

Wine Spectator

WineSpectator.com

CALIFORNIA CABERNET

OUR
ANNUAL
REPORT



**THE RENAISSANCE OF
LOUIS M. MARTINI**
**FRANCE'S LOIRE VALLEY:
WHAT TO DRINK**



**PHOTOGRAPHS BY
DAWN HEUMANN**

The new Louis M. Martini tasting complex was designed by renowned wine country architect Howard Backen.

LOUIS M. MARTINI

RENEWING A LEGACY

*A pioneering Napa winery looks to the future
under Gallo ownership*

BY TIM FISH



AS SEEN IN *Wine Spectator*

It was 1899 when Louis M. Martini set off for America. Just 12 years old, he was traveling alone, his mother having sent him from Genoa, Italy, to be with his father in California. As a teenager, Louis made wine with his dad in San Francisco, mostly the sweet wines that were popular at the time. Then, as the end of Prohibition approached in 1933, he made a risky decision. Napa Valley and dry wines like Cabernet Sauvignon were the future as he saw it, so he built a winery, alongside a railroad track in St. Helena.

Louis M. Martini winery, a utilitarian warehouse, was one of the first to open in Napa after Prohibition, and Louis M. would soon establish himself as one of the founding fathers of the modern Napa Valley wine industry.

But in 2000, after 57 years, the Martini family realized that they didn't have the stamina or wherewithal to compete on the same level as their deep-pocketed neighbors along Napa's Highway 29 wine trail.

The Martini wines were good, the winemaking and vineyards were sound, but while the family was rich with assets in vineyards and talent, liquidity was limited. They sold to wine giant E.&J. Gallo in 2002, who since then has transformed both the winery and its wines.

Matt Gallo, grandson of founder Julio Gallo and vice president of the company's coastal operations, believes the Martini and Gallo families were a natural fit for the transaction. "It was," Matt says, "the next step for both of us."

At the time of the sale, the Martini winery facility was in dire need of an upgrade. Back in the day, Louis M. had cobbled it together and finished it within a few months. He built it with cinder blocks and reinforced it with steel that he got on the cheap. He spruced up the outside with terra cotta tiles that he removed from another building; the roof came from a dog racing track in Southern California.

Looking at the winery today you'd have trouble imagining the original building. The once dark and dreary structure is now expansive and open to the outside, with hospitality areas that include several handsome salons

offering different tasting menus. The large outdoor tasting garden, which allows social distancing, is outfitted with cabanas, firepits and an alfresco kitchen with a wood-burning pizza oven, all shaded by an old sycamore grove. To oversee the restoration, the Gallos chose wine country architect Howard Backen, who preserved some of the steel beams and terra cotta tiles and added warmth with polished wood tones. Historic photos of the Martini family accent many of the rooms.

The cellar is a main attraction in the visitor center, visible through walls of glass. Short stacks of French oak barrels marked by the red stains of wine create a dramatic backdrop at the main tasting counter.

Third generation Martini siblings Caroline and Mike, both now retired, have no complaints about the restored winery or the new wines.

"Had I that kind of vision I would have come up with something very similar," says Caroline, former CEO of the winery. "How can you look at that place and complain?"

Mike, who handed over winemaking duties to Michael Eddy in 2015, is proud of the progress Gallo has made with the wines, particularly Cabernet Sauvignon.

One of the firm's first projects after the purchase was recreating Martini's marquee wine of the 1960s and 1970s: Lot No. 1, produced exclusively from mountain-grown Cabernet; the 2015, released last year, scored 94 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale.

Recent release Martini Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso 2016, also 94 points, offers ripe plum and blackberry puree flavors with accents of sage, iron, red tea



1954

Winery founder Louis M. Martini (right) hands over winemaking duties to his son, Louis P. Martini. The two had very different personalities, but successfully ran the family business as a team.



2002

Third generation Martini siblings Mike and Caroline both began working at the winery at a young age, he as winemaker and she in administration. Shown above in 2002, the year they sold to Gallo.



and licorice root. The Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Cypress Ranch Vineyard 2016 (92 points) is well-built, steeped with plum, boysenberry, black licorice and fruitcake notes. The fruits of Gallo's investment are paying off.

Martini's long-time flagship Monte Rosso Vineyard, situated on the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas mountain range, was first planted in 1886; Louis M. bought it in 1938. Senior editor James Molesworth, *Wine Spectator's* lead taster for California Cabernet, recently tasted a 33-bottle vertical of the wines, starting

“We’re not trying to repeat the wines of the past, but we are inspired by them.”

—MIKE EDDY



2015

Michael Eddy, named head winemaker in 2015, spent a decade under the tutelage of Mike Martini before the latter's retirement. Since then, Eddy has helped propel Martini's resurgence as a top Napa Cabernet producer.

with the 1956 and culminating in a trio of high quality 2018 barrel samples. (For a full report on the vertical, see “Return to Glory, page 63.)

“We’re not trying to repeat the wines of the past, but we are inspired by them,” winemaker Mike Eddy says.

The young Cabernets show the signature Monte Rosso backbone of tannins and acidity but are a touch riper and more opulent than their predecessors. Eddy also has a wider array of vineyards to work with, including coveted Napa vineyard Stagecoach, which Gallo purchased in 2017.

Mike Martini recalls what Matt Gallo told him early on, “He said, ‘The way I see this relationship is that you’re supposed to make the best Cabernet in Napa Valley, and we’re supposed to give you the money to make it happen.’ I said, ‘I can’t think of a better retirement plan.’ And they did just that.”

Napa Valley after Prohibition remained for decades a sleepy farming community. “When I was a kid, when you drove down Silverado Trail, there were walnut trees on either side,” Caroline remembers.

Prunes and cattle were also prominent, vineyards not so much. There were few wineries. Inglenook and Beaulieu resumed business, and the Mondavi family bought Charles Krug, the valley's oldest winery. Christian Brothers in 1945 took over Greystone Cellars, which had been a grower cooperative. Into that mix came Louis M. Martini. He was, by most descriptions, a sparkplug.

“He was very driven and lived life his way,” recalls Mike, who was 25 in 1974 when his grandfather died. “He’d walk into a room and take it over. My grandfather would bait you, and just get in an argument with you.”

Mike's father, Louis M.'s son Louis P., recalled Louis M.'s quick temper in a 1984 U.C., Berkeley, oral history, saying, “My main concern [about working at the winery] was whether I could get along with my dad, quite frankly.”

Louis M. was complex. He loved opera. He could be a soft touch. “He was always helping people out,” Mike says. “He had people working for him who



1886

Martini's historic flagship Monte Rosso Vineyard, situated on the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas mountain range, was first planted in 1886. Louis M. purchased it 1938.

probably couldn't have gotten a job anywhere else.” Longtime family friend and Sutter Home CEO Roger Trincherro recalls both Louis M. and Louis P. “The Martinis were always willing to share what they had. That’s my fondest memory of the family—they were well-respected and always generous,” Trincherro says.

While Louis M. had some training as a winemaker, his approach was largely intuitive, and he preferred old school blends, labeled Burgundy or Chablis. But he recognized the importance of good vineyards. He was among the first to plant vines in Carneros, and had the insight to buy Monte Rosso. He was also one of the founders of the Napa Valley Vintners Association, in 1943. “He basically was chief salesman,” Caroline says. “He made wine and his wine was like him—kinda big and California-ish, bombastic.”

Louis M. and Louis P. were like day and night. “Dad hated confrontation because I think my grandfather enjoyed it,” Mike muses of his dad, who towered over patriarch Louis M. but who was scholarly, quiet, a kind of gentle giant. “I wouldn’t argue with [my father],” Louis P. said in the oral history. “And, of course, he didn’t like that. It worked out all right, we got by.”

Louis P. Martini was born in Livermore, Calif., just before Christmas in 1918. After high school, he studied food technology at University of California, Berkeley, and later while working at the family winery, commuted to U.C., Davis, to study enology and viticulture. After serving with the U.S. Army Air Corps., he married Elizabeth Martinelli in 1947. Together they had four children: Caroline, Mike, Peter and Patty.

Louis P. was part of a new generation of Napa Valley winemakers



1977

Louis P. (above circa 1982), who moved the winery from generic blends to varietal bottlings after taking over from his own father, passed the winemaking to third generation Mike Martini in 1977.



2019

A complete restoration of the original winery and hospitality areas was completed in 2019, including an array of tasting and culinary experiences.

that was formally trained. “He had much more of a technical approach, understanding of trellis and water, clones, spacing ...,” Matt Gallo says. “Louis P. was advancing the whole industry with his approach.” Louis P. built the first lab at Martini and with his father did some groundbreaking work with temperature-controlled fermentation, mechanical harvesting and grape clones.

In the early 1950s, father and son teamed up to build what may have been Napa Valley’s first wind machine to prevent frost in

the vineyard. “They bought an airplane engine and mounted it up on a 20-foot stand,” Mike recalls. They secured the stand to the ground; Louis M. started the engine, and ran. “The whole tower took off and it flew into the vineyard and took out two sections of grapes. And we’re all standing on the sideline just laughing our asses off at this great experiment.”

By 1954, Louis M., 67, was handing over winemaking duties to Louis P., who started moving away from generic blends to focus more on varietal bottlings. The younger Martini also phased out the use of concrete fermentors and large redwood casks.



“In 1956, we had the first jacketed stainless-steel fermentors in the United States,” Mike says.

The 1970s brought big changes to the Martini family. Louis M. died in 1974 at age 87. That same year, Mike started working at the winery while also commuting to U.C., Davis, to study enology. The rest of the third generation worked at the winery, too; Caroline ran the business, and Peter and Patty were actively involved for many years.

By 1977, Mike was head winemaker and Louis P. had all but

“[My grandfather Louis M.] basically was chief salesman. He made wine and his wine was like him—kinda big and California-ish, bombastic.”

—CAROLINE MARTINI

retired. “He would come and taste with me sometimes, and he loved to wander the vineyards,” Mike says.

Money was frequently tight in the 1980s and '90s, as the winery expanded production and competition increased. Things came to a head at one point when a lender demanded the winery squeeze its budget. “Dad wouldn’t do it, so Caroline fired Peter and Patty,” Mike says, “which caused a big falling out.”

In 1998, Louis P., approaching his 80th birthday, died following a brief battle with cancer. His absence from the business found Mike and Caroline more at odds, further straining family relations. Some siblings wanted to cash out; others sought to remain. The opinion of their mother, Elizabeth, had to be taken into account. Another complication was that none of the fourth generation was interested in taking over the business.

“My dad was very fond of Bob Gallo, and he always told me if we ever had trouble, had problems or questions, go ask the Gallos. So we were definitely predisposed,” Caroline says. “We started talking to them.”

The Gallos were intrigued immediately, but it took 18 months to work out the details. Roger Nabedian, senior vice president and general manager of Gallo’s premium wine division, says the troubles facing Martini were typical of the era. “Getting a brand sold through the wholesaler network was becoming a bigger and bigger struggle,” Nabedian says. “I think they were relying too much on heavy discounting to sell the wine that they had, and as a result they were feeling pressured economically.”

The two families considered various combinations of partnerships but ultimately decided on a full buyout by 2002. Mike and Caroline remained on board for about a dozen years, he as winemaker, she as a local brand ambassador.

The purchase was as pivotal for the Gallo family as it was for the Martinis. “The marketplace was going into premium, ultra-premium and luxury wines in a much stronger way. For our family to continue to be successful we knew we had to produce premium wines,” Matt Gallo says.

Martini was Gallo’s entry into Napa Valley. Gallo’s main footprint for premium wines had long been Sonoma County. “It started us down a path that we have replicated and developed over the past 20 years,” Nabedian explains. “It allowed us to expand our portfolio into more meaningful winegrowing areas

around the world outside Sonoma County. It gave us the courage to do it and a model to follow in terms of how we thought about expansion.”

Since its 2002 purchase of Martini, Gallo has acquired Napa wineries William Hill, Pahlmeyer and Orin Swift.

At Martini, Gallo’s approach was methodical, starting with the wines. Cellar 254, a small winery within the winery, was built with a focus on small-lot production; the reimagined Lot 1 Cabernet was the initial result. Gallo also thinned out the Martini portfolio to focus less on value wines and more on high-end Cabernet. Previously, about half of Martini’s production was inexpensive wine made from Lodi fruit. “We got out of that business immediately upon acquisition,” Nabedian says.

Vineyards were the next focus. In addition to Monte Rosso, Martini owned 600 acres of vineyards, including Cypress and Sun Lake in Pope Valley, and Thomann Station, located behind the St. Helena winery. The vineyards had been well-maintained, although some replanting was required. Gallo was also buying grapes from Stagecoach Vineyard in the mountains east of Napa Valley for use in Martini’s Lot 1 Cab (the site was also a key grape source for the Orin Swift brand, which Gallo bought in 2016). Gallo’s purchase of Stagecoach in 2017 secured that high quality fruit for the future.

Moving forward, Gallo’s strategy is to build on the foundation laid in the past few years to elevate the quality of the Cabernets to rival Napa’s best. “We feel we’re mostly there but there’s always room to improve,” Nabedian says.

The focus will remain on mountain-grown Cabernet, with new bottlings potentially on the way. Gallo has also pivoted Martini from a largely retail brand to a mainly on-premise one, and Nabedian and his team plan to expand that approach once restaurants recover from the pandemic.

Martini’s annual production is about 150,000 cases, down significantly from the 250,000 cases a year made between 1990 and 2002. The company declined to comment on annual revenues.

No space at the new facility is more personal to the Martinis than the hallway of historic photos. There’s one of Louis M. with a devilish smile, and Louis P. looking more serious, plus a photo of

the winery soon after it was built, with 1930s roadsters parked outside. It reminds visitors that this multimillion-dollar showplace had humble beginnings, and that three generations of one family toiled to lay the foundation.

What would Louis M. and Louis P. think of their legacy? “I think my grandfather would be absolutely delighted,” Caroline says, “and my father would be shaking his head in wonderment.” □



2020

Matt Gallo, of California’s famed wine family E.&J. Gallo, which bought Napa-based Martini winery in 2002, oversees production of the company’s coastal properties. The Martini purchase was part of Gallo’s strategy to move into quality production beyond their home base of Sonoma.



Historic photos of the Martini family's more than half-century at the winery both remind of the past and inspire the future.

The Monte Rosso vineyard has deep roots and an impressive legacy. Located on the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas mountain range, it was first planted in 1886. Records indicate that its grapes included Sémillon, Zinfandel, Muscat and others. Its golden era began in 1938, when Louis M. Martini purchased it, for a reported \$50 per acre.

Martini expanded the vineyard plantings from 75 acres to 250, putting a strong focus on Cabernet Sauvignon followed by Zinfandel and a few other varieties. The wines were bottled under the winery's California Mountain label, and from the 1950s through the 1970s they built an impressive track record, with several vintages, such as the 1968, now legendary.

Monte Rosso became the marquee vineyard in the family-owned winery's portfolio, and today is considered one of California's all-time greatest sites.

In 2002, E. & J. Gallo purchased the Louis M. Martini winery, and the Monte Rosso vineyard along with it. Today, the vineyard's fruit goes mostly to Martini's top bottlings, with a smaller

RETURN TO GLORY

A vertical tasting of Martini Cabernet reveals generational change and new highs ahead

BY JAMES MOLESWORTH

amount sold to other wineries.

A recent vertical tasting of 33 wines, starting with the 1956, put Martini winery's history with the Monte Rosso vineyard on full display. The wines showed ups and downs before culminating in an emphatic display of quality with a trio of 2018 barrel samples. Following generational change under the Martinis and then

investments by Gallo, Martini winery is back to making world-class Cabernet Sauvignon bottlings, with Monte Rosso among its prize jewels.

The tasting took place at the winery in late July. The bottles were sourced ex-château, and the bottles were tasted nonblind from oldest to youngest vintages in flights of three or four wines at a time. (For scores and notes from this tasting, see page 66.)

The earliest vintages (1956–1976) were made by Louis P. Martini. The 1960, 1962 and 1966 bottlings were standouts among these older wines, showing remarkable consistency. They expressed what I have come to know as the Monte Rosso DNA: bright red currant and dusty red cherry fruit built around an intense iron spine. The winery's records don't indicate if these wines were 100% Monte Rosso fruit (they likely were not). But the stamp of the vineyard is unmistakable.

Also of note was the 1976, the last vintage made by Louis P., showing a still lush edge, with darker than typical plum and black cherry fruit and a long, smoldering finish.

The early vintages also showed Louis P.'s experimental side, for example the Lot 1 and Lot 5 bottlings as well as the Special Selection and Private Reserve designations.

The Lot bottlings debuted in 1968. Each was a different blend, of both varieties and vineyard sources, though usually led by Cabernet Sauvignon and Monte Rosso. For example, the 1968 Lot 1 is equal parts Monte Rosso fruit with fruit from the La Loma vineyard in Carneros.

The Special Selection label was used to indicate Martini's top lot selection; the Private Reserve label was used for a portion of the same wine that was held back in bottle before release, often five years longer than the initial Special Selection release, proof that not only was Martini homing in on quality, but had a knack for marketing as well.

The next phase for the winery began in 1977, when Mike Martini took over the winemaking, and lasted through 2002, when the winery was sold to Gallo. It is in this stretch that the wines are at their most mercurial.

Mike Martini's tenure oversaw a transition from old upright redwood and concrete vats to stainless steel, the introduction of temperature-controlled tanks for fermentation, and aging in small oak barrels.

He also extended the maceration times greatly, by two to three weeks, aiming for wines that put a greater emphasis on power and fruit, rather than the more graceful, minerally versions of the previous generation. It's a transition that was ahead of its time in some ways, as the explosion of cult Cabernets that relied on powerful fruit profiles didn't take hold in Napa Valley until the mid-1990s.

The highs and lows in this period can be dramatic—but they are instructional as well. The '77 Special Selection remains overtly herbaceous. Yet the '79 Monte Rosso Vineyard Lot 2 (the first bottling labeled as Monte Rosso), showed a wild mix of steeped plum and black cherry fruit mixed in with beef bouillon and a sweet mushroom hint.

Also of note is the 1981 Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley

COURTESY OF LOUIS M. MARTINI



Los Niños, made entirely from Monte Rosso and aged for three years in barrel. It offered a warm feel, with riper plum and black cherry fruit splayed out over warm earth, singed vanilla and black tea notes before the telltale iron note peeked in at the very end.

By 1990, changes in winemaking and aging techniques had been stabilized, and the wines showed a greater consistency. But the style is markedly different, with riper, darker profiles and a more extracted feel to the wines. In this group, the wines clocked in at alcohols of 13.8% to 14.6%, the latter a full 2 degrees more than the oldest wines in the tasting.

The '90, '91, '94 and '95 were all in lockstep with each other, offering plum and blackberry notes with briar, licorice and tarry grip. While very solid, the wines from this period tended to obscure their Monte Rosso DNA, relying more on tar and licorice than a fine iron spine.

Based on the tasting, the final and current shift in both style and quality came with the purchase by Gallo in 2002.

The first major investment was in a micro-winery dedicated to Monte Rosso fruit only, featuring smaller-batch picking, hand-sorting, more careful destemming, and gravity flow to the tanks for vinification. (The facility now handles all the fruit from the top vineyards, including Stagecoach, purchased by Gallo in 2017.)

Winemaker Michael Eddy joined the team in 2005 and worked with Mike before being promoted to head winemaker in 2015, a job he still holds. During this period, both the maceration and élevage were shortened, bringing the wines back to their typical red fruit core and brighter minerality.

The 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 marked

the rebirth of the Lot designation, and again blended fruit sources while still relying heavily on Monte Rosso. In the tasting, it put on an authoritative display of cassis, raspberry puree and plum sauce flavors that knit nicely with dark licorice, black tea and singed sage hints. The grip was on the tarry side but the wine was focused and pure and just hitting its stride.

The 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso is a modern-day beauty from this vineyard, sporting waves of crushed plum, raspberry and red and black cherry fruit, while bright minerality and light sassafras, sage and bay hints dart in and out. It marries power and brightness, with really nice cut on the finish.

Both the 2007 and 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard bottlings were among the most impressive wines in the tasting, with ripe fruit laced with wild, savory and sassafras notes. They are very solidly built, with their iron minerality very evident and enough coiled up energy to cruise in the cellar for another two decades.

The tasting ended with a trio of 2018 barrel samples: Monte Rosso; Lot 1 (comprising 100% Napa Valley fruit, including one-third from the Stagecoach vineyard, as well as fruit sourced from Mount Veeder, Atlas Peak, Howell Mountain and Coombsville); and a new Stagecoach bottling. All show potentially classic quality. They offer up copious amounts of fruit, while remaining pure, well-delineated wines, each with a distinct personality. Showcasing their varying *terroirs* and keeping a link to their past, they represent a very bright future for the Louis Martini Cabernet program. □



The wines expressed the Monte Rosso DNA: bright red currant and dusty cherry fruit built around an intense iron spine.

—JAMES MOLESWORTH

Tasting Louis M. Martini Cabernet Across Seven Decades

The notes below represent James Molesworth's non-blind vertical tasting of 33 vintages; see the accompanying story for details. Prices are not available. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews using the online Wine Ratings search.

WINE	SCORE	WINE	SCORE
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Private Reserve 1956	87	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard Selection 1991	91
Hanging on, with tea and cedar notes, this is a wispy, elegant old wine with gentle savory, cola, mushroom and sandalwood notes lingering on the finish.		This is juicy and still shows an edge of freshness to the red currant and cherry fruit. Perhaps a bit overextracted, but this has range and character for sure.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Private Reserve 1960	95	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard Selection 1994	92
This is fully mature but still focused and persistent, with a beam of bitter cherry and damson plum infused with green tea, sandalwood and sanguine nuances.		Ripe and well-defined, with a youthful edge to the mix of plum, blackberry and black cherry fruit. There's obvious extraction, but also drive and energy.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Special Selection 1961	91	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard Selection 1995	92
There's a ripe, sweet edge amid the mature tea, orange peel and sanguine notes that pushes its succulent cherry character through the finish. Hanging on nicely.		Similar to the 1994, but there's a touch of velvet to compensate for the extracted edge, while dark plum and blackberry fruit mix with bramble and licorice root.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Private Reserve 1962	94	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard Selection 1996	86
This has both ripeness and elegance, with a mix of dried cherry and strawberry notes mingling with green tea, sandalwood and bergamot. Rivals the 1960.		Very light, with a menthol aroma followed by dried red currant, sandalwood and red tea hints. A bit hollow on the finish and a bit of an anomaly in this flight.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Special Selection 1966	94	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2003	94
Lovely, with rose petal, red tea, mineral and sanguine notes surrounding a graceful, fully mature core of dried cherry and raspberry fruit. One of the stars of the tasting.		Features an authoritative display of cassis, raspberry puree and plum sauce flavors, showing energy through the finish. Seems to be just hitting its stride now.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Special Selection Lot No. 1 1968	75	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2005	94
There's bright, juicy red currant and cherry flavors, but also a hint of mustiness. Likely has TCA taint, but the hints of the legend are here. The first Lot 1 bottling.		Warm and polished in feel, with cassis and raspberry puree flavors, this rolls through slowly but surely, with red licorice, sweet spice, singed vanilla and mesquite notes.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Special Selection Lot No. 5 1968	88	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2005	95
There's nice mouthfeel and a persistent sweet earth note through the finish, but this is a slightly compromised bottle. The alcohol is also pretty high for the time.		A modern-day beauty, sporting waves of crushed plum, raspberry and red and black cherry fruit, with saffras, sage and bay leaf hints. Has power and brightness.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Special Selection 1969	91	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2007	95
Sleek, tight and refined, with a piercing edge to its dried red currant and raspberry fruit, while sanguine and tea notes emerge through the finish. Very pure and pretty.		Offers a lovely display of red, blue and black fruit, showing notes of cherry, plum and blueberry, with saffras, sage and spice. Destined for a long life. A big step up.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Mountain Private Reserve 1973	92	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2007	96
Beautifully floral, with rose petal and cherry blossom notes pulling bergamot, cherry and raspberry fruit. Long, pure and refined, with seamless structure.		This has it all—ripe fruit covering raspberry, plum and cherry, a savory edge and a long, iron-fueled finish. Remarkably youthful, with coiled up energy and terrific cut.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Special Selection 1975	90	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2010	95
More mature than the 1973, with a trimmer, slightly lifted feel overall, showing dried cherry and cranberry fruit. A bit on the tart side, but still pretty. Old-school.		Ripe, polished and driven, with a still very youthful core of cassis, plum reduction and cherry puree, all wrapped in juicy red licorice. Beautifully rendered.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Special Selection 1976	94	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2010	95
This one stands out, as it still shows a lush edge, with crushed plum and black cherry fruit that are a full shade darker than most of the wines in this tasting.		Ripe and very energetic, with racy acidity leading the way for a mix of red currant, damson plum and raspberry reduction notes. A wine that harnesses its power.	
Cabernet Sauvignon California Special Selection 1977	89	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2013	96
Aggressively herbal aromas are a stark departure from the previous wines in this set, though on the palate this is more generous, with dusty red berry fruit.		Still a baby, with waves of pure cassis, plum reduction and raspberry compote, all riveted by a graphite spine. Built for the long haul. A new benchmark for the winery.	
Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Vineyard Selection Monte Rosso Vineyard Lot No. 2 1979	88	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2013	96
The first vintage with Monte Rosso on the label, this shows a beef bouillon note, turning to steeped plum and black cherry fruit, with notes of mushroom and vanilla.		Another powerful yet harnessed example of Monte Rosso, offering a mix of red and blue fruit with wild herb, saffras and sage. I'd give this a hair's edge over the 2007.	
Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Los Niños 1981	90	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2018	95-97
This has a warm feel, with riper plum and black cherry fruit that splays out over warm earth, singed vanilla and black tea notes. In a good spot now.		This is a large ball of cassis and cherry puree that has yet to unwind, with red tea, singed vanilla and floral notes peeking in. Polished and pure despite its heft.	
Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard Selection 1983	91	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Stagecoach Vineyard 2018	95-97
Strikes a nice balance between sweet fruit and bright savory notes, with underlying energy as the plum, cherry, savory and sage notes extend through the finish.		This is the most open of the three 2018s, showing more aromatic range right now, but it's still youthfully raw in feel, with a slightly rugged, rocky edge to the structure.	
Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard Selection 1985	88	Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2018	95-97
Notes of Asian five-spice powder, singed sandalwood and steeped black tea might indicate heat damage, yet the fruit is still strong, with a core of dried and fresh plum.		Youthfully balled up, but there's gorgeous cassis, raspberry and plum fruit, all of it kept in check right now thanks to a bolt of iron as riveting as I've seen in this wine.	
Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard Selection 1990	90		
Solid ripe cherry and raspberry fruit mixes with dark licorice, sage and warm earth. This aims for more power rather than pure minerality, but it's still showing well.			