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## Tasting Highlights: California Cabernet

*Nine outstanding new reds from California, including Napa and Sonoma Cabernets and a Dry Creek Zinfandel*

*James Laube*

Posted: Monday, November 24, 2008

This week's mixed case offers a variety of exciting new wines, ranging from Bordeaux blends to Zinfandel, and offering some excellent values.

The top-rated wine is the 94-point Bialla Napa Cabernet 2006 from the Bialla family property on Atlas Peak, above Napa Valley. It is their best yet. Craig MacLean oversees the winemaking.

Racecar driver Kevin Buckler, based in Sonoma, has recently delivered some outstanding bottlings under his Adobe Road label. The best so far is the Napa Cabernet. It's a fantastic deal, in these or any other days.

Kenefick Ranch Cabernet 2004 also hits the sweet spot of price and score. You've seen the name Kenefick on other bottlings from such labels as Behrens & Hitchcock and Rosenblum. Celani Family's Tenacious Napa 2006 is a blend of Merlot and Cabernet Franc, made by Mark Herold.

Fans of top-flight Napa Cabernet know the name Philippe Melka. He consults for nearly a dozen wineries but also has his own Bordeaux blend from Napa called Métisse. The 2005 is outstanding.

Marco DiGuilo's 2005 Sonoma Valley Cabernet under the Lookout Ridge label is the best of the Cabernets I've tried so far from this winemaker series of wines.

Artezin 2006 Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel, made by Randle Johnson, captures the grape's characteristic berry and spice.

### **BIALLA Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2006 Score: 94 / \$93**

Firm, ripe and vibrant, with rich, full-bodied currant, sage, blackberry, anise and sage. Complex and concentrated, with a tight, focused finish that keeps revealing extra flavor nuances. Best from 2010 through 2016. 190 cases made. —*J.L.*

### **ADOBE ROAD Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2005 Score: 93 / \$55**

Intense and focused, with a rich, concentrated core of currant, mocha, wild berry and black cherry fruit that's supple, layered and full-bodied, offering ripe, integrated tannins. Drink now through 2016. 685 cases made. —*J.L.*

**CELANI FAMILY Tenacious Napa Valley 2006 Score: 93 / \$60**

Luxuriously rich and supple, showing bold aromas of black cherry, mocha and toasty oak, with ripe and layered plum, vanilla and cinnamon spice flavors that linger on the long, polished palate. Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Drink now through 2015. 900 cases made. —*T.F.*

**KENEFICK RANCH Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2004 Score: 93 / \$60**

Ripe and full-bodied, with penetrating black cherry, currant and black olive, teetering on jammy, sweet and rich. Unfolds to reveal extra flavor nuances of blackberry, hazelnut and spice. Drink now through 2015. 765 cases made. —*J.L.*

**MELKA Métisse Napa Valley 2005 Score: 93 / \$110**

Intense and concentrated, focused and complex, with dried currant, black cherry, cedar, sage and mineral flavors presented in a full-bodied style and framed by tight tannins. Better than previously reviewed. Best from 2010 through 2016. 500 cases made. —*J.L.*

**LOOKOUT RIDGE Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Marco Digiulio 2005 Score: 92 / \$100**

Offers a mix of ripe dried currant and black cherry with a touch of earth and leather. Full-bodied, intense and concentrated, with touches of spice and underbrush. Complex and distinctive. Drink now through 2015. 250 cases made. —*J.L.*

**MADRIGAL Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Las Viñas del Señor Reserve 2004**

**Score: 91 / \$80**

Made in a ripe, sweet fruit style, offering a mix of ripe berry, plum and black cherry fruit that's full-bodied and elegant, ending with fine-grained tannins, good length and a sense of finesse. Drink now through 2014. 200 cases made. —*J.L.*

**SAINT HELENA ROAD Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County Roy J. Maier 2006**

**Score: 91 / \$58**

Minty bay leaf, herb and chocolate currant flavors are intense, full-bodied and deeply concentrated, tightly focused and framed by dry, minerally tannins. Best from 2010 through 2016. 600 cases made. —*J.L.*

**ARTEZIN Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley 2006 Score: 90 / \$25**

A real spice bomb, loaded with black cherry and caramel notes and jammy, appealingly complex huckleberry, toasty licorice and loamy sage flavors. Drink now through 2014. 2,750 cases made. —*T.F.*

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