it was impressive. It has plum, earth, cassis, and tobacco aromas as well as flavors and big body and an austere, tannic, mountain-styled personality. Patience is required to appreciate this wine at its finest, but it should last for decades. www.cornerstonecellars.com

• 2006 Pina Cabernet Sauvignon Firehouse Vineyard

This charming Cabernet boasts a saturated purple color along with a big, dense nose of plums, black currants, wet stones, and vanilla. Long, full-bodied, and powerful it requires 3-5 more years of bottle age and will be great accompaniment to grilled steaks. www.pinanapavalley.com

• 2003 Garden Creek Tesserac

This lovely, elegant wine has 12% Cabernet Franc and 11% Merlot added to the Cabernet Sauvignon base to give a complex nose of spice box and blackberries. It has the same flavors on the palate with the blending grapes giving good depth of flavors. This wine is not a punch-in-the-mouth Cabernet, but instead is a perfect food wine that would grace anyone's table. www.gardencreekvineyards.com

Next week: Part 2 of the results of the California Cabernet Society annual wine tasting.