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Home > News & Features > Retrospective / Vertical

2003 California Cabernet Retrospective: At Age 10, Wines Show the Year's Difficulties

In a recent blind tasting, a dozen wines shine, but overall the vintage comes up short compared to the surrounding years

James Laube

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As Napa Valley Cabernet vintages go, 2003 was a year in which to shop carefully or not shop at all. This was one of the weakest years of the era, comparable to 1998 and 2000, both in structure and in the paucity of stellar wines.

With a wet spring and cool summer interspersed with several heat spikes, 2003 was difficult from the start, vintners said. By harvest, achieving ripeness and body while avoiding excessive tannins was a challenge across the board.

"Oh yes, we remember the 2003 harvest," wrote Fred Schrader, who submitted four wines to *Wine Spectator's* 10-year retrospective tasting of California Cabernet Sauvignon and blends. "The vintage presented a series of weather extremes—an early biting frost, perpetual rain and overcast skies and a withering summer heat wave. The erratic conditions produced a 'personal best' challenge for [our] winemaker."

Even in lesser years, excellent wines emerge. There are just fewer of them. In 2003, the best aren't in the same category as the top wines from either 2002 or 2004 or most of the 2000 decade. That makes 2003 a bit of a black sheep.

After blind tasting more than 80 Cabernets from 2003 in my Napa office, I found a dozen or more merited outstanding marks (90 points or higher on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale) and more than half fell into the very good range (85-89). The best wines captured a broader range of riper, richer flavors and had more texture and body. They also weren't overwhelmed by tannins.

However, many of the 2003s are beginning to dry out. Wines die from the inside out: Once they lose their initial fruitiness, the tannins become more evident.

One of the complaints vintners had of 2003 was that they had to wait a long time for the grape seeds to darken, which is a common sign of physiological ripeness and influences texture. Of note, many of the wines were around 14.4 percent alcohol, meaning that sugars were sufficient, but based on the taste profiles, the least interesting wines did not achieve flavor development while the top-scoring wines did.

My top five wines came from sites where ripeness was clearly achieved. The Schrader Cellars Beckstoffer To-Kalon T-6 (95 points) showed the vintage at its strongest. It is both powerful and youthful, with dense, rich flavors, making it a candidate for a much longer life. Four wines had 93-point ratings, including Darioush, Pride Sonoma-Napa Counties Reserve, Selene and Shafer Hillside Select. Schrader's RBS bottling scored 92 points, but two of his other Cabernets—the straight To-Kalon (88) and Old Sparky (88)—had lost their fruity edge.



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Wine Spectator senior editor James Laube reviews 78 California Cabernets from the 2003 vintage.

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One of the most interesting wines was the Scarecrow. When released (88 points), the wine reminded me of a Cabernet-Shiraz blend, and in fact the first bottle showed similarly. The second bottle (91), however, was more in sync with the property, expressing mocha, dark berry and dried herb, but also clamping down on the finish.

Several wines were disappointing or about what you'd expect given the year, among them Bond St. Eden (89), Harlan Estate (88), Lewis Reserve (89), Staglin (89), Joseph Phelps Insignia (89) and Peter Michael Les Pavots (87). These wines were on the cusp of outstanding but short of their usual marks.

Nearly all Napa Valley Cabernet producers, as well as some from outside the appellation, were invited to participate in this retrospective tasting. As long as two bottles were submitted, all the wines were tasted twice.

Based on comments from winemakers about their 2003s today, they're more enthusiastic in their praise than I. As my tasting notes below indicate, most of the wines were better on release and are now declining, which is an important consideration for those who cellar wines. Often it's wiser not to wait on wines from marginal years. Sometimes tricky vintages surprise. Not so with 2003.

Reviews and tasting notes for all wines that scored good, very good or outstanding are listed below.

2003 California Cabernet Retrospective

SCHRADER CELLARS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To-Kalon Vineyard T6 2003

Score: 95 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$151

Forceful, persistent and remarkably youthful, with a rugged, chewy mix of deep dark berry, mocha, mineral and iron. Gains depth and maintains intensity through the long, lingering finish, aided by gripping tannins that lend the flavors traction. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2022. 125 cases made.—*J.L.*

DARIOUSH Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Signature 2003 Score: 93 | Release price: \$68 | Current price: \$68

Firm, dense and powerful, this is very complete, with a range of well-focused dark berry, spice, dried herb, cedar and graphite notes. Ends with a dash of mocha and pleasantly chewy tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2024. 4,795 cases made.—*J.L.*

PRIDE Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma-Napa Counties Reserve 2003

Score: 93 | Release price: \$120 | Current price: \$120

Aging very well, this is rich and well-built, centered on dark berry flavors and cigar box and cedar notes. Ends with a mix of black licorice and loamy earth. The tannins are firm on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2025. 1,206 cases made.—*J.L.*

SELENE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 93 | Release price: \$70 | Current price: \$70

Delicious and at a great drinking plateau, this is ripe and juicy, offering tiers of dark berry, spice, loamy earth and cedar. Impressive for its supple texture and long, lingering finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2024. 465 cases made.—*J.L.*

SHAFER Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Hillside Select 2003

Score: 93 | Release price: \$200 | Current price: \$174

Big and expressive, with intense notes of dark berry fruit, cedar, crushed rock and loamy earth, gaining depth, velocity and texture. Impressive on the finish, where the flavors taper and weave into the tannins. Best to drink this soon. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2024. 2,400 cases made.—*J.L.*

FRANK FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford Reserve 2003 Score: 92 | Release price: \$85 | Current price: \$85

Mature and complex, supple-textured, with graceful plum, black cherry, tea, spice and anise notes. Pure, focused, elegant and persistent. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. 970 cases made.—*J.L.*

KOBALT Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 92 | Release price: \$90 | Current price: \$90

In excellent shape, this combines ripe, intense, extracted dark berry, mineral, licorice, kirsch and dusty-cedary oak. The tannins are firm, keeping the flavors alive on the long finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2024. 250 cases made.—*J.L.*

Retrospective: *A Garagiste Scores a Victory*

Monday, February 9, 2009

Retrospective: 1998 California Cabernets

More from Retrospective / Vertical

MERUS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 92 | Release price: \$160 | Current price: \$120

Complex and at a good drinking stage, with fresh, juicy blackberry, black licorice, cedar and tobacco notes, ending with a push of plump, elegant fruit. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2024. 800 cases made.—J.L.

SCHRADER CELLARS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To-Kalon Vineyard RBS 2003

Score: 92 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$161

Intense and well-built, with vibrant, youthful notes of currant, dried herb, cedar and crushed rock. The tannins are starting to dry around the edges, so now is a good time to catch this at a nice plateau. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 175 cases made.—J.L.

WINSTON HILL Proprietor's Barrel Select Rutherford 2003 Score: 92 | Release price: \$125 | Current price: \$125

The aromas of herb, olive, cedar and dark berry are mature and refined. Smooth-textured, this offers depth, focus and persistence, with a long finish and touch of loamy earth. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 440 cases made.—J.L.

BERINGER Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Private Reserve 2003

Score: 91 | Release price: \$115 | Current price: \$40

Complex on the palate, firm, intense, vibrant and a touch dry, with drying tannins. The core dark berry flavors are deep and persistent, gaining on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 10,200 cases made.—J.L.

JARVIS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2003 Score: 91 | Release price: \$195 | Current price: \$195

The classy aromas are complex and distinctive, showing hints of red and black licorice. Tight and dense on the palate, featuring mocha-laced currant, black cherry, wild berry and herb notes, this holds focus and ends with a long, persistent finish, with firm gripping tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 748 cases made.—J.L.

SCARECROW Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 91 | Release price: \$100 | Current price: \$613

Presents a rich, potent mix of espresso, mocha, dark berry, dried herb and melted licorice notes, ending with rich, gripping tannins and a push of youthful fruit. The better of two bottles tasted. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. 400 cases made.—J.L.

XTANT Napa Valley 2003 Score: 91 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

Notably supple, rich and graceful, offering smooth currant, plum and anise flavors, with a touch of mint, black tea and cherry folding in. At an ideal drinking stage. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 1,462 cases made.—J.L.

BRYANT FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 90 | Release price: \$235 | Current price: \$306

Exhibits a mix of dense, earth- and graphite-laced dark berry fruit, with touches of espresso, cedar, cigar box and spice. Drying, yet at a good drinking stage now. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 400 cases made.—J.L.

DUCKHORN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 90 | Release price: \$60 | Current price: \$60

Smooth-textured, graceful and elegant, mature and appealing, displaying polish and pure, anise-laced, mature dark berry flavors. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2017. 9,880 cases made.—J.L.

GALLO OF SONOMA Cabernet Sauvignon Northern Sonoma Estate 2003

Score: 90 | Release price: \$80 | Current price: \$80

Aging well and at its peak, showing a touch of sweetness from ripeness. The dark berry, mineral, cedar and black licorice notes are trim and focused. Long on the finish, this ends with dry, chewy tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. 485 cases made.—J.L.

CLIFF LEDE Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District 2003 Score: 90 | Release price: \$50 | Current price: \$50

Very rich and concentrated, presenting a potent core of dark berry, licorice, graphite and tobacco. This is gutsy and gripping, but the kind of wine where you can happily drink through the tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. 1,609 cases made.—J.L.

RAMEY Diamond Mountain District 2003 Score: 90 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

Pleasantly mature, with rich dark berry fruit, mocha and a hint of chicory, this is very complete and persistent, ending with a complex finish. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 2,300 cases made.—J.L.

SBRAGIA FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Dry Creek Valley Andolsen Vineyard 2003

Score: 90 | Release price: \$35 | Current price: \$35

A solid effort that's dense, chewy, youthful and concentrated, with a complex mix of dried dark berry, prune, crushed rock and blackberry. This is ready now, but has time on the clock. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 937 cases made.—J.L.

BOND St. Eden Napa Valley 2003 Score: 89 | Release price: \$230 | Current price: \$176

A creamy oak overlay softens the tannins in this rich and full-bodied version, with complex anise, mocha, dark berry, subtle spice and roasted coffee notes. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. 725 cases made.—J.L.

CHIMNEY ROCK Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Reserve 2003

Score: 89 | Release price: \$100 | Current price: \$100

Still showing plenty of creamy oak, this is mature, with fresh, lively dark berry flavors that join mocha and espresso hints. Ends on a drying note, but shows considerable freshness and texture. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 206 cases made.—J.L.

LEWIS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2003 Score: 89 | Release price: \$110 | Current price: \$63

Rich and powerful, with spicy, creamy oak and intense dark berry flavors. This is full-blown, complex and dense, ending with purposeful tannins. The best of two bottles. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. 800 cases made.—J.L.

MARSTON Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District 2003 Score: 89 | Release price: \$90 | Current price: \$90

Dense, gutsy and tannic, this is probably best drunk now, as the tannins threaten to dry out the fruit. Offers lots of extracted dark berry, loamy earth and crushed rock notes. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2021. 500 cases made.—J.L.

LOUIS M. MARTINI Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2003

Score: 89 | Release price: \$80 | Current price: \$80

Shows good intensity, with a mix of fresh and mature flavors built around anise, cedar, plum and black cherry. The oak gives this a hint of graphite. Firms without drying on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 2,771 cases made.—J.L.

JOSEPH PHELPS Insignia Napa Valley 2003 Score: 89 | Release price: \$150 | Current price: \$97

At or a shade past its peak, this is rich and mature, with complex dried berry, cedar, cigar box, dried herb and loamy earth notes, veering toward dryness on the finish, where the flavors retain velocity. Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Merlot and Malbec. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. 12,000 cases made.—J.L.

SBRAGIA FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain Rancho Del Oso 2003

Score: 89 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

At a good drinking stage now, this offers a complex if fading mix of mature dried fruit, with plum, wild berry, loamy earth and tobacco leaf notes. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2017. 642 cases made.—J.L.

STAGLIN Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2003 Score: 89 | Release price: \$135 | Current price: \$135

Pure, clean and elegant, with ripe, rich red and dark berry fruit and touches of red and black licorice and savory herb. Dries midpalate, losing velocity. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 3,300 cases made.—J.L.

TOR Cabernet Sauvignon Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley Mast Vineyard 2003

Score: 89 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

The aromas of black licorice, dark berry, fresh earth and cedar are complex. Intense on the palate, this features tannins that wrap their arms tightly on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2017. 425 cases made.—J.L.

TRUCHARD Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Carneros 2003 Score: 89 | Release price: \$35 | Current price: \$35

Big and powerful, with intense dark berry, graphite, black licorice and cedary oak, this gains depth and richness, ending with a forceful finish. Tannic. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 2,472 cases made.—J.L.

WHITEHALL LANE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2003

Score: 89 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

Complete and at a good drinking stage, featuring firm, ripe, concentrated dark berry, currant, black licorice and crushed rock notes. Tightens and firms on the finish, with gripping tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2017. 3,870 cases made.—*J.L.*

CAKEBREAD Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Benchland Select 2003

Score: 88 | Release price: \$98 | Current price: \$98

Well-built, with drying tannins and mature olive, herb, dill, cedar and currant notes. Best to drink soon, as this is drying up. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 1,000 cases made.—*J.L.*

DELECTUS Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford Sacrashe Vineyard 2003

Score: 88 | Release price: \$100 | Current price: \$100

Intense and spicy, at a stage where the fruit still shows vibrancy, offering a mix of red and dark berry, licorice and espresso. The tannins aren't shy, but the fruit pushes through. Drink now through 2017. 225 cases made.—*J.L.*

DUCKHORN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Patzimaro Vineyard 2003

Score: 88 | Release price: \$95 | Current price: \$95

Firm and well-built, with chewy tannins wrapped around dark berry, spice, dried herb and cedary oak flavors. Ends a bit crimped. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 428 cases made.—*J.L.*

GRGICH HILLS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Yountville Selection 2003

Score: 88 | Release price: \$135 | Current price: \$135

Drying out. What remains is intense, concentrated and extracted, with dark berry, crushed rock, cedar and graphite notes. Best to enjoy now, as the tannins show presence. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2024. 580 cases made.—*J.L.*

HARLAN ESTATE Napa Valley 2003 Score: 88 | Release price: \$265 | Current price: \$336

Mature and a bit muddled, rich and potent, with a mix of loamy earth and dry dark berry notes, ending with a touch of mocha and metal. The better of two bottles tasted. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 1,248 cases made.—*J.L.*

MOUNT EDEN VINEYARDS Cabernet Sauvignon Santa Cruz Mountains 2003

Score: 88 | Release price: \$40 | Current price: \$40

Offering smoky aromas—charcoal, pipe tobacco and graphite—this is intense and well-structured, with lively, vibrant dried currant and dark berry notes. Grippy tannins give the flavors traction on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. 2,297 cases made.—*J.L.*

RAMEY Jericho Canyon Vineyard Napa Valley 2003 Score: 88 | Release price: \$95 | Current price: \$69

Both bottles tasted exhibited a tight, Bordeaux-like structure. Concentrated, with dried berry, cedar, tobacco and dried herb notes. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 1,745 cases made.—*J.L.*

RIDGE Monte Bello Santa Cruz Mountains 2003 Score: 88 | Release price: \$120 | Current price: \$80

Dry throughout, with loamy earth and tobacco leaf notes mixing with dry currant, crushed rock and licorice flavors, ending with chewy tannins. Still has room to go, but the dryness of the fruit poses a concern. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. 1,931 cases made.—*J.L.*

SCHRADER CELLARS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To-Kalon Vineyard 2003

Score: 88 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$151

Broad-shouldered, rich and full-bodied, yet drying and fading, with a mix of dark berry, black licorice, dill and cedar notes. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 250 cases made.—*J.L.*

SCHRADER CELLARS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To-Kalon Vineyard MM III 2003

Score: 88 | Release price: \$250 | Current price: \$250

Mature and fading, yet appealing for a Bordeaux-like mix of cedar, dried berry, cigar box and black cherry notes. Gains on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 100 cases made.—*J.L.*

CARTER Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard H&C 2003

Score: 87 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

Built like a Bordeaux, taut and drying, very deeply colored, offering a mix of cedar, spice, fine-grained earth and tobacco

leaf. Ends with dry, clinging tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2021. 125 cases made.—J.L.

DELECTUS Cuvee Julia Napa Valley 2003 Score: 87 | Release price: \$125 | Current price: \$125

Very ripe and quite tannic, with dry, earth-laced dark berry, anise, cedar and crushed rock notes. There's no getting around the tannins, but the core flavors are intense, solid and chewy. Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah and Merlot. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2022. 200 cases made.—J.L.

PAUL HOBBS Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2003

Score: 87 | Release price: \$235 | Current price: \$165

Past its prime, this exhibits an earthy, gutsy, tannic base for the core of dried berry, sage and cedar notes, ending with grippy tannins and a pleasant touch of anise and loamy earth. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 567 cases made.—J.L.

JERICO CANYON Napa Valley 2003 Score: 87 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

Drying and fading, with cedar, dried berry, loamy earth and tobacco leaf notes. Complex and aging well, though this seems a bit past its peak. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 466 cases made.—J.L.

PETER MICHAEL Les Pavots Knights Valley 2003 Score: 87 | Release price: \$150 | Current price: \$130

Dense and cedary, austere and tannic, with drying dark berry, mint, cedar and cigar box notes. The better of two bottles tasted. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 1,964 cases made.—J.L.

ROBERT MONDAVI Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 2003

Score: 87 | Release price: \$125 | Current price: \$61

The complex aromas of mocha, cedar and dark berry are youthful, but this is still quite tannic and drying on the palate, ending with roasted herb and forest floor scents. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 7,000 cases made.—J.L.

PRIDE Claret Reserve Sonoma-Napa Counties 2003 Score: 87 | Release price: \$120 | Current price: \$120

Mature and starting to dry out. This retains a pleasing core of melted black licorice, cedar and loamy earth, gaining on the finish. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 402 cases made.—J.L.

ROCCA Cabernet Sauvignon Yountville 2003 Score: 87 | Release price: \$145 | Current price: \$145

Offers loamy and crushed rock flavors, with notes of dried berry, chicory and melted black licorice. This is complex and layered, ending with dry, grippy tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2017. 830 cases made.—J.L.

RUDD Oakville Estate 2003 Score: 87 | Release price: \$125 | Current price: \$60

Mature and drying, presenting a hint of nut and chicory, with dried dark berry, crushed rock, cedar and graphite notes. Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Malbec, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 1,770 cases made.—J.L.

VINE CLIFF Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Private Stock 16 Rows 2003

Score: 87 | Release price: \$135 | Current price: \$135

A dash of creamy oak softens the tannins in this version, while a touch of vanilla takes away from the twinge of bitterness. Rich and complete, this is good but nothing exceptional. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. 288 cases made.—J.L.

BEHRENS & HITCHCOCK Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Herrick-Moulds 2003

Score: 86 | Release price: \$65 | Current price: \$65

The pure, fresh and vivid dark berry fruit is tightly wound, turning to smoke, tobacco leaf, cedar and fresh herb. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 305 cases made.—J.L.

BENNETT LANE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 86 | Release price: \$45 | Current price: \$45

Mature, with a touch of oxidation, this offers dried berry, herb and woody notes. The better of two bottles tasted. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 2,000 cases made.—J.L.

BENNETT LANE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Primus Reserve 2003

Score: 86 | Release price: \$85 | Current price: \$85

Marked by melted black licorice, dry gravelly tannins and fading dark berry fruit, this is intriguing, but at or past its peak.

2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2019. 375 cases made.—*J.L.*

CHIMNEY ROCK Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District 2003 Score: 86 | Release price: \$52 | Current price: \$52

Firm and drying, with grainy tannins holding the edge. The core of currant and black licorice shows a pleasant touch of dry earthiness. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 11,000 cases made.—*J.L.*

DUCKHORN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Estate Grown 2003

Score: 86 | Release price: \$90 | Current price: \$90

Drying and fading, with chewy currant and dried berry notes. The tannins are earthy and gripping on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 2,640 cases made.—*J.L.*

FREEMARK ABBEY Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Sycamore Sycamore Estate 2003

Score: 86 | Release price: \$150 | Current price: \$150

Mature and drying out, with fading black licorice and dried berry, ending with firm tannins. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 2,040 cases made.—*J.L.*

THE HESS COLLECTION Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder 2003

Score: 86 | Release price: \$70 | Current price: \$70

Firm, dense and chewy, this is built around a core of dark berry, licorice, fresh earth and tobacco. Turns drying on the finish. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2020. 5,000 cases made.—*J.L.*

HIDDEN RIDGE Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County 2003 Score: 86 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

Mature and drying, with complex smoke, dried berry, fresh-cut herb and savory notes, this is a shade past its prime, ending with a mix of dried dark berry. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 960 cases made.—*J.L.*

SBRAGIA FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Monte Rosso Vineyard 2003

Score: 86 | Release price: \$50 | Current price: \$50

Dry and savory around the edges, with a core of ripe dark berry, currant and cranberry. Features a touch of mocha and ends with crushed rock. Quite tannic. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. 913 cases made.—*J.L.*

ST. CLEMENT Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Oropas 2003 Score: 86 | Release price: \$50 | Current price: \$50

Drying and a touch oxidized, the tannins have the upper hand over the dark berry and crushed rock flavors. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. 3,000 cases made.—*J.L.*

TOR Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain Cimarossa Vineyard 2003

Score: 85 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$75

Remains a tight, lean effort, showing some currant and berry maturity, but remaining quite tannic. Needs a thick grilled steak. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now through 2018. 350 cases made.—*J.L.*

VIADER Napa Valley 2003 Score: 85 | Release price: \$85 | Current price: \$85

Past its peak, but complex and vibrant. The tannins clamp down, giving this a drying flavor throughout. Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 900 cases made.—*J.L.*

WHITEHALL LANE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Leonardini Vineyard 2003

Score: 85 | Release price: \$100 | Current price: \$100

Fading and drinkable, but past its peak, with creamy oak, dark berry and anise notes. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 305 cases made.—*J.L.*

BUONCRISTIANI Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 84 | Release price: \$80 | Current price: \$80

Drying and fading, with a mix of loamy earth, dried berry, herb, cedar and tobacco. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 280 cases made.—*J.L.*

GRGICH HILLS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 84 | Release price: \$58 | Current price: \$58

Dry and savory, with dried herb and berry notes. The tannins hold the upper hand in the end. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 14,637 cases made.—*J.L.*

PAUL HOBBS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 84 | Release price: \$75 | Current price: \$50

Racy, rich and smooth, this is sharply focused, with a balsamic edge to the plum and raspberry fruit. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 3,818 cases made.—*J.L.*

PREVAIL Back Forty Alexander Valley 2003 Score: 84 | Release price: \$80 | Current price: \$80

Drying out, this retains some rich berry and black licorice notes. Runs into trouble on the finish, where the tannins are drying and gripping. Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Cabernet Franc. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 2,057 cases made.—*J.L.*

PRIDE Cabernet Sauvignon Napa-Sonoma Counties 2003 Score: 84 | Release price: \$64 | Current price: \$64

Drying out, with the tannins holding the upper hand, this offers fading anise, licorice and dried dark berry notes. The better of two bottles tasted. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 4,210 cases made.—*J.L.*

CARTER Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Coliseum Block 2003

Score: 83 | Release price: \$95 | Current price: \$95

Quite tannic and drying, offering loamy earth, graphite and cedar notes, with little fruit vitality left. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 125 cases made.—*J.L.*

COVENANT Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 83 | Release price: \$85 | Current price: \$85

Mature and fading, this struggles to find a focus, coming across as ultimately muddled, with earthy berry and cedar notes. Kosher. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 550 cases made.—*J.L.*

FREEMARK ABBEY Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Bosché Bosché Estate 2003

Score: 83 | Release price: \$65 | Current price: \$65

Drying, giving the grainy tannins the edge, with fading currant and cherry fruit. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 2,500 cases made.—*J.L.*

LOUIS M. MARTINI Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Lot No. 1 2003

Score: 83 | Release price: \$100 | Current price: \$100

Mature, with aromas of fresh earth and leather joined by dried berry and loamy earth notes. The fruit is drying out, so best to drink this soon. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Drink now. 480 cases made.—*J.L.*

BARNETT Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District 2003 Score: 82 | Release price: \$65 | Current price: \$65

Mature and drying out, with gravelly tannins holding the upper edge. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 1,606 cases made.—*J.L.*

HONIG Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 Score: 82 | Release price: \$35 | Current price: \$35

Both bottles tasted were dried out, with faded dark berry and dried herb notes. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 12,000 cases made.—*J.L.*

BEAULIEU VINEYARD Georges de Latour Private Reserve Napa Valley 2003

Score: 81 | Release price: \$95 | Current price: \$33

At a tough stage. This is dried out, with sour berry flavors and a bitter edge. Not much on release, not much now. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 14,000 cases made.—*J.L.*

DUCKHORN Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Rector Creek Vineyard 2003

Score: 81 | Release price: \$95 | Current price: \$95

A shade better than the first bottle tasted, but still very dried out, with dill, herb and cedar notes. Shows little in the way of fruit vitality. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 423 cases made.—*J.L.*

TERRA VALENTINE Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District Wurtele Vineyard 2003

Score: 81 | Release price: \$55 | Current price: \$55

Dry, earthy, extracted and bitter, with a core of off-kilter dried berry flavors. 2003 California Cabernet blind retrospective (July 2013). Past its prime. 635 cases made.—*J.L.*