

From: **The BrightWines Beacon** - lighthouse@brightwines.com
Subject: April showers bring spring Cabs!
Date: April 29, 2022 at 12:43 PM
To: The BrightWines Beacon newsletter

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The BrightWines Beacon for 4/22/22: April Showers Bring Spring Cabs!

Yep, we've reached the point of this so-called "spring" where we're just making it up as we go along! ***So YES... April showers bring spring Cabs!***

Cabernet lovers take note, **today's newsletter is ALL about Cabernet, and friends!** Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, Carmenere, claret, or meritage... I've got something for everyone in-stock now! (email orders preferred, subject to confirmation, some supplies may be limited)

And speaking of meritage... be sure to **read today's The View from The Top for a brief article on "whatever happened to all those meritage wines"** anyway??

Highlights of today's "**Bright Lights**" include:

** Smart-Buys in textbook and tasty Cabernet Sauvignon from Sonoma, Mendoza, and Columbia Valley!

AVV and Piattelli and Red Mountain selections

** Meritage or Heritage? Dave's TOP Pick for both!

Alexander Valley Vineyards "Homestead Red"

** Cabernet, and friends!

Cabernet Franc? What about Carmenere? Malbec? Merlot? Blends of all of the above?

Read on to Bright Lights for plenty of pure Cabernet selections, plenty of Smart Buys, plus some Affordable Luxury too!

THE LAMP IS LIT: Store Hours and Shopping Preferences

Until further notice, BrightWines is STILL operating as "order pickups preferred" during regular store hours. Wine orders are available for in-store pickup and with curbside options also available. BrightWines is not currently open for in-store browsing, standard retail shopping, or for tasting events. I am fully vaccinated (and boosted) so masks are optional at pickup. I do realize that it's not always possible to be 100% "orders only" and still offer the responsive customer service folks are used to from BrightWines, so I'll do my best to be flexible. If you prefer the in-person experience, it is still best to begin with an email to Dave so we can be on the same page and efficient over the process of selecting your wines and arranging for pickup at a time that is mutually convenient.

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP: whatever happened to all the "Meritage" reds?

I'm sure many of you have been drinking good California reds long enough to remember when most of the most-popular red wines were "not" necessarily "red blends" and that most of the reds (as is still true for whites) were labelled as single varietal wines. You might even remember at time when Merlot was the top dog in the varietal red wine business. Regardless, the standard-bearer for California red wines (with apologies to Zinfandel, or Pinot Noir, and the aforementioned Merlot) has almost always been the Napa/Sonoma red wines and for most of those have been based off Cabernet! Of course, pure unadulterated Cabernet Sauvignon is not for everyone. It's a tannic variety, not always smooth and not particularly deeply fruited. Over the long course of the history of wine and around the world there has always been a strong temptation to blend a little something into that Cabernet to round it out, to flesh it out, to deepen the fruit, to make it more approachable, to add additional complexity, you name it...

Cabernet Sauvignon is a wonderful lead horse, one of the finest in all the stable of vinifera red wines. But add some "friends" to it and it can be even better. Add some Merlot, or add some Merlot and some Cabernet Franc, mix it with Sangiovese, or Shiraz, or go for the full "Bordeaux Varietal" blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot, and Carmenere. Whatever the winemaker's preferences decided, but certain

to be a blend of those varieties.

But step back in time to the decades of the '80s and '90s in California winemaking when Cabernet was king, or move forward to the mid-'90s when Merlot was the thing, and it does not take too much creative energy - and historical knowledge of places like Bordeaux - to say, hey we need a California wine category that defines the Cabernet blend! Unfortunately, or fortunately, the wine label rules did not have much room for those sorts of wines. Any red wine of 75% or more of Cabernet Sauvignon could be called Cabernet. Easy enough. But what would you call a blend of Cabernet otherwise? The names for wines from particular regions are well-protected, of course. So there was no way to call a Napa/Sonoma "Bordeaux Blend" a "Bordeaux" blend.

Back in the day, the solution seemed simple: create a new term. And that's basically where we got the word "Meritage" (as freely stolen/edited/rewritten from Wikipedia)

"The Meritage Association was formed in 1988 by a small group of Sonoma County and Napa Valley vintners who hosted a contest to conceive a proprietary name for these sorts of blends. The winner was the word "Meritage" which is a portmanteau of merit and heritage. Those two root words inform the proper pronunciation too. Although many people, including plenty of wine experts, have a tendency to French-ify the word Meritage by pronouncing its last syllable with a *zhuh* sound, as in the U.S. pronunciation of "garage" but the Meritage Alliance specifically states that the word should be pronounced to rhyme with the word "heritage" (or sometimes as to merit "age" in the cellar). Regardless, "Meritage" is a trademarked word to name or describe Bordeaux-style wines without infringing on the Bordeaux region's protected designation. Moreover, the word Meritage is a trademarked term and to use the trademark for a wine, the winery must belong to the California-based Meritage Alliance and pay annual dues. The blend was limited to the Bordeaux varietals and was encouraged to be one of the best wines a winery could offer."

For a good decade or two, using the word meritage to describe Cabernet blends had reasonably good traction and was relatively commonplace especially in Napa and Sonoma. But over the years, as styles and preferences, and varietal designations, and consumer familiarity and expertise changed, the word meritage lost some of its appeal. Ironically, as the popularity of red wine blends grew by leaps and bounds, the word meritage actually faded off. Most wineries realized that a clever or insightful or descriptive name for their own individual concept of a blend could be more successful, easily trademarked or protected, and more flexible from vintage to vintage without paying dues or sticking to the concepts of the meritage association. Additionally, words like "claret" which implies the same Bordeaux blend idea, or the rather low bar of 75% varietal for wines labelled as Cabernet or Merlot allowed enough blending and labeling flexibility that many wineries left behind the word meritage.

To be sure, the longstanding tried-and-true red wine concept of blending Cabernet Sauvignon with some of its good friends did not go away. The wines of Bordeaux, and also Napa and Sonoma and all around the world are testament to that. It's just that the name did. So whether you want to call it a Cabernet while knowing it might have 25% of other varietals in the mix, or say it's a Bordeaux (if it's from Bordeaux) or a claret (a British term for Bordeaux that often implies more Merlot than Cabernet) or give it a new distinctive name all its own, it is still one of the most important red wine styles around, and it has many fans!

So Cabernet fans, take note... read on to Bright Lights for a range of Cabernet (and friends) that are in-stock now at BrightWines! Just don't ask if I have any meritage...

BRIGHT LIGHTS: April showers bring spring Cabs!

** Smart-Buys in pure Cabernet Sauvignon from Sonoma, Mendoza, and Columbia Valley

Alexander Valley Vineyards 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon @ \$17.99 per bottle (\$215.88/case, regular price \$21.99)

estate bottled. Alexander Valley (Sonoma). The flagship bottling from this great winery, a leading citizen of the region today and home to historic Alexander Valley properties. A "reference point" for Alexander Valley and in Sonoma Cabernet Sauvignon since the 1970's.

Canoe Ridge 2017 Red Mountain “The Expedition” Cabernet Sauvignon @ \$12.99 per bottle

(\$155.88/case)

Red Mountain is its own AVA within Columbia Valley, and widely regarded as the finest discrete set of single source mountain hillside vineyards in Washington for Cabernet Sauvignon. This is a soft and smooth example, ready to drink, with a pedigree equal to wines twice its price!

Piattelli 2019 Cafayate reserve Cabernet Sauvignon @ \$12.99 per bottle (\$139.99/case = \$11.67 each)

Rated 90-points Wine Spectator! "This lively version is filled with vibrant minerality to the pure-tasting red fruit and spice flavors. Shows dried beef accents midpalate, with sanguine and hot stone notes on the fresh finish. Drink now through 2024. \$16 retail. 90 points." AND also recommended by Wine Enthusiast, who says "Typical of Cafayate Cabernet, this opens with rustic, saucy aromas of spicy and herbal black fruits. The palate is sound and medium in body, with good structure and clear lines. Herbal plum and spicy blackberry flavors finish steady and solid. Drink through 2023." (and) DAVE says: this tastes like it's halfway between a good Sonoma Cabernet and a nice Chilean style of Cabernet. You may know this winery well, and right now the real smart buys from Piattelli are this Cabernet Sauvignon, and their Malbec+Tannat blend and their Torrontes white - which are all made at their newer winery up north of Mendoza, at altitude in Cafayate. Inquire with Dave for limited stock of the new vintages of those two wines too.

** Meritage or Heritage? Dave's TOP Pick for both!

or maybe let's just call it "homestead" red...

AVV “Homestead Red” 2019 Alexander Valley @ \$14.99 per bottle

The best value red made by Alexander Valley Vineyards, drinks like twice the price! A classy and full-bodied red blend in a “meritage” style, but with other fun varieties in the mix. Estate Alexander Valley - Sonoma blend of Merlot, Zinfandel, Cabernet, Grenache, and Syrah. This blend is aged in good oak barrels too. Impressive wine!

Chateau Lamothe Vincent 2018 "Heritage" Bordeaux Superieur @ \$15.99 per bottle (\$178.88/case = \$14.99)

A longtime favorite petit Chateau, and always a gold medal winner. Made to "merit age" and called "Heritage" so it fits this theme very nicely. It also rated a nice 88 points in Wine Enthusiast magazine, who notes "Wood aging gives this wine a polished, minty character that goes well with the juicy black-plum-skin flavors and underlying acidity." My tasting notes say this wine need until 2025 to smooth out, and will be great until 2028. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon.

** Cabernet, and its many friends!

Perhaps you prefer Cabernet Franc? Or the all-important Merlot! Or what about a rarer "Bordeaux Varietal" like Carmenere? Blends of all of the above? Here are some more Smart Buys, plus one great Affordable Luxury too!

Mi Terruno "Expresion" 2017 Mendoza Cabernet Franc @ \$12.99 per bottle (\$155.88/case)

this wine is drinking beautifully at peak and is very classic and pure, yet friendly, expression of Cabernet Franc (if you will excuse the pun). This as much more than just "true fan" appeal, and shows why Mendoza is becoming well-known for Cab Franc.

Domaine Paul Mas 2020 pays d'Oc Malbec @ \$12.99 per bottle (\$143.88/case = \$11.99 m/m)

from single vineyard in the Languedoc, drinks like a Cahors meets Mendoza!

“Canto Sur” (by J. Bouchon) Maule Valley 2020 Carmenere red blend @ \$14.99 per bottle (limited stock)

Rated 92 points by Tim Atkin, a good wine writer who specializes in South America. A blend of 50% Carmenere, 25% Carignan, and 25% Pais. I like this wine for the Carmenere elements, but I have to also make note of the Carignan and the Pais in the blend. Those two are as historically important to Chilean winemaking as Carmenere, and this half of the blend is correctly labeled as “old vines”.

Alexander Valley Vineyards 2019 Alexander Valley Merlot @ \$14.99 per bottle (\$179.99/case)
a "Cab-lovers" Merlot that is rated 93 points by Tastings and 89 points Wine Spectator (new release).

Chateau Les Gravettes 2017 Cotes de Bourg @ \$15.99 per bottle (\$89.95/6pk case = \$14.99 each)
Gold medal winner at the Concours Mondial Feminalise in Paris, one of my two favorite gold medals a French wine can win. Classic Bordeaux style for fans of the traditional claret. This has good depth and very aromatic character.

Chateau le Crock 2018 Saint Estephe @ \$59.99 per bottle (very limited) Owned and made by Leoville-Poyferre. Ratings range from 88 - 94 points, across the board from 6 magazines, for this vintage of this wine.

Salvestrin "Dr Crane Vineyard" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2017/2018 "two-bottle sets" @ \$159.99 per set (inquire)
(one bottle of each vintage) note: the 2018 was #9 on this year's Wine Spectator Top 100 (rated 95 points) and the 2017 is rated 93+ points.

BrightWines is OPEN regular hours for confirmed order pickups from this newsletter, for previously confirmed orders, and for new Dave-as-personal-shopper orders. email orders preferred, I'll confirm back asap - please indicate your pickup preferences when you email your order so I can reply accordingly, especially if you want a pickup sometime this Saturday! (just reply to this newsletter or contact Dave)

Remember that unless otherwise note, I'll do my best to stay within the "24 hour rule" for email replies.

The Right Wines are BrightWines!
2420 Margaret Street North Saint Paul, MN 55109