

Wine Spectator

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California Syrah and More

New reviews of Syrah and Petite Sirah lead a selection of 18 outstanding Rhône-style varietals and blends

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

This week's focus on red Rhône-style wines from California reinforces the strengths of this category; Syrah, Grenache and Petite Sirah do well all over the Golden State, from Napa and Sonoma to Santa Barbara and the Sierra Foothills. The wines are equally strong bottled as varietals or as blends, and there is a style for everyone.

Though Petite Sirah is not one of the Côtes du Rhône grape varieties approved by the French government, its roots can be traced back to the Rhône. Petite has a distinct personality: inky dark, with dense, sometimes chewy tannins. The Rosenblum Pickett Road and C. Beck bottlings demonstrate how these tannins don't have to get in the way of bold, rich flavors.

Syrah and Grenache lovers should pay attention to the Sierra Foothills, and the wines from Prospect 772 are just a couple of examples why. The Foothills are proving to be a great source for Rhône grapes, making aromatic, well-structured wines with plenty of personality.

MARTINELLI Syrah Russian River Valley Vellutini Ranch 2009

Score: 92 | \$75

Big, ripe and expressive, with tiers of juicy red and black licorice, dark berry, mocha, espresso and dried herb flavors. For all its enormity, this is smooth and richly flavored. Drink now through 2022. 89 cases made. —J.L.

PLUMPJACK Syrah Napa Valley 2010 Score: 92 | \$48

Distinctive for its mix of spice, pepper and beef stew-like berry flavors that are detailed and elegant, ending with mineral and crushed rock notes and pleasantly gripping tannins. Drink now through 2022. 396 cases made. —J.L.

ROSENBLUM Petite Sirah Napa Valley Pickett Road Reserve 2010

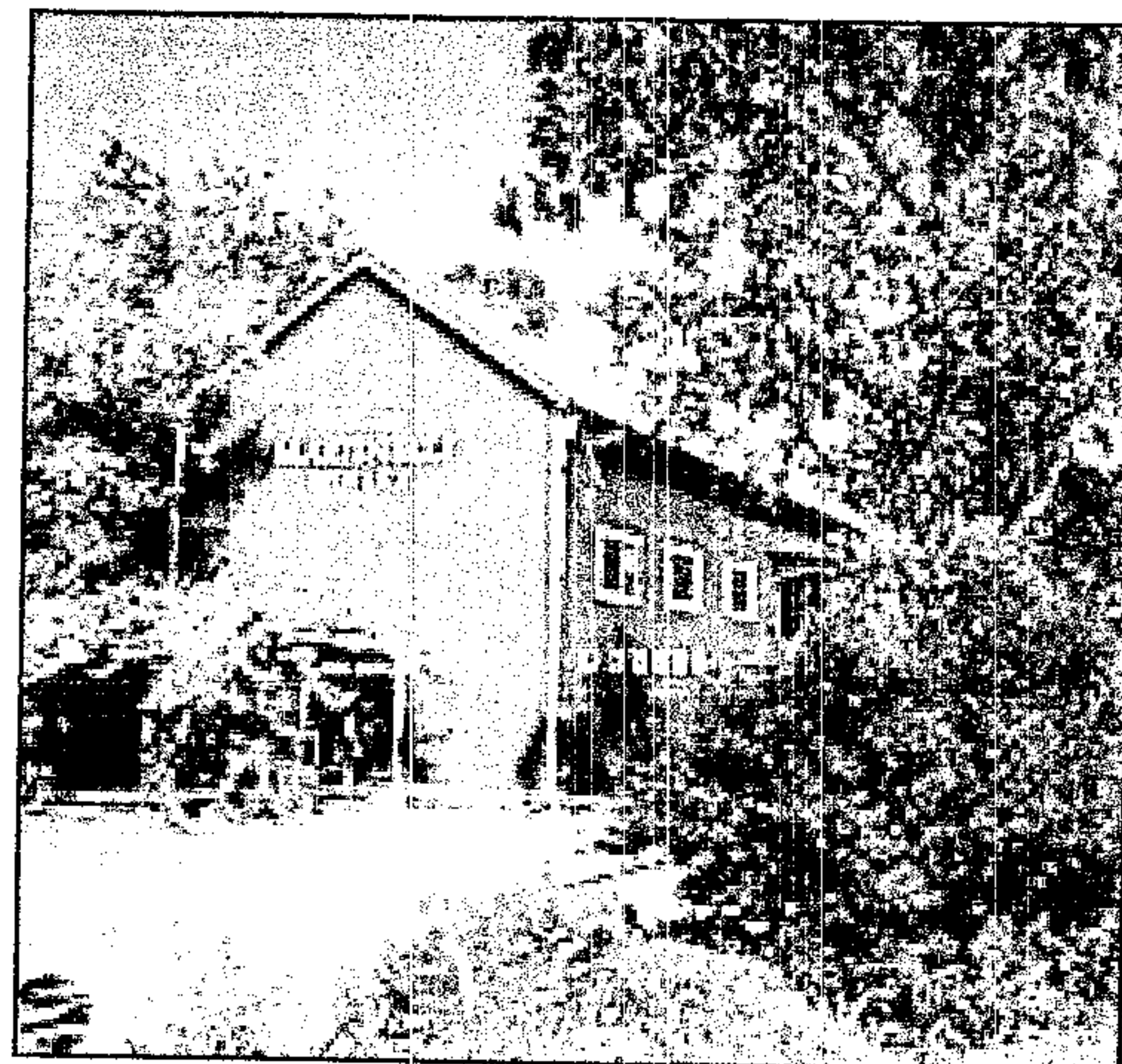
Score: 92 | \$40

Dark, dense, bold, and expressive, with an espresso note underneath the blackberry and plum flavors, which show dried coriander and chili powder aromatics. The tannins are thick and velvety, and never get in the way of the wine. Drink now through 2020. 400 cases made. —M.W.

C. BECK Petite Sirah Napa Valley 2009 Score: 91 | \$38

Expressive, with espresso and toffee notes detailing the ripe blackberry and blueberry flavors. Smooth and velvety, with some traction from the tannins showing up on the finish. Drink now through 2020. 275 cases made. —M.W.

MARTINELLI Syrah Russian River Valley Zio Tony Ranch Gianna Maria



Kent Hanson

From Martinelli come two outstanding 2009 Syrahs grown in the Russian River Valley, in California's Sonoma County.

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9 California Values

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10 Outstanding Barbarescos

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Monday, December 31, 2012
California Rhône Reds

Monday, December 31, 2012

2009 Score: 91 | \$75

A mix of power and flavor, this red is firm and compact, very rich and layered, if edgy, with earthy black berry, beef carpaccio, espresso and dried herb flavors. Gains momentum on the finish. Drink now through 2021. 314 cases made. —J.L.

Wine of the Year

Thursday, December 27, 2012

My Top 10 X-Factor Wines of 2012

PRIDE Syrah Sonoma County 2010 Score: 91 | \$60

Rich and extracted, with intense beefy dark berry and savory herb flavors that will surely reward cellaring. Tempting now, but the tannins hold you at arm's length. Best from 2013 through 2023. 886 cases made. —J.L.

Thursday, December 27, 2012

How Do They Do It, Part 2: Meet the People Who Make \$500 Wines, \$10 Wines—And Everything in Between

PROSPECT 772 The Brat Sierra Foothills 2010 Score: 91 | \$36

Pleasing for its mix of rustic, gravel-laced dark berry, black cherry and blackberry flavors, gaining depth and firmness on the finish. Grenache and Syrah. Drink now through 2022. 170 cases made. —J.L.

More from topic California

VENGE Syrah Napa Valley Stagecoach Vineyard Block I-4 2010 Score: 91 | \$54

Solid, with a chunky, chewy mix of extracted blackberry, licorice, spice and crushed rock flavors. At points shows a supple side, ending with notes of dried herb and tobacco leaf. Drink now through 2022. 200 cases made. —J.L.

WRATH Syrah Santa Lucia Highlands KW Ranch 2010 Score: 91 | \$39

Combines richness with tiers of spice, blackberry, black pepper, anise and sage. Very complete, gliding along on the finish. Drink now through 2021. 143 cases made. —J.L.

DREW Syrah Mendocino Ridge Perli Vineyard 2010 Score: 90 | \$40

Tense and vibrant, with a tight core of fresh earth, tart berry, spice and cedar. Slow to unfold, revealing more white pepper as this lingers. Best from 2013 through 2020. 97 cases made. —J.L.

GREY STACK Syrah Sonoma County Greywacke Greywacke-Dry Stack Vineyards 2009 Score: 90 | \$39

Firm, with a spicy, beefy edge to the wild berry and dried herb flavors, showing plenty of sinewy tannins that give this a crushed rock aftertaste. Drink now through 2022. 100 cases made. —J.L.

GREY STACK Syrah-Grenache Russian River Valley The Folly Greywacke Vineyard 2010 Score: 90 | \$35

Fresh and vibrant, with snappy, sinewy dark berry, tobacco leaf, dried herb and savory touches that fan out on the finish. Ends chewy. Drink now through 2022. 200 cases made. —J.L.

HUDSON VINEYARDS Syrah Carneros 2010 Score: 90 | \$90

Pleasantly rustic, with a range of crushed rock, loamy earth, dried berry, sage and dried herb flavors, all well-proportioned and ending with a tight, tapered finish. Drink now through 2021. 83 cases made. —J.L.

OJAI Syrah Sta. Rita Hills Melville Vineyards 2008 Score: 90 | \$44

Combines ripe, grapey plum and wild berry character with a touch of meatiness, turning spicy and ending with a crushed rock and hot brick edge. Drink now through 2024. 216 cases made. —J.L.

PROSPECT 772 The Brawler Sierra Foothills 2010 Score: 90 | \$36

A rough-and-tumble effort that's all the more intriguing because of it, offering a rich, complex mix of roasted coffee, dried currant, crushed rock, gravel pit and roasted herb notes. Immense and firmly tannic. Syrah and Viognier. Best from 2013 through 2022. 125 cases made. —J.L.

ROCCA Syrah Yountville Grigsby Vineyard 2009 Score: 90 | \$50

Dense and chewy, offering firm spice, dried berry and crushed rock flavors, with tight tannins, this is closed now, with hints of blueberry and roasted coffee. Best from 2014 through 2024. 262 cases made. —J.L.

SHANE Syrah Bennett Valley Judge Vineyard 2009 Score: 90 | \$40

A pleasantly distinctive style that offers a beefy Bolognese sauce-like mix of flavors, with dried berry, pepper and savory herb notes. Long on the finish. Drink now through 2020. 100 cases made. —J.L.

TALLULAH Lifeboat Napa Valley 2009 Score: 90 | \$36

A bold, expressive style that's very rich and intense, with a stewed berry pie mix of flavors that takes on a gravelly edge,