

Top 100 Wines of the USA 2023 100 TASTING NOTES Wednesday, Dec 13, 2023

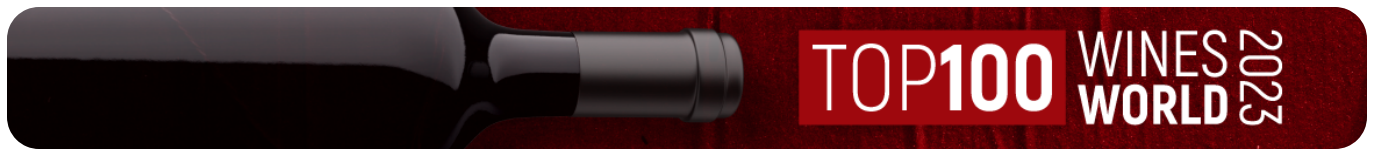


James with Jasmine Hirsch of Hirsch Vineyards and their most recent releases. She is holding our U.S. Wine of the Year, the Hirsch Vineyards Pinot Noir Sonoma County Sonoma Coast Raschen Ridge 2021.

You won't be surprised to see so many California wines in this year's Top 100 Wines of the USA, but you might be slightly shocked to see so many pinot noirs and chardonnays on the list. In fact, the No. 1 wine of the list is an amazing young pinot noir from the Hirsch family, the [Hirsch Vineyards Pinot Noir Sonoma County Sonoma Coast Raschen Ridge 2021](#).

It's a high-altitude wine from vineyards on a ridge at 480 meters elevation that overlooks the Pacific Ocean, and the cool maritime climate makes the wine so linear and fresh as well as transparently fruity. It's made from heritage clones (Swan and Pommard) that were planted a little more than 20 years ago. It's a perfect 100-point wine.

"You have concentration, structure, detail, expressiveness, and terroir," said Jasmine Hirsch, whose family owns the winery where she makes the wine. "The wines we make express themselves. That makes it so special to us."



HAYNES VINEYARD'S NICO CUEVA ON THEIR 'EXTRAORDINARY CHARDO...



The Raschen Ridge 2021 is one of 26 pinot noirs on the list below and they highlight the exceptional quality of so many pinots in California at the moment. Every top producer of Sonoma and Napa pinots noirs I spoke to this year said that demand for their wines was strong. And it all makes sense considering most of the top wines are still between \$60 and \$150 a bottle. It's almost impossible to find quality like that in Napa cabernet sauvignon, by comparison.

With 24 bottles on this list, Chardonnay is equally compelling, particularly ones made from old-vine heritage Wente clones. Great examples are the No. 2 and No. 3 wines, the [Haynes Vineyard Chardonnay Napa Valley Coombsville Corazon 2021](#) and [Kistler Chardonnay Sonoma County Sonoma Valley Kistler Vineyard Cuvée Cathleen 2021](#), respectively. The first comes from one of the oldest chardonnay vineyards in the United States with old Wente clones planted in the late 1960s. The Kistler Vineyard is young and planted in 1989. The bottling comes from one specific block.

"All the great wines that I have been [attracted] to are with a sense of structure," said Carlton McCoy, the CEO of Lawrence Wine Estates, which owns Haynes Vineyard as well as some other top names in Napa such as Heitz and Burgess. "They are all there in these white wines" from Haynes Vineyard, he added.



James loved being in Napa during his mid-November tasting trip this year.



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James and Associate Editor Johann Kwon (right) taste at Beringer, with the No. 9 Beringer Chardonnay Napa Valley Private Reserve 2021 on the table.

It's unfortunate when I hear from wineries in the United States that some people still say that "they don't drink chardonnay," yet they are missing probably the greatest grape variety in the United States at the moment. And with the outrageously high prices for top white Burgundy at the moment, the best American chardonnay almost seems like a bargain.

Just take a look at the No. 9 wine in this list as an example. It's the \$40 **Beringer Chardonnay Napa Valley Private Reserve 2021**. It's made from old Wente clone chardonnay, which delivered great depth and structure in 2021. It's built for cellaring. I am still shaking my head in near disbelief when I think of this wine and the price.



Left: James tasting with Chris Carpenter, who made the No. 5 Lokoya Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Mount Veeder 2021. | Center: Sunset on a cold evening atop Pritchard Hill in Napa last month shows such natural beauty. | Right: Tom Futo (right) and his winemaker, Jason Exposto, take a break from tasting with James in mid-November at the Futo winery.

Cabernet sauvignon and Bordeaux blends from Napa Valley still account for the lion's share of this list, with almost three dozen included. And almost all are from the terrific 2021 vintage, which was slightly smaller in volume on average because of the extended drought. The top wines show an excellent depth and structure and don't seem overly concentrated.

The four Napa cabs in the Top 10 on this list are superb examples of this, including the [Tor Napa Valley Black Magic 2021](#) at No. 4, [Lokoya Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Mount Veeder 2021](#) at No. 5, [Futo Napa Valley Oakville 2021](#) at No. 7 and [Favia Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Oakville 2021](#) at No. 8.

The lone syrah in the Top 10 is a perennial favorite on our Top 100 USA list, because the [K Vintners Syrah Yakima Valley Motor City Kitty 2020](#), at No. 6, offers fantastic value for such a superlative red, at \$50 a bottle. And value also comes through clearly with the No. 10 [Red Newt Cellars Riesling Finger Lakes The Knoll Lahoma Vineyards 2020](#). I was impressed with the viticulture and winemaking at Red Newt. David Whiting's wines are always inspiring.

Overall, California dominates this list with 80 wines, followed by eight from Washington and seven from Oregon. Plus, there's another five from New York, including the Red Newt riesling. I think this is one of the best-ever Top 100 lists for the United States and I hope you do as well.

Please keep in mind that this list includes many wines that were not considered for our Top 100 Wines of the World 2023 because I didn't taste them until mid-November, just after the list was posted on Nov. 12. I thought it was better to include the late tasted wines on this list to give you a heads-up on some great American wines to buy in the New Year.

– James Suckling, Editor/Chairman

Note: The list of wines below is comprised of bottles tasted and rated in 2023 by the tasters at [JamesSuckling.com](https://www.jamesSuckling.com). You can sort the wines below by vintage, score and alphabetically by winery name. You can also search for specific wines in the search bar.



Winemaker Brennon Leighton of K Vintners speaking last year about his wines.

Top 100 Tasting Notes

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1	HIRSCH VINEYARDS PINOT NOIR SONOMA COUNTY SONOMA COAST RASCHEN RIDGE 2021	✓
2	HAYNES VINEYARD CHARDONNAY NAPA VALLEY COOMBSVILLE CORAZON 2021	✓
3	KISTLER CHARDONNAY SONOMA COUNTY SONOMA VALLEY KISTLER VINEYARD CUVÉE CATHLEEN 2021	✓
4	TOR NAPA VALLEY BLACK MAGIC 2021	✓
5	LOKOYA CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY MOUNT VEEDER 2021	✓
6	K VINTNERS SYRAH YAKIMA VALLEY MOTOR CITY KITTY 2020	✓
7	FUTO NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE 2021	✓
8	FAVIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE 2021	✓
9	BERINGER CHARDONNAY NAPA VALLEY PRIVATE RESERVE 2021	✓
10	RED NEWT CELLARS RIESLING FINGER LAKES THE KNOLL LAHOMA VINEYARDS 2020	✓
11	JOSEPH PHELPS PINOT NOIR SONOMA COUNTY FREESTONE ESTATE PROEM NO.2 2021	✓
12	MT. BRAVE CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY MOUNT VEEDER 2021	✓
13	SPOTTSWOODE CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY ST. HELENA ESTATE 2021	✓

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| 14 | QUINTESSA NAPA VALLEY RUTHERFORD 2021 | ✓ |
| 15 | DANA ESTATES SAUVIGNON BLANC NAPA VALLEY HOWELL MOUNTAIN
HERSHEY VINEYARD 2021 | ✓ |
| 16 | PAUL HOBBS CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY COOMBSVILLE
NATHAN COOMBS ESTATE 2021 | ✓ |
| 17 | REALM CELLARS NAPA VALLEY OAKVILLE BECKSTOFFER TO KALON
VINEYARD 2021 | ✓ |
| 18 | DOMAINE DE LA CÔTE PINOT NOIR SANTA RITA HILLS SOUS LE CHÊNE
2021 | ✓ |
| 19 | DANA ESTATES CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY RUTHERFORD
HELMS VINEYARD 2021 | ✓ |
| 20 | K VINTNERS GRENACHE WALLA WALLA VALLEY THE BOY 2020 | ✓ |

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