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Wine & Spirits

The Future is
Mourvedre

in the Sierra
Foothills...

...and in
Châteauneuf-
du-Pape



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Hardy Wallace of
Dirty & Rowdy and
Chris Pittenger of
Skinner Winery

US NEW RELEASES

Our blind panels tasted **323** new-release US wines for this issue. Our critics rated **36** as exceptional (90+) and **22** as Best Buys. **Joshua Greene** covers Napa Valley; **Luke Sykora** covers the rest of California. **Patrick J. Comiskey** covers New York, Oregon and Washington. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

CALIFORNIA WHITE

BLENDS



91 | Zaca Mesa \$20
2014 Santa Ynez Valley Z Blanc (Best Buy) The sunny, high-elevation Zaca Mesa estate is one of the warmer spots in the Santa Ynez Valley, its warmth bringing balanced ripeness to this blend of roussanne, grenache blanc and viognier. The vines grow in soils based on shale and sand. There's no escaping the oak here, but the exuberance of the wine's tangerine flavor takes charge, melding with the oak into a mineral-tinged honeycomb flavor that lasts. Its sophisticated richness will match chicken liver mousse. (1,890 cases) *Zaca Mesa Winery, Los Olivos, CA*

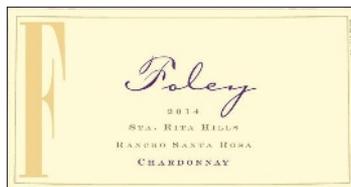
CHARDONNAY



92 | Gary Farrell \$45
2014 Russian River Valley Olivet Lane Vineyard Chardonnay The Pellegrini family planted more than 20 acres of chardonnay, an old Wente selection, at Olivet Lane in 1975. The vines grow on a bench above the Santa Rosa Plain, near the geographical center of the Russian River Valley; in 2014, the region's warm days and cool evening breezes ripened the fruit to a rich and appetizing balance. This has the concentration and depth of the best old-

vine Sonoma chardonnays: a sleek, succulent lemon-curd flavor that meets earthen spice at the edges, lasting on invigorating peach-pit and honeycomb scents and mouthwatering acidity. Age it for another two or three years to let the oak and fruit merge. (926 cases) *Gary Farrell, Healdsburg, CA*

91 | DeLoach \$50
2014 Green Valley of Russian River Valley Hawk Hill Vineyard Chardonnay From a cold, foggy hillside vineyard in the southwestern corner of the Russian River Valley, this seems a bit burly at first, its vintage-driven warmth and oak spice meeting crunchy minerality. Then, bright acidity pushes its hearty yellow pear and butternut squash flavors toward a salty, marine briskness. It's intense, substantial, fresh chardonnay; you could decant it now or age it a few years before pouring it with sweet, earthy miso-glazed black cod. (161 cases) *DeLoach Vineyards, Santa Rosa, CA*



91 | Foley \$30
2014 Sta. Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa Chardonnay (Best Buy) Get past this wine's initial toasty scent of oak and you'll find some delicious fruit; its sunny papaya flavor and salty, marine tang feel like textbook Santa Rita Hills chardonnay, capturing this high-elevation south-facing hillside vineyard with roots in marine sediments. Serve it as you would a rich albariño, with crispy head-on prawns. (3,454 cases) *Foley Estates Vineyard & Winery, Lompoc, CA*

88 | Friedeman \$22
2015 Russian River Valley Dichotomy Chardonnay (Best Buy) Barrel fermented in neutral oak, this is a clean, zesty chardonnay with a roundness that comes from properly ripe fruit rather than new wood. Its breadth is balanced against clean green-apple tang,

with a lifted chamomile scent coming through at the end. (235 cases) *Friedeman Wines, Sebastopol, CA*

PINOT GRIS

90 | Donkey & Goat \$28
2015 Anderson Valley Ramato Filigreen Farm Pinot Gris California's efforts to mirror the skin-fermented whites of the Adriatic can sometimes feel harsh and clunky; this one feels balanced and appetizing. The fruit comes from a biodynamically farmed vineyard, and spent five days on its skins in concrete before moving to used oak barrels. It's dusty rather than astringent, with savory aromas of roots and meadow flowers that give it a pleasant lift in the end. For smoked fish. (292 cases) *Donkey & Goat Winery, Berkeley, CA*

VIOGNIER

88 | Zaca Mesa \$18
2015 Santa Ynez Valley Estate Vineyard Viognier (Best Buy) This offers all the richness you'd expect in a warm-climate California viognier: luscious roasted peach and marzipan flavors, a peppery edge of alcohol and a high-toned lilac aroma, its creaminess balanced by zippy acidity. (1,526 cases) *Zaca Mesa Winery, Los Olivos, CA*

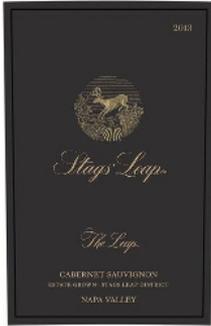
CALIFORNIA RED

BORDEAUX-VARIETY BLENDS

90 | Frank Family \$150
2013 Rutherford Napa Valley Winston Hill Red Rich Frank, of Frank Family Vineyards, purchased this vineyard in 1991, in the eastern hills above Rutherford. He immediately replanted the eight acres of vines, while adding another 35 acres. The site provides Frank Family's flagship wine, this 2013 a blend of 89 percent cabernet sauvignon, with small amounts of cabernet franc, merlot and petit verdot. It's bright and spicy, the texture smooth and rich, showing a little dimpled fruit as it finishes with clean generosity. A straightforward cabernet with some underlying charm, this needs age to

show itself more completely. *Winston Hill Vineyards, Calistoga, CA*

CABERNET SAUVIGNON



92 | Stags' Leap Winery \$90
2013 Stags Leap District Napa Valley The Leap Cabernet Sauvignon The volcanic soils at the base of the Stags Leap escarpment produced a 2013 with the meatiness of steak tartare. It's a wine of cool intensity, the boldness of flavor based on lasting root-like spice and high notes of red fruit. Those flavors buzz over a firm base of tannins, infusing the wine with freshness and setting it up to age well for the next five years. (4,964 cases) *Stags' Leap Winery, Napa, CA*

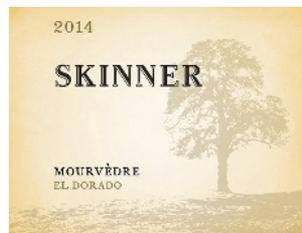
91 | Conn Creek \$90
2013 Diamond Mountain Napa Valley Sori Bricco Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Sori Bricco rises on Diamond Mountain directly west of the town of Calistoga. Mike McGrath sources this wine from a south-facing block at an elevation of 890 feet, where the fruit maintains the foresty cool of the site while developing powerful mineral intensity in its tannins. This is dense and youthful, both tough in its structure and generous in the way it fills out that structure with juicy richness. It's built to age for a decade or more. (201 cases) *Conn Creek Winery, St. Helena, CA*

91 | Stags' Leap Winery \$65
2013 Coombsville Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon Christophe Paubert sources most of the fruit for this wine from the Garvey Vineyard, blending it with other vineyards in Coombsville. That fruit from the cool, southern end of the Napa Valley maintained its freshness even as it developed plenty of intensity in 2013. The wine feels saturated with fruit and mineral-rich tannins, the initial oakiness of the aroma giving way to sweet cherry scents. Smoky and powerful, this is a wine to decant; open it over the next several years to serve with steak. (508 cases) *Stags' Leap Winery, Napa, CA*

CHARBONO

90 | Folk Machine \$23
2015 Suisun Valley Charbono (Best Buy) This smells like textbook charbono, with a hyper-floral scent that one taster compared to magnolias. Its bright blueberry flavor feels unadorned, bursting with juiciness, its exotic floral aroma meeting darker, earthy spice and peppery grip in the end. It's a curious but memorable wine that will make plenty of friends at a dinner party. (225 cases) *The Folk Machine, Santa Rosa, CA*

MOURVEDRE



93 | Skinner \$28
2014 El Dorado Mourvedre (Best Buy) It's easy to fall for this charming mourvedre, which winemaker Chris Pittenger sources from four different sites planted from 1,300 to 2,700 feet in elevation. The late-ripening variety flourishes in the Foothills' hot summers and volcanic soils. Like many Sierra Foothills mourvedre plantings, these vines are still young, yet this shows just how fresh and lithe the wines can be—it lasts with an herbal savor and a strawberry-red brightness that's delicious, and feels like the product of very happy vines. (237 cases) *Skinner Vineyards, Fair Play, CA*

PETITE SIRAH

94 | Ridge \$35
2014 Dry Creek Vly. Lytton Estate Petite Sirah The oldest petite sirah vines on Ridge's Lytton Springs property were planted in 1901; the youngest were planted as recently as 2008. This particular bottling comes from vines planted in the 1980s and 1990s, on the western side of the gravelly Lytton bench. It seems dense and oak-dominated at first, but pay attention to its flavors as they develop—you'll find a fresh, crisply defined petite that lasts on bright acidity and a vivid mineral spark. It's gripping but actually not dense at all, with the sort of powerful yet layered complexity you might find in an old-vine Douro blend, red and black fruit rising toward lasting green peppercorn and bay leaf aromas. Ridge has a track record for

long-lived petites; some of the York Creek wines from the mid-1980s are still beautiful and astonishingly youthful. Give this one at least a decade before touching it. (2,200 cases) *Ridge Vineyards, Healdsburg, CA*

92 | Frank Family \$65
2013 Napa Valley Reserve S&J Vineyard Petite Sirah Deliciously ripe and rich, this wine's concentrated black fruit is patterned with scents of dried herbs and fresh flowers. The structure feels youthfully reductive, as if the tannins were giving off the scent of broken rock and asphalt. If you open this now, decant it for something as rich as duck confit or braised lamb shank. This grows at the Frank Family vineyard in the Capell Valley, a hillside site located between Atlas Peak and Lake Berryessa. Best to cellar it for ten years or more. *Frank Family Vineyards, Calistoga, CA*



92 | Parducci \$30
2014 Mendocino True Grit Reserve Petite Sirah This smells floral and feels graphite-firm at the core; its beetroot and black tea flavors seem to emerge from and last in the tannins. It's not a warm, sweet or particularly welcoming wine at this stage, but it's balanced to age. Ten years or more in the cellar will refine its gripping structure and bring out the rich, sumptuous texture of well-aged petite sirah. (4,743 cases) *Parducci Wine Cellars, Ukiah, CA*

86 | Bogle \$12
2014 California Petite Sirah (Best Buy) Bogle's reliable and inexpensive petite is lush and juicy in 2014, with bold purple fruit flavors that darken toward fig and cocoa powder at the end. Buy it by the case for barbecues. *Bogle Vineyards, Clarksburg, CA*

PINOT NOIR

96 | Tessier \$42
2014 Santa Cruz Mountains Saveria Vineyard Pinot Noir Tasted blind, this brought back memories of the 2014 Lioco Saveria (*W&S* 10/16): a sense of foggy delicacy, the scent you might find while hiking