

Decanter

CLASSIC CABERNETS

QUICK MOVERS

Since the pioneering revival of Cabernet Sauvignon in the 1960s and 70s, Napa has undergone a startlingly rapid transformation.

STEPHEN BROOK pays tribute to those producers who have proved their staying power...

Cabernet Sauvignon embraces the soils and climate of Napa with all the ease of a hound joyfully plunging into a stream on a hot day. It was so in the 19th century and it is still so today. Venerable vintages from Beaulieu Vineyards and Inglenook have proved the staying power of Napa Cabernet, now confirmed by a new generation. The modern revival began in the late 1960s, and many of those pioneering wineries are still very much at the top of their game. But 40 years is a long time in California, and times change. So who are the names which have withstood the test of time? ...

... Araujo, a biodynamic property further north near Calistoga. Although Bart and Daphne Araujo only bought the estate in 1990, it was originally planted with Cabernet in 1964 - it produced outstanding wines for Ridge in 1971 and for Phelps in the 1970s and 1980s. The Araujos have a real passion for the site, and their wines have been great from the outset, the power of sophisticated winemaking. In their search for perfection, they routinely declassify about a third of the crop, and a dash of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot adds complexity. Rolland completed the blend of the 2005 about an hour before my most recent visit to Araujo, so I was the first person outside the estate to taste the finished wine, which has fine-grained tannins and great polish. ...

Inevitably, these classic Cabernets are very much different from each other. Yet as I concluded my visits and tastings, one common feature did emerge. With the exception of Shafer, Caymus and recent vintages of Mondavi Reserve, all are modest in alcohol.

The common perception of Napa Cabernets as blockbusters is misplaced, at least as far as the top wines are concerned. Few exceed 14%. As Randy Dunn says: 'This notion that you need to let the grapes hang till they start to raisin, and the pips turn brown, that's all bullshit.' **D**

HAIL THAT CAB: BROOK'S NAPA LEGENDS TODAY

Araujo 2004

★★★★★

Black cherries and cassis on the nose. Voluptuous and highly concentrated, with tremendous spice and energy, toasty but polished and very long. 2010-2022.