



**CATHIARD
VINEYARD**

Press Articles





Press articles



"A vineyard in Napa Valley...

It's been twenty years since we set our sights on it.

When we tasted the first Napa Cabernets with high and round shoulders...

The bottles were so full of flavor, making our Bordeaux seem almost austere.

Carrying memories of these first visits there, we kept a painting in our minds. We walked under the Napa Valley sun in the mustard yellow flowers, between two rows of gobelet pruned vines, while in the horizon through the mist, we could see the silhouette of the Mayacamas.

We continued to dream of the perfect property that seemed just out of reach.

Meanwhile our Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte was demanding our energy, as we set our sights on making each vintage the world's best in both red and white.

Napa was starting to feel like a distant memory, when just after the 2019 harvest, we were given an opportunity to complete our vision: an estate marked by volcanic and sedimentary terroir (the famous Rutherford dust), vineyards including cabernet blocks at altitude, wildlife, biodiversity, and even historical landmarks constructed by the pioneers of the valley.

We came, we had a "coup de coeur ", we signed ! Soon after, we were faced with a situation in 2020 that was not for the faint of heart. We managed a new property from Bordeaux while borders closed, wildfires threatened California, and headlines told us the end was not in sight.

Now, our enthusiasm for Cathiard Vineyard remains whole and is growing. The team in place has marked its territory with efficiency and talent. In addition, while we develop our integrated cooperage, the two vintages aging in barrel have exceeded our expectations.

The more we deepen the connection with our terroir, the more its potential reveals to be out of the ordinary. We cannot wait to share this treasure with you. "

*Florence & Daniel
Cathiard*



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| **97 points Cathiard Vineyard 2020**

By James Suckling



CATHIARD VINEYARD NAPA VALLEY 2020

Wonderful aromas of blackcurrants, dark plums, mint, sage, and dried wood. Some sandalwood. Full- to medium-bodied with tannins that have the texture of fine velvet and run down the length of the wine. Extremely polished and refined. Sophisticated. Firm at the end. This will age beautifully. Pure cabernet sauvignon. Best after 2026.



WINEENTHUSIAST®

| 97 points Cathiard Vineyard 2020

By Jim Gordon



97
POINTS

Cellar Selection

Cathiard Vineyard 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Extraordinary and opulent, this densely concentrated, luxuriously textured flagship Napa wine by Florence and Daniel Cathiard of Bordeaux is their first vintage from the former Flora Springs property.

The wine is softly saturated with black currants, blueberries, spearmint and black olives for a comforting, mouth-filling expression that is at once powerful and gentle. It feels layered, deep and creamy.

Best from 2027-2037.

— J.G. *Published 9/1/2023*

JANE ANSON

INSIDE BORDEAUX

| **Bordeaux in Napa: tasting Cathiard Vineyard's inaugural vintage**

By Jane Anson

SCORE 96

Pretty much anyone who has visited Napa Valley is likely to have driven along Zinfandel Lane. Its main section runs from Silverado Trail straight over to Highway 29, marking the southern border of St Helena before it switches into Rutherford, spanning the valley from one side to the other. As you drive from east to west (and you'll almost certainly be going by car – the location gets a 1/100 Walkability Score on an American rental website), you'll pass Frog's Leap, then Kelham Vineyards, Wheeler, Boisset Family Estates and its flagship Raymond Winery, among other stellar names. Cross over Highway 29, and things get quiet pretty fast, as you continue the drive up towards the foothills of the Mayacamas. This is still Zinfandel Lane but the road narrows as you go, and the views get more stunning as you climb into the hillsides. The very last property that you reach on this section of the road is the Cathiard Vineyard.



You can see why Florence and Daniel Cathiard fell in love with it when they visited in summer 2019. It's nestled into the mountainside, with most of the vineyard plots rising on slopes behind one of the few stone-built historic winery buildings still standing in Napa, dating back to the 1880s. Its construction by the Scottish Rennie brothers offered a neat link with the 19th century Scottish wine merchant George Smith from their Bordeaux property Château Smith Haut-Lafitte.

They bought it pretty much on sight, with the transaction completed just a few months before covid hit.

'And then all of a sudden we couldn't get over to see our new estate,' Florence told me. We spoke about its progress several times during the covid years, with her updating me as they got the right visas in place to visit, and dealt with staff changes, most notably the departure of winemaker Ben Morken and the arrival of current winemaker Justine Labbé (both working alongside SHL's technical director Fabien Teitgen).

The threats or realities of wildfires added an extra layer of complications – and many of the challenges were both helped and hindered by a decision that the couple had made on purchasing the property of not taking on either the previous brand name, Flora Springs, or any of the existing stock.

'Since the wines we were elaborating there are so different from what was there before,' Florence told me, 'we did not buy inventory or brand – and decided to keep all activity focused on the winery itself, rather than having a tasting room in St Helena. It has meant that we were able to start afresh, and in many ways this new adventure reminds us of our beginnings at Smith Haut Lafitte 30 years ago (when they famously bought the estate in 1990 and then had three years of frost and other disasters that meant they bottled no wine until 1994). We have exactly the same expectations for our eventual success'

From cattle to vines

The site is part of the history of the Napa Valley. A large cattle ranch in the 1840s, the Rennie Brothers purchased the property in 1887, planted 60 acres (24ha) of vines, and began building the gravity-flow winery. To do so, they hired engineer Hamden McIntyre, who had worked with Gustave Niebaum in the creation of the Inglenook winery, the first gravity-flow structure of its kind in the valley, as well as the Greystone Winery that is now the site of the Culinary Institute of America, just round the corner from the Cathiard Winery in St Helena and Far Niente. They had engineering in their blood themselves, as their uncle Sir John Rennie the Younger was knighted for his work in completing the London Bridge in 1824, and they financed many local bridges in Napa Valley including the Pope Street stone bridge in St Helena.

The Rennie Brothers Winery was finished in 1900, and became the first in the valley to use a gasoline-powered engine to crush the grapes. I'm not sure if the later fire that destroyed much of the winery was connected to this, but Phylloxera, Prohibition and the fire played its part in extinguishing their efforts, although in the 1930s another legendary figure arrived at the Rennie Brothers Winery – Louis M Martini.

It was Martini who built the large wooden house in the 1940s that still stands, where he lived with his family until his death in the 1970s. We can imagine the site helped him realise the potential of mountain sites around Napa, as he was famous for championing mountain fruit. In 1977, Jerry and Flora Komes bought the property, and renovated and restored it, and it was this family (by now Komes-Garvey) who then sold to the Cathiards in 2019.

New beginnings

I was lucky to coincide my visit to Napa with a week when both Florence and Daniel were present, but to further understand both the potential and the singular character of the estate, I also caught up with Frederick Ammons, who previously worked for Harlan and Rudd Estate, and has been consultant since 2021.

'Four things struck me immediately on arriving here,' he said. 'First was its diverse terrain within one, contiguous estate, with a rare blend between hillside, terraced and bench vineyards. Second observation is exposure. Being on the Myacamas side of Napa Valley has several advantages: as the slopes here are southeast facing, they have morning exposure to the sun and are more protected from a majority of afternoon heat in comparison with the Vaca side (eastern side of Napa Valley). A cooling effect from the forest and hills above is another feature, as are the old vines -the oldest being over 40 years old'.

Other things will take more time to become evident. The transition to organic farming, with biodynamic techniques, is already underway but is likely to take five years to really show results, and there are currently several replanting projects that inevitably will also take time to come on line – and will mainly see Merlot removed in favour of Cabernet Sauvignon. Launching three entirely new labels is also a challenge, although from my tasting the three already have clearly distinct characters, and they show excellent potential, even though 2020 was challenging not just because of COVID but because of the destructive fires that burnt across the Valley. To monitor any at-risk fruit, the must was put into neutral oak after fermentation before being racked into new French oak barrels, and tested for compounds connected to smoke taint. It cleared the tests, and I didn't find any taint during the tasting, although you can expect the concentration and spice that is typical of 2020.

Currently the Cathiards are planning on three or four extended trips to Napa per year, but they are notorious perfectionists, and my guess is the biggest challenge of all be staying away during these crucial years of construction. Due to be sold partly through the Place de Bordeaux as of March 2023, this is a name to add to your watchlist.



- 23 hectares, or 58 acres, in size, with a further sector of around 4ha of hillside virgin land, already belonging to the estate, likely to be planted in the future.
- Winemaker Justine Labbé is from Blois in the Loire Valley, where her father runs a successful bookshop. 28 years old, she studied agronomy in Toulouse, then winemaking, and had worked in Pine Ridge in Napa, as well as at Moss Creek, Margaret River and in Bordeaux at Smith Haut-Lafitte before moving back out to Napa in April 2021.
- Current plantings stand at 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 10% Malbec and 5% Cabernet Franc, with the estate's oldest vines dating back to 1983.
- Three separate labels, Hora, The Founding Brothers and Cathiard Vineyard, ranging from (approximately) US\$130 to US\$400.
- Grapes for the Hora label come from the estate's younger vines, meaning 25 years old or younger, and is named after the word for 'season' in Greek.
- The Founding Brothers is named after the founders of the property, James and William Rennie, brothers from Scotland who built the stone gravity-flow winery in 1885.
- The grapes for Cathiard Vineyard come from the oldest vines, and are specifically centered around a high quality plot christened 'Up and Down' by Florence and Daniel, reflecting its topography.
- The cellars are built into the hillside, and have been fitted with new stainless steel vats. There may have been plans for caves dating from the original winery – in the late 1800s an archway was built in the winery next to the hillside indicating potential plans for drilling caves – but it took until the 1990s for 1,200m² of caves to be drilled into the hills.
- From 1997-2019, the estate was known as Flora Springs, owned by the Komes and Garvey family.
- This was the first winery in Napa to use a gasoline-powered engine to crush their grapes, until a fire broke out, burning their press and all their barrels. Eventually the property changed hands and the winery was shuttered in 1920 with Prohibition.
- Due to be sold 75% in the US, 25% through La Place de Bordeaux.
- The intention is to be entirely estate-grown, and that has been the case for the 2020 and 2021 vintage. There was a small amount of fruit purchased in 2022 to compensate for the loss in production due to replanting several blocks of the Estate.
- Natural diversity abounds here – not only is much of the hillside still forested, but there are several small ponds that can provide irrigation water as needed. The largest pond is Lake Cathiard/Sinegal, shared with their neighbour Sinegal Estate.
- You can find a detailed history of the estate at the brilliant Napa Wine Project blog, and on Hamden McIntyre on the Napa History site.

Wine Spectator

| Cathiard Vineyard: a french makeover beneath the Mayacamas

By James Molesworth



It was love at first sight for Florence Cathiard when she saw the property at Flora Springs.

Florence, along with her husband, Daniel, owns Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte in Bordeaux. That original foray into the wine business was in 1984 and Smith-Haut-Lafitte was a run-down mess, with a hole in the winery roof. Today it has been rejuvenated into one of Bordeaux's elite properties, and its neighboring Sources de Caudalie is one of the world's top eno-tourism spots.

The couple has since gone on to purchase château Le Thil, Cantelys, Beauregard, Bastor-Lamontagne and St.-Robert in Bordeaux, as well as develop additional luxury hotels, spas and a ski chalet. The Flora Springs purchase is their first foray outside of France.

But with that track record, it seems an easy gamble for the Cathiards to elevate the Flora Springs estate they purchased at the end of 2019, especially considering the relatively healthy state of the vineyards. Only the winery and hospitality facilities need much of an upgrade at this point, though there are plans to tweak the vineyards a bit as well. The previous owners, the Komes and Garvey families, kept some additional vineyards to the south, as well as the Flora Springs brand name and tasting room on Highway 29. The Cathiards have renamed the property, located at the base of the Mayacamas mountain range, Cathiard Family Estate.

While the ravages of COVID in 2020 have prevented the Cathiards from getting to their new property, they have been able to install Justine Labbé, 27, as winemaker. On my recent visit, she'd been on the job all of two and half weeks (previously she worked with SHL technical director Fabien Teitgen for two years). While she has youthful energy, she's taking a measured approach, particularly in the vineyards.

"We need to wait for this year, to see what does well and what needs realignment," she says, referring to some spots where she plans to change the row orientation from north-south to east-west to help mitigate the effects of too much sun. "We need to see how the terroir expresses itself."

A touch of Merlot has already been taken out in favor of Cabernet Sauvignon. Labbé has her eye on 20 of the 58 acres for possible realignment, along with an additional 11 acres to be planted on virgin soils on the property. The current breakdown of plantings is 60 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 25 percent Merlot, 10 percent Malbec and 5 percent Cabernet Franc, with the estate's oldest vines dating to 1980. Rudd Estate's Frederick Ammons is consulting on the project, with Teitgen overseeing from back in Bordeaux.



There were 156 tons of fruit brought in from the 2020 harvest, but no final decisions have been made on what, if any, might make it to bottle under the Cathiard Family Estate name.

We want our first release to be outstanding. Luckily a majority of the lots don't show any smoke taint," notes Labbé. "Other than that, nothing has been decided yet, as our desire is to only produce a CFE wine if the quality reaches our expectations. For now, it is too early for us to decide, as the wines are still at the beginning of the aging process."

In addition to tweaking some vineyard parcels, Labbé has also immediately set to converting the estate to organic growing, and will then perhaps test some biodynamic practices as well. The cellar upgrade is already underway too, with new stainless steel vats being brought in along with a few technical upgrades.

Labbé admits she has a lot of catching up to do. She's familiar with some of the clonal and rootstock material in the vineyard, but not all of it. Soil pits need to be dug as well so she can get a handle on what's going on underneath the vines. And she's tasting.

"The last two weeks have been busy, but I've tried wines from Dominus, Inglenook, Phelps and others," says Labbé. The goal is "to do the best of both worlds. To use low yields as we have in Bordeaux and vinify for freshness, but respect the beautiful fruit and rich tannins of California."

It's all very much at the beginning for this project, and wine is a long game. But with some excellent building blocks in place and dedicated ownership, I'd expect this new project to trend up relatively quickly.



| **Cathiard Family Estate**

By Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW

The last decade has seen a number of prestigious Châteaux in Bordeaux investing in Napa Valley. In 2013, Francois Pinault, owner of Château Latour, purchased Araujo Estate in Calistoga, renaming it Eisele Vineyard. Alfred Tesseron of Pontet-Canet bought Pym-Rae in 2016, and AXA Millésimes (owner of Pichon Baron) purchased Outpost Winery in 2018. One of the latest Bordelais acquisitions was that of Florence and Daniel Cathiard, owners of Château Smith Haut Lafitte in Pessac-Léognan.

In January 2020, the Cathiards purchased the homestead and historic winery that was at one time the residence of Napa Valley winemaking forefather Louis M. Martini from the Komes family, owners of Flora Springs. The deal included around 200 acres of land, 58 of which was already planted to vine, and what had come to be known as the Flora Springs Winery. The purchase did not include the Flora Springs name, which is still operating. That suited the Cathiards just fine, though. They want to establish their name in Napa Valley: Cathiard Family Estate and Cathiard Vineyard.



Located in the foothills of the Mayacamas Range in St. Helena, I took the opportunity to visit the vineyard and winery reconstruction in February this year with the general manager and winemaker Justine Labbe. The partly sloped vineyard extends up to an altitude of 650 feet (200 meters) and includes mature vines, including a couple of blocks of free-standing old-timers that are on St. George rootstock. The Cathiards had torn down the eyesore of an outdoor tank farm, replaced by a state-of-the-art refit to the historic stone winery, including small upright and inverted conical vats. Justine is working with the dedicated cooper at Smith Haut Lafitte to adjust the toasting levels of barrels made especially for aging the wines from the Cathiard Vineyard.

Given the challenges of this vintage, it will be a minimal first release, including around 700 cases of the flagship Cabernet Sauvignon, 900 cases of the next tier “Founding Fathers” label, and 1200 cases of the Cabernet Merlot blend. The Cathiards intend to develop a club membership and distribute the wines via the Place de Bordeaux. Having tasted some very impressive barrel samples of the 2020 vintage, I can confirm this is a property to watch!

| **The glamour of Cathiard Family Estate**

By W. Peter Hoyne

Cathiard Family Estate in St Helena, Napa Valley is one of those awe-inspiring places with an identity that is immediately apparent. Daniel and Florence Cathiard, owners of Chateau Smith Haute Lafitte fame in Bordeaux, completed the purchase of this 200-acre property in 2020. In many ways, the future potential of this property is reminiscent of their grand cru classe estate in France's Pessac-Léognan appellation. The Cathiards are poised to position their wines at the top tier of Napa's elite.

Daniel and Florence met while on the French Olympic ski team in 1960's, finding love on the Alpine slopes. Together they managed an extensive number of supermarket stores and a chain of sporting good businesses. In 1990, they pivoted, selling their business and purchasing the historic 14th century chateau and vineyards near Bordeaux. They elevated the reputation and wines of this estate with a mission statement that read "To do our utmost so that every vintage of our red and white wines reflects the full potential of our magnificent terroir."

Cathiard Estate is situated at the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains in St. Helena, California. The property changed hands several times between 1840 and 1885 until Scottish emigrants James and William Rennie purchased the property from Martin Furstenfeld in 1885. The Rennie brothers constructed a gravity flow winery and planted 60 acres of grapes. Falling into disrepair after phylloxera and Prohibition, the winery closed. In 1933 Louis Martini and his wife purchased the property, using it as their residence while storing Martini's wine. Martini stayed on the estate until his passing in 1974. In 1978, the Komes and Garvey families became owners and named the property Flora Springs Winery, until it was later acquired by the Cathiards in 2020.



Cathiard Estate Vineyards is an idyllic location with 200 acres of mountainside and Napa Valley floor vineyards. The rolling hillside vineyards extend to 500 feet in elevation with a spring fed reservoir near the top. The property is officially in St Helena but also straddles the Rutherford appellation with volcanic and sedimentary sub-soils.

As with their property in France, the Cathiards are intent on resurrecting this historic winery and vineyards. The Cathiards, being extremely savvy in winemaking and business, are intent on creating a state of the art wine making facility with their own cooperage. Of course, as with their other property in France, a new hospitality center is in place. Florence and Daniel realized “our vineyard must be earned, it requires vigilance, commitment and a respect for the legacy of the pioneers before us.”

They are growing their team with the French, energetic Justine Labbé, who has been appointed general manager and head winemaker. She had worked with Fabien Teitgen, Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte’s senior technical director in Bordeaux before transitioning to California. Tiegen has been overseeing winemaking for over 20 years at the chateau and as is responsible for much of its winemaking success. Fabien Teitgen visits the property several times a year overseeing winemaking, vineyard development and the overall project. Tiegen professes that this endeavor “is the beginning of a story. It is our view of Napa Valley.”

At this point in time. the Cathiards objective is to produce two Bordeaux red blends and a Cathiard Vineyards Estate Cabernet Sauvignon. The blends are named Hora, after a group of Greek goddesses representing the change of seasons, Founding Brothers after James and William Rennie, and Cathiard Estate Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon. The vineyards are planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. The estate vineyards have transitioned to organic and biodynamic farming practices.



As I tasted these wines, it became quite evident that these were remarkably different from others in the valley. They possessed a vein of purity and an artistic expression of sophistication along with a touch of savoir-faire. There is a self-confidence to the wines that expresses a true sense of place. The first release of this collection of wines from Cathiard Estate is expected in Spring, 2023.



2020 Cathiard Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

This estate-grown wine is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon sourced from volcanic and sedimentary sub-soils from the oldest hillside vineyard on the property. The average age of the vines is 35 years and it is aged for 18 months in 80% new French oak barrels and oak foudres.

This is a profound and extremely sophisticated wine from the beginning to the conclusion. Although somewhat Napaesque in style, the French showcase their talents in expressing the terroir of this property. The wine opens up with layers of pure silky black and blue fruits accented by undertones of savory spices, graphite and minerality.

The wine has a sense of place with a compellation of complexity and texture that carry you on a journey. Around every rounded corner is a new dimension and more gratification. The finish is long and memorable, although I wish it hadn't ended. I found this Cabernet Sauvignon to be nearly flawless in its expression. An impressive achievement by winemaker Justine Labbé and her team.

« This is a profound and extremely sophisticated wine from the beginning to the conclusion! »

| **The Frenchification of Napa Valley**

By Roger Morris



After the global stock-market crash in 2008, the big names in French winemaking could not get enough of Napa Valley's red juices. And this time they came not to partner, but to bag big-name buyouts. (...) Florence and Daniel Cathiard bought the Flora Springs property (though not the name) in 2020, reopening it as Cathiard Estate.

As Florence Cathiard says, she and Daniel purchased a great property at a lousy time. "When we bought the estate in January 2020, we had a lot of problems, starting with the fact that at first we couldn't come back to California due to the travel ban, and [also in 2020] the Glass Fire really frightened us and came as close as 3 miles [5km] from the estate just before our first harvest." But the Cathiards are talented and determined owners. "During this year's en primeur campaign, we split our forces," she says. "Ludovic [Fradin], my commercial director, and I were focused on the release pricing, while Daniel et Fabien [Teitgen] flew to California to deal with everything there—the wine and the works in progress to have the winery open to the public soon. Of course, we would have each other on the phone every single day to discuss how things are going each side of the Atlantic."

| **Posh french winemakers pounce on big american vineyard selloff**

By Elin McCoy



A recent SVB survey found that almost 50% of Napa and Sonoma wineries consider selling a possibility in 2021. For some regions, including the Sierra Foothills, a zinfandel haven east of Sacramento that was once the epicenter of the gold rush, it's 80%. Yes, the latest European influx brings even more international flavor to American wine regions. Will it influence the style of the wines? (...) "In general, French producers have been the leading investors in the U.S. wine industry, followed by other countries," explains Mario Zeponi of mergers-and-acquisitions firm Zepponi & Co., who says foreign vintners are motivated by access to U.S. consumers and the world's largest wine market. (...)

In 2020 the family owners of Napa estate Flora Springs, founded in the 1970s, sold their 280-acre vineyard and winery (but not the brand name) to Bordeaux's Château Smith Haut Lafitte, which picked up its first American property. They're calling it Cathiard Family Estate.

The pandemic brought complications. The Cathiards had bought Flora Springs in January 2020 but couldn't get to their new property for 14 months. "I could easily write a book about all the disasters we overcame, including the fires which had the good spirit of stopping at 12 km from our forest!" co-owner Florence Cathiard wrote in an email. "After three months of filing official papers and fighting with the U.S. Embassy, we managed to get National Interest Exception visas so we could oversee the work in progress."

The Cathiards were seduced by Flora Springs' similarities to Smith Haut Lafitte. The Napa property is in one big piece, mostly in the top appellation of Rutherford. It also has a strong history, water resources, and plenty of biodiversity.



| Spinning gold from a blighted vintage

By Jancis Robinson



Above, sheep nibble at the Cathiard Vineyard at sunset.

Cathiard Vineyard, Estate 2020 Napa Valley

16.5

Full bottle 1,303 g. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from vines with an average age of 35 years.

Deep, blackish crimson. Very strong, refreshing, not-quite-pyrazine Cabernet aroma. Sweet start, like all Cathiard Napa 2020s, and then just a little pinched on the end. The most ambitious of these three wines in terms of tannins, and it certainly still needs to fill out on the mid palate. 14.1%

Drink 2026 – 2036

\$395 RRP

Few of these are released yet, but guide prices are shown in US dollars

- **Cathiard Vineyard**
All three of this Bordeaux-owned estate's debut bottlings, Hora (\$125), Founding Brothers (\$225) and Cathiard Vineyard (\$395)
- **Corison**
Both single-vineyard wines, Sunbasket and Kronos (both \$225)
- **Frog's Leap**
Certified organic Rutherford estate wine — a relative bargain (\$75)
- **Gallica**
St Helena (\$210)
- **Grgich Hills**
Miljenko's Selection (\$90) and Yountville Old Vine (\$185) — both in admirably lightweight bottles
- **Harlan Estate**
To be released April 2024. Its 2018 Cab costs around \$1,925 for a single bottle
- **Larkmead**
(\$125)
- **Quintessa**
Biodynamic Rutherford estate wine (\$230)
- **Salvestrin**
St Helena (\$95)
- **Spottswoode**

San Francisco Chronicle

| **Foreigners keep buying Napa Valley wineries. But this one is different**

By Jess Lander



There's a controversial consolidation trend in California's Wine Country, and Florence Cathiard doesn't skirt around it. She acknowledges that this shift is driven by investments from foreign entities — just like her.

Listing off some of the most recent acquisitions to make headlines, she points to Joseph Phelps, which sold to Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton (LVMH) last year, and Shafer, which was acquired by a South Korean company. But Florence Cathiard insists that she and her husband, Daniel Cathiard, are different — a family, not a conglomerate.

The Cathiards' arrival does look different from these big corporations, which typically target large, already-notable and scalable wineries. Instead, their new Napa Valley winery, Cathiard Vineyard in St. Helena, is small, and they have little desire for growth. Now that it's ready for its public debut following a three-year transformation, the Cathiards hope the local wine community takes notice.

Like many Napa Valley winery owners, the Cathiards had long and successful careers in other industries before making the switch into wine. The changeover began 32 years ago with the much-needed restoration of a winery in Bordeaux, France, called Château Smith Haut Lafitte.

The Cathiards have since grown their holdings in Bordeaux, but in early 2020, they purchased their first winery outside of France: the former home of Flora Springs Winery, one of Napa Valley's most historic winery estates. Despite spending most of their time in France, the Cathiards are involved. They brought their niece to Napa full-time to run hospitality.

Cathiard is producing three wines, exclusively utilizing fruit from the estate: a flagship Cabernet and two blends priced between \$115 and \$395 a bottle.

Anyone who previously visited Flora Springs will feel a sharp pang of recognition when arriving at Cathiard Vineyard. Located at the foot of the Mayacamas Mountains and surrounded by dense forest, the bones of the 280-acre estate are the same, including its centerpiece: a large, 1885 stone winery believed to be haunted. The winery is known in Napa as one of a handful of “ghost wineries,” which sat vacant for many years following Prohibition.

But blink, and you might think you're in Bordeaux.

But blink, and you might think you're in Bordeaux. The historic architecture combined with Florence Cathiard's old world design aesthetic — consisting of 19th-century antiques shipped over from Europe and heavy stone statues — give Cathiard an unmistakable French feeling.

When it opens later this month, by-appointment tastings (from \$125 per person) of Cathiard's three Bordeaux-inspired red wines will take place in a number of nooks on the property: in a serene courtyard; under a wisteria-cloaked pergola overlooking the vineyards; or surrounded by antiques — including a King's Chair from Normandy — in a private salon. Like most Napa wineries, Cathiard will also offer a few elevated and customizable experiences, including a personalized walking tour with a Cathiard winemaker and an off-roading adventure up into the vineyards. Guests of the exclusive off-roading outing later taste on the deck of the Cathiard's private residence, the former home of Napa pioneer Louis Martini.

Bordeaux and Napa have comparable climates and focus on the same core grape varieties. Beyond that, Cathiard shares many similarities with Smith Haut Lafitte, which drew the family to the property in the first place. Both estates have natural lakes surrounded by forest as well as older vines — widely believed to produce grapes of higher quality — planted at some degree of elevation. Cathiard goes up to 1,000 feet. The Cathiards incorporate animals into their farming at each; in Napa, they use sheep to mow the grass and weeds in place of pesticides.

Soon, Cathiard, too, will have its own in-house cooperage, where the winery will build and toast its own oak barrels in house. It's a practice that's common in Bordeaux among the top châteaux, but almost unheard of in Napa. Once complete, visitors will be able to watch the cooper in action through a protective glass wall. “It's the best way to control everything,” said winemaker Justine Labbé, who the Cathiards brought over from Smith Haut Lafitte. “(The best way) to adapt to the different vineyard blocks and terroir is to do it at our own winery.”

Florence and Daniel Cathiard met when they were teenagers competing on the French national ski team. On their first visit to the U.S. — long before they turned their sights to wine — they attended the famed 1969 music festival Woodstock, and later drove an old Mustang across Utah and throughout Napa Valley. The entrepreneurial couple owned successful grocery and sporting goods chains. The latter, called Go Sport, had several locations in America. Florence Cathiard also oversaw her own advertising company.

But in 1984, Florence Cathiard said the couple cashed out to reinvest “everything” into the painstaking restoration of Smith Haut Lafitte, which was falling into disrepair and had a poor reputation for its wines. Their mission didn’t go smoothly; the Cathiards’ first harvest at Smith Haut Lafitte fell victim to a bad frost that reduced their crop by 90%. The next year was extremely rainy. It wasn’t until their fourth harvest that they had “a great year,” said Cathiard. But today, the winery ranks among the top wineries in the tier that sits just below Bordeaux’s consummate First Growth estates, which are among the most revered wineries in the world.

In many ways, the transformation taking place at Cathiard is similar to the work they did in Bordeaux. The estate has received a comprehensive revamp: They’ve cleaned and painted the interior of the winery and horseshoe-shaped cave; added a separate high-tech production facility; and converted the vineyard to organic farming. With plans to go fully biodynamic, they’re currently building a waterfall feature that will recycle water from the winery.

Much as with Smith Haut Lafitte, the first Cathiard Vineyard harvest in 2020 was unimaginably challenging. On top of navigating the pandemic — the Cathiards had to acquire special exemption paperwork that allowed them to travel into the U.S. — smoke from wildfires destroyed most of Napa Valley’s red wine crop.

Yet their French-leaning winemaking style worked to their advantage. The Cathiards prefer freshness and elegance over the power, ripeness and concentration that’s dominated Napa’s Cabernet revolution since the late 1990s. The winemaking team tends to pick their grapes earlier than the majority of their Napa peers. As a result, most of their fruit was in the winery before the Glass Fire struck; Cathiard is one of the few wineries that produced a 2020 vintage.

“The idea is to do an American wine with a sense of density, structure and fruitiness, but with a Bordeaux touch of elegance and a long finish,” said Labbé. “It’s a blend of New World and Old World.”

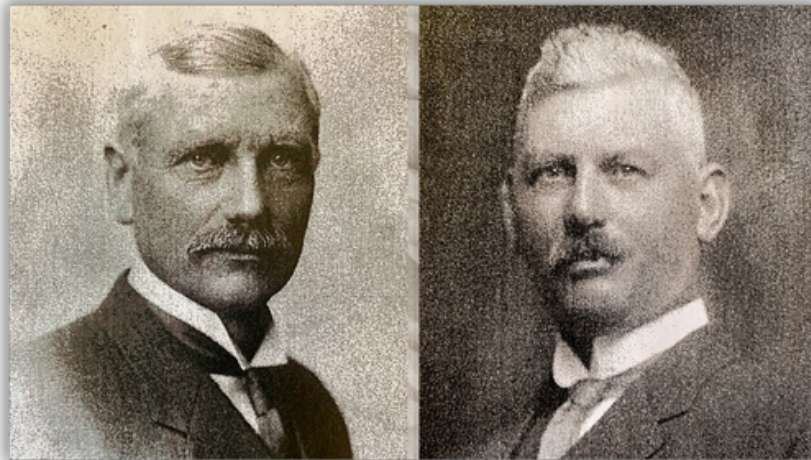


| **Cathiard Vineyard**

By Dave

Over the decades, this property has featured numerous owners and vineyard and winemaking heritage. Its roots began as a very small part of a nearly 18,000 acre land grant called Rancho Carne Humana, given to Dr. Edward Bale at age 30 by General Vallejo. This was roughly the entire valley between present day Tubbs Lane just north of Calistoga all the way down to Galleron Lane in Rutherford (today with no traffic about a 20 minute drive). (...)

Two brothers, James and William Rennie (sons of an Irish iron manufacturer) immigrated from Scotland via Australia to the Napa Valley, and in 1887 purchased the property from Furstenfeld. They planted 60 acres of grapes and began construction on their stone gravity flow winery in 1888. (...)



While certainly not the first winery in the valley, their operations were notable because they were the first winery in the state to use a gasoline powered engine to crush the grapes. Rennie Brothers Winery was completed in 1900. But then two unfortunate situations arose. Soon after finishing the winery, a fire broke out later that year burning their press and all their barrels of wine. This was a total disaster and coupled with the fact that phylloxera was making its way throughout Napa Valley and into their own vineyards, the brothers soon found themselves out of business. (...)

The property changed hands several times, closed down during Prohibition and was eventually purchased in 1933, by Louis M Martini and his wife Assunta – the same year he founded Martini Winery in St. Helena. While Martini never used the old winery for wine making (rather it was used for storage and aging wines) he sourced some of the grapes growing on the property for use at Martini Winery.



In 1977, the Komes family (Jerry – a former President of Bechtel Corporation and his wife Flora) purchased 325 acres of land from the Martini estate (Louis and Assunta had died several years earlier) including the stone Rennie Brothers Winery and the old Brokehoff Winery (1885) and a home built in 1946 which was at one point was lived in by Louis M. Martini and his family. (...)

Jerry and Flora planned to use the site as a retirement property and grow and sell grapes. However, their children, John and Julie soon became interested in resurrecting the old winery and producing their own wine. In 1977, the buildings were in bad shape; the Rennie Brothers Winery still had burn marks from the devastating fire 77 years prior and John recalls the roof was falling apart and the floor was still dirt (common in wineries of this era and earlier). John was involved in construction at the time, focusing on building mausoleums in the San Francisco Bay Area. Eventually he moved his construction business to the Napa Valley and over the years built or remodeled some of Napa's most prominent wineries including Far Niente – along with restoring the stone winery on the Flora Springs property. (...)

In early 2020, Flora Springs Winery was sold, including 200 acres of which 58 are planted to vine, to Daniel and Florence Cathiard of Bordeaux, France. Not included in the sale was the Flora Springs brand, The Room – the winery's tasting room on Highway 29 and additional vineyard property owned by the Komes family.

Owners of Bordeaux's Chateau Smith-Haut-Lafitte, the Cathiards (purchased in 1990 and is also their primary residence) own several other winery properties in France including Château Le Thil, Château Cantelys, Château Beauregard and Château Bastor-Lamontagne.

Both Daniel and Florence are champion downhill skiers and were on the French Olympic ski team. They built other careers outside of the wine industry including in advertising and supermarket stores. And they also own several hotels and spas and a ski chalet.

Cathiard Vineyard is perched slightly above the valley floor on the lower slopes of the Mayacamas mountains with vineyards straddling both the Rutherford and St. Helena appellations. The views on a clear day looking to the east are quintessentially Napa – rows of grapevines stretch out as far as one can see until meeting the slopes of the Vaca mountains on the other side of the valley.

The first vintage harvested and produced at the winery was from 2020, overseen by an interim winemaker – an extremely challenging vintage for numerous reasons including due to COVID and some of the most destructive fires in recent memory in the Napa Valley. The fruit that was harvested between the LNU Complex Fire and the Glass Fire was treated gently at first – put into neutral oak after fermentation and later racked into new French oak barrels. It did not show any signs of smoke taint.

In April 2021 Justine Labbé arrived to the property from France to become the General Manager & Winemaker. While she previously worked a harvest at Pine Ridge Winery, the first time she visited Cathiard Vineyard was in April. Some of her previous experiences included working two harvests at Château Smith Haut Lafitte, a harvest at Moss Creek in Margaret River, Australia and living in very rural Cambodia for the better part of a year introducing agricultural practices and specific crops including permaculture to villages.

The Cathiard's and Justine's vision is long term; it is an exciting one that requires significant initial investment and time to elevate the quality of the wines produced. At the time of our visit, numerous soil pits had been dug to analyze differences between several of the vineyard blocks and sub blocks and parts of the vineyard had been replanted. In addition, after the ownership change, the vineyard transitioned to organic farming with biodynamic practices, a new winery building is being built, hospitality spaces are being renovated and significant changes are being made in the cellar including updating winemaking equipment.

Some of the choicest blocks are located on the hillsides, hidden from view from the lower parts of the property. A highly appealing attribute of this property is its natural diversity – as a significant portion of the hillside land remains forested. Several small ponds are used to provide irrigation water as needed. The largest pond is Lake Cathiard/Sinegal, shared with their winery neighbor, Sinegal Estate.

The oldest vines date from 1983; currently the property is planted to a majority of Cabernet Sauvignon, along with Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec. Well regarded Bettinelli Vineyard Management Company oversees the management of the vines. In addition to replanting sections of the vineyard, parts of the hillside have not been planted for more than 20 years and are slated to be planted again. »

« The changes currently being made to the property are being conducted with purpose and are thoughtfully planned out, both in the vineyard and the cellar. Keep a very close eye on this winery over the coming years and their subsequent wines. »

| Cathiard Vineyard's Inaugural 2020 Releases

By Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW

2020 was a tough first vintage to kickstart this new venture. However, having walked the vineyard and visited the new facilities twice, the potential for greatness at this estate is clear.

In January 2020, Florence and Daniel Cathiard, owners of Château Smith Haut Lafitte in Pessac-Léognan, Bordeaux, purchased the homestead and historic winery that was once the residence of Napa Valley winemaking forefather Louis M. Martini from the Komes family, owners of Flora Springs. The purchase did not include the Flora Springs name, which suited the Cathiards since they wanted to establish their name in Napa Valley: Cathiard Vineyard.



I took the opportunity to visit the vineyard and winery reconstruction in February 2022 with the general manager and head winemaker Justine Labbé and again in March of this year, when the Cathiards were visiting the property just before the launch of their first 2020 releases.

“We have 220 acres in total,” said Florence Cathiard. “58 acres are currently under vine, and we have plans to plant six more.”

The vineyard is located in the Mayacamas Mountains, on the front side of Bald Mountain. Technically it is mainly within the Rutherford AVA, although it is right on the St. Helena border, and one block is within the St. Helena AVA.



“We used shade cloth on the vines, with no de-leafing until 2 days before harvest,” said Justine. “After 3-4 pm, we are in the shade for most of the blocks. We did a little irrigation just prior to the Labor Day heat event to give them some water to cope.”

The partly sloped vineyard extends up to an altitude of 650 feet (200 meters) and has mature vines, including a couple of blocks of free-standing old-timers that are on St. George rootstock. The Cathiards have torn down the eyesore of an outdoor tank farm, replaced by a state-of-the-art refit to the historic stone winery, decked out with small upright and inverted conical vats. Justine worked with the dedicated cooper at Smith Haut Lafitte to adjust the toasting levels of barrels made especially for aging the wines from the Cathiard Vineyard.

The first vintage, 2020, was bottled in August 2022. I asked Justine how they managed the extreme heat episode during the Labor Day weekend that year.

As for the Glass Fire that started on the 27th of September 2020, which had a devastating impact on wine yields and quality in Napa Valley that harvest:

“We started picking the 9th of September and finished the 3rd of October. We had to get rid of one block due to smoke taint—a Malbec block. We rinsed the grapes before fermentation and were very careful with the skin contact. After one year of aging, we racked the wines and altered the oak use.”

Given the challenges of this vintage, the quantities of their first releases are ambitious by Napa 2020 standards, including around 750 cases of the flagship Cabernet Sauvignon, 1250 cases of the next tier “Founding Brothers” label, and 2500 cases of the third-tier blend called, “Hora.” The Cathiards are developing and mailing list membership and distributing the wines via the Place de Bordeaux.

The Cathiards have put together an amazing team.

2020 was a tough first vintage to kickstart this new venture. Having walked the vineyard and visited the new facilities twice, the potential for greatness at this estate is clear. What’s more, the team the Cathiards have put in charge of winemaking is amazing: Justine Labbé aided by Fabien Teitgen (winemaker at Château Smith Haut Lafitte), Michel Rolland (consultant winemaker), assistant winemaker Ryan Montgomery (from Australia), and California consultant Frederick Ammons (formerly the winemaker at Rudd Estate). The signs favor a fast upward trajectory for Cathiard Vineyard, meaning this is a mailing list to hop on now!

| Tourism in Napa and Sonoma Bounces Back With Posh, Outdoorsy Resorts

By Elin McCoy



During the pandemic, tourism in Napa and Sonoma mostly dried up, kitchens closed, and hotels were practically empty. On a mid-May trip to both regions, though, I was impressed by how many exciting new tasting rooms, restaurants and luxury resorts had sprung up, ready to cash in on pent-up tourist demand. Is wine still why they come—or is it for the expanded luxury wine country is now peddling? (...)

In both regions, there's been a surge of \$1,000-a-night-and-up resorts, such as [the Montage Healdsburg](#), the [Four Seasons Resort & Residences in Napa Valley](#) and the recently opened [Stanly Ranch](#). They come with working vineyards to explore, acres of bike and hiking trails, wellness activities such as yoga among the vines, light therapy and, at Stanly Ranch, a hyperbaric oxygen chamber to promote circulation—plus plenty of outdoor decks. (Each resort offers residences to buy as well, if you have a few extra million dollars.)

These lodges promise an intimate experience in wine country, a way to be more than a visitor. “That’s what people want now,” says Atit Jariwala, chief executive officer of real estate development company Bridgeton Holdings LLC, which opened [Dawn Ranch resort](#) on Sonoma’s Russian River on Memorial Day weekend. “Covid and work from home led people to rediscover nature and the landscape. They want more than tastings. They want to be rejuvenated.”

In Napa, the must-go place is [Cathiard Vineyard](#), which also has a French flair. The owners of Bordeaux château Smith Haut Lafitte purchased the 280-acre estate in Rutherford in 2020 and, after extensive renovations, opened it in March. I sampled the first vintage of their three dark, savory, complex Bordeaux-inspired reds in a private salon outfitted with French antiques, where the musical backdrop was jazz artist Stacey Kent’s songs. Later this summer you’ll be able to watch workers crafting barrels at the winery’s in-house cooperage.

Decanter

| Smith Haut Lafitte owners buy Napa Valley winery

By Chris Mercer

Florence and Daniel Cathiard, owners of Smith Haut Lafitte in Pessac-Léognan, have bought a Napa Valley vineyard estate originally founded by the Scottish Rennie Brothers in 1885.

They lauded the 'exceptional terroir' of the estate, which lies at the base of the Mayacamas mountains and covers more than 100 hectares – including around 25 hectares of vineyard sitting across the Rutherford and St Helena American Viticultural Areas.

It was most recently part of the Flora Springs wine group owned by the Komes & Garvey families, who acquired it in 1977.

'We feel at home here,' Florence Cathiard told Decanter.com from California this week, citing the estate's focus on classic Bordeaux grape varieties.

Cabernet Sauvignon is the dominant variety planted, with some Merlot and Cabernet Franc, plus a small amount of Malbec.

'It's surrounded by forest, and there are three small lakes and a spring, which was still running when we came to see it at the end of last summer,' said Cathiard. 'It's incredible.'

There is also a winery and Cathiard said the team was investing in new equipment in order to begin a fresh winemaking project from the 2020 harvest, under the name 'Cathiard Family Estate'.

The deal does not include the Flora Springs brand name or any wine inventory and the Komes and Garvey families still own several other quality vineyard sites.

Some of the vines 'are pretty old', said Cathiard, 'which suits us because they already have low yields'. She added that a portion of the vineyard was already organic. 'We want to extend this as fast as we are able to do so.'

Smith Haut Lafitte's technical director, Fabien Teitgen, will help to oversee the 2020 harvest. Ben Morken, a young US oenologist & agronomist who trained at Smith Haut Lafitte, will be the permanent winemaker at the Napa Valley estate.

'This new adventure reminds us of our beginnings at Smith Haut Lafitte 30 years ago and we have exactly the same expectations,' said the Cathiards. Financial details were not disclosed.

| Les propriétaires de Château Smith Haut Lafitte s'installent en Californie

By Stéphane Reynaud



Les Cathiard, propriétaires de Château Smith Haut Lafitte, à Bordeaux, viennent d'acquérir un domaine dans la Napa Valley, en Californie.

Depuis longtemps, la Napa Valley, au nord de San Francisco, fait rêver les Français. De nombreux propriétaires de châteaux, souvent Bordelais, et de grands groupes (Moët Hennessy, Pernod Ricard...) y ont investi dans des domaines de premier plan. Le phénomène s'est accéléré ces dernières années. Aujourd'hui, la mise en place par le gouvernement américain de droits de douanes à 25 % sur une bonne partie des vins Français importés aux Etats-Unis (taxe dont le montant pourrait encore augmenter) constitue un premier motif valable d'acquisition in situ pour qui veut profiter du formidable marché du vin local. Sur place, les tarifs des flacons, sensiblement plus élevés qu'en France, l'importance de la vente directe et des clubs mis en place par chaque marque sont d'autres atouts.

Dans ce contexte, trente ans après l'acquisition de Château Smith Haut Lafitte, Grand Cru Classé, à Martillac, dont ils ont fait une perle de Bordeaux, Florence et Daniel Cathiard annoncent l'achat aux familles Komes et Garvey d'un domaine situé à Rutherford, au sud de St. Helena. "Nous avons un temps prospecté en Toscane, mais acquérir un domaine en Italie est vraiment très compliqué. Alors nous avons cherché en Napa Valley, où la viticulture est proche de celle que nous connaissons. En outre, nous avons des affinités familiales avec les Etats-Unis."

Les voilà donc à la tête d'un joli ranch. "Le domaine de Rutherford compte 25 hectares de vignes entourés de 110 hectares de forêt primaire", explique Florence Cathiard. Comme la plupart des propriétés perchées sur les coteaux de la vallée, la propriété est composée de plusieurs parcelles.

Les Français ne récupèrent pas la marque Flora Springs, conservée par le vendeur. Et peut-être l'image de Flora Springs ne correspond-t-elle pas aux ambitions des Cathiard qui souhaitent revoir la gamme du domaine. Jusqu'à présent, 600 000 bouteilles y étaient produites chaque année. A partir de la vendange 2020 -la première récolte des Bordelais qui n'ont pas racheté les stocks-, elle devrait descendre à 200 000 bouteilles. Le vin est appelé à progresser avec des rendements plus faibles, une agriculture bio, une approche plus précise du terroir... "Nous voulons retrouver l'esprit l'origine des pionniers, celui des frères Rennie qui ont créé l'exploitation en 1885. Nous allons installer sur place un jeune ingénieur agronome oenologue formé à Château Smith Haut Lafitte. Mon mari et moi-même nous rendrons sur place au moins trois fois par an pour des périodes de trois semaines.» Un très gros chantier attend les Bordelais qui souhaitent construire un cuvier adapté à leur recherche de précision, enterrer les poteaux électriques disgracieux... Les Cathiard veulent aussi profiter de l'oenotourisme très développé dans la vallée. "Nous disposons d'autorisations pour recevoir un grand nombre de personnes au domaine" ajoute Florence Cathiard. A coup sûr, ce Cathiard Family Estate devrait faire parler de lui.



Terre de Vins

| **Smith Haut Lafitte : Florence et Daniel Cathiard s'installent dans la Napa**

By Audrey Marret



Les propriétaires du Château Smith Haut Lafitte, cru classé de Graves dans l'appellation Pessac-Léognan, ont eu un « vrai coup de cœur » pour un domaine historique de la Californie, à Rutherford.

Florence et Daniel Cathiard ont désormais « un pied sur chaque continent ». Les propriétaires du Château Smith Haut Lafitte, à Martillac, ont annoncé l'acquisition d'un domaine en Californie, à Rutherford. Dans la Napa Valley, l'influence française est déjà très marquée : de nombreux grands groupes (LVMH ou Pernod Ricard...) y sont représentés aux côtés de familles souvent liées à Bordeaux comme les Rothschild ou les Moueix.

Le montant de l'achat du vignoble, planté de cabernet sauvignon et de merlot, reste confidentiel : « quasiment aussi cher qu'un grand cru classé bordelais », confie Daniel Cathiard. Il faudra attendre 2022 pour que soit commercialisée la première vendange 2020, que doit diriger sur place Ben Morken, jeune œnologue américain formé au Château Smith Haut Lafitte, avec l'appui de Fabien Teitgen, l'actuel directeur technique du château bordelais.

Il s'agit de votre premier vignoble à l'étranger ?

Daniel Cathiard : L'Amérique est un gros client pour nous. Nous n'avons pas fait cet investissement pour réagir aux secousses du marché mais nous nous doutions que les taxes risquaient d'augmenter et que les relations pouvaient se compliquer. Être sur place nous permet d'intervenir au quotidien.

Sur quelle surface s'étend votre nouveau domaine, à Rutherford ?

Le domaine représente 25 hectares de vignes. Il pourra monter à 30 ou 35 hectares. Autour, il y a plus de 80 hectares de forêt. Contrairement à Smith Haut Lafite, c'est un domaine tout à la verticale. C'est-à-dire que nous sommes en pied de côte des monts Mayacamas. L'endroit s'appelle les Spring Mountains. Le vignoble est en très grande partie sur une pente, avec une bonne exposition : un peu moins de soleil qu'ailleurs, ce qui est un avantage car le problème dans la Napa Valley est un peu trop d'ensoleillement.

C'est un domaine avec une histoire ?

C'est un endroit historique, créé en 1885 par les frères Rennie, des Écossais. L'endroit est ensuite devenu une winery fantôme pendant la Prohibition. La magnifique maison de maître date de 1945. Puis d'autres Écossais, les familles Komes et Garvey, ont ensuite créé une marque, Flora Springs, qu'ils conservent et que nous n'avons pas achetée. Car cette marque a été étendue jusqu'à 650 000 bouteilles... Nous, notre objectif est de faire du vin avec l'expérience que l'on a de Bordeaux : c'est-à-dire produire sur place et faire du vin avec ce la winery est capable de produire.

Allez-vous recréer une nouvelle marque ou utiliserez-vous le nom de Smith Haut Lafite ?

Nous allons recréer un nom. Il y aura sûrement « SHL » [les initiales de Smith Haut Lafite, NDLR], peut-être « Cathiard » et « Napa ». Cela va tourner autour de ces références. Nous allons voir ce qui est le mieux perçu, et ce qui est permis. Mais notre vin sera un vin de propriétaire, un vin qui sera signé. »

La winery sera-t-elle complétée par un hôtel ou un restaurant ?

Ce n'est pas prévu pour l'instant. Nous avons déjà assez à faire avec le vin et le marché est différent aux États-Unis avec des ventes à la propriété importantes. Les Américains fonctionnent notamment avec un système de club et tout cela doit être mis en place. Le prochain projet d'hostellerie et de restauration qui doit se faire est dans la vallée de la Loire : mes enfants [Alice et son époux Jérôme Tourbier, NDLR] ont créé un nouvel établissement, les Sources de Cheverny, qui doit ouvrir cet été.

Est-ce un projet auquel vous pensiez depuis longtemps ou est-ce un coup de cœur ?

Nous avons depuis longtemps des relations avec les gens de la Napa Valley. Pour créer les Sources de Caudalie, nous nous étions déjà beaucoup inspirés du complexe hôtelier Meadowood, de William Harlan, qui est un fidèle des Sources de Caudalie. Il vient quasiment chaque année et amène des vignerons de la Napa. Nous avons beaucoup de raisons de nous installer là-bas. L'influence française y est très forte. C'est en plus un territoire qui a la meilleure réputation pour les vins aux États-Unis. On trouve une clientèle pour des vins très haut de gamme. Cela nous semblait naturel d'y aller, nous qui cherchons l'extrême qualité. Les problèmes conjoncturels de taxes font également que cette implantation nous sera très utile.

| Loir-et-cher : une jeune Blésoise à la conquête de la Californie

By Paulin Aubard



Justine Labbé a été choisie par l'une des plus prestigieuses références viticoles de Gironde pour gérer un nouveau domaine aux États-Unis.

A Blois, tout le monde connaît la librairie indépendante gérée depuis des années par Olivier Labbé. Sa fille, Justine, est également en train de se faire un nom, loin de Blois et dans un secteur différent. Âgée de 27 ans, la jeune femme est depuis un peu plus d'un an la gérante d'un domaine viticole situé dans la Napa Valley, en Californie (États-Unis) acheté en 2019 par le château Smith Haut Lafitte, un grand cru classé du vignoble des Graves, en Pessac-Léognan. Celle qui se rêvait actrice « pour partir découvrir le monde » s'est découverte une passion pour le vin alors qu'elle suivait des études d'agronomie à Toulouse.

« J'étais intégrée dans cette culture, mon père a toujours apprécié le vin. Mais c'est vraiment en intégrant un club d'oenologie, en faisant des dégustations à l'aveugle et en m'intéressant à la chimie, à l'environnement et au terroir, que cela m'a passionnée », explique-t-elle.

Tout à construire dans ce domaine acheté en 2019

Ce qui est alors un loisir devient vite une vocation professionnelle. Après plusieurs stages en France, Justine Labbé accède à son rêve d'enfant en partant à la découverte du monde. D'abord en Californie, durant sept mois en 2017 et 2018, puis en Australie pendant neuf mois.

« J'ai cherché à multiplier les expériences en faisant du travail en cave ou en laboratoire. Je voulais rester en cabernet-sauvignon pour le perfectionner. Je pensais rester plus de neuf mois en Australie mais c'est à ce moment que Smith Haut Lafitte m'a contactée, fin 2019. »

La Blésoise revient en France pour intégrer le domaine géré depuis 1990 par Florence et Daniel Cathiard.

« J'ai appris énormément chez Smith Haut Lafitte. Le domaine fonctionne en biodynamie, le sol est travaillé avec des chevaux, il y a une attention particulière à chaque détail. »

La jeune femme s'épanouit aux portes de Bordeaux, où elle ne compte pas ses heures et passe par toutes les étapes de fabrication du vin. L'idée de repartir à l'étranger lui trotte toujours en tête mais la crise sanitaire empêche tout départ. Pourtant, c'est à ce moment que ses plans sont bouleversés.

« Trois jours après les fêtes de fin d'année, on me demande mon CV et j'ai un entretien avec le directeur général, qui me propose de devenir winemaker en Napa Valley. J'étais extrêmement surprise, je n'aurais jamais pu l'envisager. C'est un poste important, avec de grosses responsabilités, et quasiment un départ dans l'inconnu puisqu'on refait tout de A à Z. Je savais que je m'engageais pour plusieurs années. »



Un mixte entre vins californiens et bordeaux

L'aventure californienne débute en avril 2021, où elle comprend vite l'ampleur du travail à accomplir.

« Le château avait recruté quelqu'un à distance pour gérer le domaine depuis 2019, mais cette personne est partie deux jours après mon arrivée. J'ai rencontré de nombreux ingénieurs pour faire le point sur les projets, consulté des dizaines et des dizaines de pages de dossiers, pour les mises aux normes, l'électricité ou la plomberie. J'ai dû progresser aussi en anglais des affaires. »

Il s'agit déjà de construire un chai, ce qui n'est pas une mince affaire quand on n'est pas né sur le sol américain pour traiter avec les ouvriers locaux, les devis étant parfois plus épicés. Avec la pénurie de matériaux liés à la crise sanitaire, il faut aussi constamment penser à des plans B, mais le projet se concrétise, avec un chai « très fonctionnel, avec des cuves que nous avons nous-même élaborées ».

Après un premier millésime 2020, Justine Labbé et ses équipes sont actuellement en train de réaliser les assemblages pour le millésime 2021. Le domaine fait 120 ha, avec 23 ha de vignes plantées sur différents types de sol, avec du sable, de l'argile et même un terrain volcanique pour les parcelles au pied des monts Mayacamás.

« On a du cabernet-sauvignon, un peu de merlot, un peu de cabernet-franc et du malbec. Les vins américains sont réputés pour être assez expressifs aromatiquement et avec une structure tannique, l'idée est de garder ce côté-là en apportant l'élégance et la fraîcheur des vins de Bordeaux », souligne Justine Labbé.

Prochaine étape, le développement de la partie commerciale et réception, avec l'accueil des premiers clients prévu en cave pour la fin de l'année 2022. « Les journées sont intenses, il y a peu de repos. Mais à chaque jour qui passe, je me dis que le suivant sera plus facile. J'essaie de prendre le meilleur chez tous les winemakers que je rencontre. »



« Tout le travail réalisé depuis plus d'un an porte ses fruits. Nous sommes dans la dernière ligne droite avec cette ouverture à venir, c'est un autre beau challenge. »

| Enquête : L'irrésistible ascension des femmes dans le vin

By I.F. et J.B.



Des travaux récents menés en Australie montrent que 3% des postes de P.-D.G. sont occupés par des femmes (contre 1% dans les autres secteurs d'activité) et que 9% des exploitations viti-vinicoles australiennes emploient des femmes au poste à responsabilités liés à la viticulture et/ou à la vinification. Aux Etats-Unis, Lucia Albino et John C.Gilbert, d'éminents professeurs de l'Université de Santa Clara, ont constaté que seuls 10% des 4000 domaines californiens employaient une femme à un poste de responsable vinification

Pour offrir une visibilité à ces vinificatrices, ils ont créé un site dédié à la place des femmes dans la viticulture et édité un livre, *Women Winemakers*.

Dans la Napa Valley, Daniel et Florence Cathiard ont confié la direction de leur domaine Cathiard Vineyard à la jeune oenologue Justine Labbé depuis avril 2021.

Decanter

| Napa Cabernet 2020: Vintage report and top recommendations

By: Jonathan Cristaldi - September 11, 2023

After what turned out to be a difficult and traumatic growing season across California, those who were able to did manage to produce many high-quality wines, albeit often in small quantity, as our expert summary reveals. Follow advice where you can, and consider drinking rather than keeping long term.

Napa Cabernet 2020 vintage rating: 3.5 stars

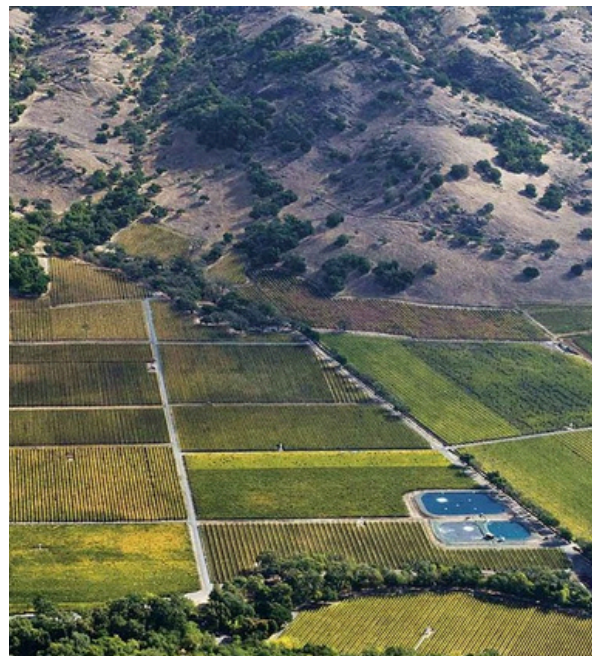
The wines often show the warmth of the vintage, with rich, riper red fruits, dusty mineral notes, and burly, almost rustic tannins due to heat spikes. Many are medium- to full-bodied, compact and rather tight at the pull of the cork. They gain in volume and soften with decanting.

Napa's 2020 vintage is very much about farming choices and location. The growing season began with a dry winter; early rains reduced crop yields. Two fires impacted the region in the middle of the growing season. Still, the vast majority of producers who bottled any Cabernet Sauvignon harvested their grapes before the second fire, which erupted on 27 September.

Despite all the challenges, wine lovers will find plenty to admire among the wines I have recommended here. Now three years on, having had good time to settle in the bottle, these are wines to drink now and often.

The short version of the 2020 growing season in Napa is best summed up in one stark reality: compared to a typical vintage, only half the quantity of wines were produced.

Indeed, many wineries opted not to produce wine at all. When it came to assessing the 2020 wines earlier this year, apart from one large organized event at which I was able to taste 80 wines, even finding out who had actually made wine and was willing to send out samples was a challenge, and understandably so. The 60 other wines I was able to try were therefore tasted over several months, many on an individual basis.



Those who did make Cabernet Sauvignon, or any wine for that matter, did so with great care and were methodical in their approach, given the tumultuous conditions of both the hot growing season and all the complexities of adjusting to Covid pandemic restrictions for cellar work.

Luck and Timing

While the two intense fires mark the 2020 vintage in Napa Valley, nearly every producer who did choose to bottle a Cabernet, and whom I interviewed, relied heavily on testing their wines for any evidence of smoke issues, or the presence of glycosides (sugars bound to volatile smoke phenols). It is a vineyard-by-vineyard issue.

The Cabernets that show best are simply the lucky ones: those harvested from vineyards least impacted by the fires. And while good scores tell part of the story, it is not the whole story. Simply put, it's complicated.

Wine is, after all, an agricultural product. As with any crop, its growth potential is determined by all the factors at play in any given location – from degrees of smoke concentration and duration of exposure to wind direction, elevation, sun exposure and vine-row orientation. All of this, coupled with different pick dates, means there is more variation in both style and quality in 2020.

Wesley Steffens, director and associate winemaker for Vineyard 7 & 8, told me: 'We made a beautiful 2020 Cabernet, though a fraction of what we would have, as we lost nearly 70% of our fruit to smoke. The Cabernet we did produce was harvested just days before the Glass Fire broke out and enveloped Spring Mountain [just a few km away towards St Helena]. Sadly all was on track to be a gorgeous vintage.'



Choose Advisedly

With uncharacteristically warm temperatures in late winter 2020, early spring saw the mercury reaching above 15°C, even climbing above 21°C, a trend that continued well into November, with summertime highs averaging between 26°C and 32°C, and at least three significant heat spikes above 37°C in August and in September.

But two fire events remain the defining factors of the season. The LNU Complex Fire ignited on 17 August, and the Glass Fire began on 27 September. While so many producers remained optimistic after the LNU fire that they'd avoid smoke issues, the intensity and proximity of the Glass Fire, which erupted on a hill just north of St Helena, dashed any hopes for those who still had fruit on the vine longer than a day or two after it ignited.

In such a vintage as this, what is the reader and the drinker of wines to do? While there is some uncertainty, I hope this report serves as a good gauge, and beyond the wines included here, consumers should seek out their favourite labels and, if produced and still available, buy them and drink them. If you have a questionable bottle, contact the winery and discuss it.

Some of the appellation highlights from my 2019 report, such as Calistoga, Howell Mountain, and Spring Mountain, returned so few wines in 2020 that I've focused on appellations with more wines produced; Coombsville, Oakville, Rutherford, St Helena and Stags Leap District are explored in slightly more detail and are among the best to seek out.



Harlan Estate, Napa Valley, Oakville, California, USA, 2020

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

The 2020 Harlan Estate is such a pretty wine—compact, tightly knit, with a coiled-up energy...

Points 99



Spottswoode, Napa Valley, St Helena, California, USA, 2020

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

2020 Spottswoode Estate Vineyard & Winery, Cabernet Sauvignon - St. Helena NV ///...

Points 99



Paul Hobbs, Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard, Napa Valley, California, USA 2020

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

100% Cabernet Sauvignon from the famous gravelly loam soils of Beckstoffer Dr Crane in the St...

Points 98



Quintessa, Napa Valley, Rutherford, California, USA, 2020

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

Gorgeous aromas, fragrant and floral, sweet and heady sun-kissed currants and black cherr...

Points 98



Cathiard Vineyard, Napa Valley, California, USA, 2020

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

A very lovely and fresh, bright expression of 100% Napa Cabernet with nicely delineated...

Points 97



Wine Spectator

| 2020 California Cabernet Tasting Report

By: James Molesworth - November 15, 2023



For Golden State producers of Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2020 vintage was like a fork in the road, leading to one of two divergent outcomes. The stakes couldn't have been higher, considering that Cabernet is California's most prominent wine category, dominated by big-name estates in Napa Valley and commanding the highest prices. The extreme heat of the growing season, followed by harvesttime wildfires, forced vintners to make some of the toughest choices of their careers.

On one side are a range of leading producers, including Corison, Dalla Valle, Dominus, Favia, Paul Hobbs, Memento Mori, Salvestrin, Spottswoode and Vine Hill Ranch, that decided to make wines from the 2020 vintage, all with outstanding results. Other prominent names, such as Mayacamas, Harlan Estate and Opus One, also produced 2020s, though their bottlings have not yet been released.

On the other side are a number of top estates, large and small, that chose to skip the vintage completely. This group includes Abreu, David Arthur, Colgin, Continuum, Dunn, Lokoya, Robert Mondavi, Rivers-Marie and Schrader, among many, many others. Whether out of an excess of hope or as a learning exercise, some producers tried to carry on as they normally would, harvesting and vinifying their crop, only to dump it down the drain or sell it off in bulk. Others walked away from vineyards they were unable to harvest, leaving the fruit behind to suffer a dismal end. Each side has a case to make.

Since my previous report on Cabernet Sauvignon (“The Wonder Years,” Nov. 15, 2022), I have reviewed nearly 500 wines from California, including a handful of bottlings in which Cabernet Franc takes the lead. That’s an eye-opening drop-off as the widespread declassification of the 2020 vintage cuts into the available bottlings. By comparison, my report focusing primarily on 2019 included reviews of more than 800 wines. The 2020 vintage had a serious drag effect on quality as well. Whereas the previous two vintages saw more than three-quarters of the wines under review earn ratings of 90 points or higher on Wine Spectator’s 100-point scale, only two-thirds of the total number scored 90 or more points in 2020, with just 28 wines—less than 6 percent overall—at the classic level of 95-plus.

Not surprisingly, most of the top wines in this report are late releases from the 2019 and 2018 vintages, accounting for 27 of the 28 classic-rated bottlings. Some producers typically release late, while others tried to stretch out their releases to paper over the hole caused by 2020, but in the end, there will be a noticeable gap in the supply chain, even if just briefly. That’s because there are already a handful of wines in this report from the very promising 2021 vintage. In the meantime, consumers need to choose carefully among the 2020s, while staying patient for the bulk of the 2021s to roll through.

Although the wildfires garnered the most attention in 2020, as smoke in both Napa and Sonoma brought harvest to a crashing halt, the growing season itself was hardly smooth sailing either. The handful of wines that prove it was possible to find success in this difficult vintage were reliant on a combination of factors, including lessons learned in 2017—a year that was also affected by wildfires at harvest—along with farming practices that are pushing healthy vineyards to ripen earlier. Hard work was a given in achieving a favorable outcome, as was a healthy dose of luck and determination.



The Case for 2020

With only 55 percent of the 2020 Cabernets earning outstanding ratings, it's clear that the vintage doesn't reach the typical level of quality for the category. Yet there are bright spots amid the gloom—namely the year's only classic-rated wine, the impressive Dominus Estate Napa Valley 2020 (95 points, \$299)—and the growing season itself opened with plenty of optimism.

“Rainfall for the year was quite low, just 16 inches, with most of that falling in the previous winter,” explains Tod Mostero, winemaker at Dominus. “There was limited shoot growth, which is great. It stopped on its own at the top wire, meaning the vine knew it had to conserve its water for the coming season. And at that point we thought we were set up for a terrific year.”

The Dominus vineyard, which is dry-farmed, is now entering middle age, the time when quality begins to rise vis-à-vis young plantings. Napa vineyards with these characteristics are proving to have a significant leg up in terms of quality, as the region's growing seasons trend decidedly toward the pattern displayed in 2020, with winter rains followed by dry and warm conditions. It's a pattern that began in 2013, a vintage that proved to be a pivot point for Napa Cabernet in general.



So what happened? First off, April, May and June were all warmer than usual. That wouldn't be debilitating in and of itself, but the trend line didn't stop. July continued to cook, and then most critically, the post-veraison stretch in August was exceptionally warm. It was during this period that the LNU fire started, on Aug. 17, throwing up a major red flag for vintners.

“We saw the smoke plume from across the valley and it kind of freaked me out,” says Cory Empting, head of winemaking at Harlan, Bond and Promontory. “We knew after 2017 that if the valley got saturated with smoke at that point, it meant game over.”

Thankfully, that smoke blew east and south, sparing the west side of the valley from any immediate effects. But when Labor Day weekend rolled around, temperatures soared again to 105° F, topping out at a new record of 114° F on Sept. 7. Napa vintners know how to deal with heat, but the high temperatures typically come in short waves offset by more moderate periods with cool nights. This fluctuation didn't happen in 2020. The heat never let up and nighttime temperatures remained warm. The vines simply never got a breather.

“That dictated the season,” says Mostero. “That heat was more of an effect on the vines than the fires. The fires are a footnote to the season.”

Even the best-farmed and healthiest vineyards cannot handle sustained temperatures over 105° F, which cause the fruit to essentially boil on the vine. As September kept the heat on after an already torrid season, producers who had ripe fruit at that point also had fruit that was damaged and dried out, putting a premium on sorting and selection while greatly reducing the crop.



The producers who were successful in 2020 find themselves in select company. Location played an outsized role for most of them, allowing them to thread a needle between the LNU and Glass fires, the latter of which developed quickly into a season-ending event. But even for producers that were able to find an escape hatch, there was little to work with. “There was fruit that wasn’t sun-burned, dried or dead, but it wasn’t much,” says Mostero. “And to get to that we had to sort in the vineyard, sort again in the winery and then cull lots through the vinification and élevage. Since there were lots of small lot vinifications, there was a lot of work to do.”

Dominus produced only 1,600 cases of its 2020, one-third the typical amount. Among other top bottlings, Favia only made 235 cases of its Cabernet Sauvignon Coombsville 2020 (94, \$250), while Diamond Creek managed just 350 cases of its Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Volcanic Hill Microclimate 3 2020 (90, \$350). The debut releases from Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte owners Florence and Daniel Cathiard’s new Cathiard Family Estate were able to beat the odds, with winemaker Justine Labbé bottling two different cuvées, including the Founding Brothers Napa Valley 2020 (92, \$225). Successes such as these are notable in 2020 because nobody had it easy.

“We picked the main vineyard in different waves, spread over a couple of weeks,” says Aron Weinkauff, winemaker at Spottswoode in St. Helena. “The last wave of fruit was severely [smoke] tainted. But we needed to vinify that and learn from it, and perhaps try to come up with viable options to clean it up. We did the full analysis and made it into wine. But in the end, that last pick was no good and so that was poured down the drain. Overall, we still picked when we thought things were ready. We weren’t going to rush and do an early pick out of panic. And so, with essentially that three-quarters of a crop, we made our wine.”

The result is the Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon St. Helena 2020 (93, \$255), which shows the character of a warm vintage, with enticing up-front fruit.

“It’s a vintage that doesn’t have the aromatic nuance and complexity of a cooler vintage,” Weinkauff says.

Cathiard Family Estate debuted with a pair of outstanding 2020s from its vineyards in Rutherford, along the Mayacamas mountains. (Will Page)



The Washington Post

| ‘Climate King’ Charles ends France state visit at organic vineyard

By: Karla Adam - September 22, 2023



BORDEAUX, France — Florence Cathiard first met the future British king at a polo match about two decades ago. Cathiard, a former champion skier for France’s national team, wasn’t so taken by Prince Charles’s skill in the saddle, but she told him how incredibly inspired she was by his organic farming philosophy.

She recalls confessing she had all his books, gushing about the garden at his Highgrove estate, saying she adored his Duchy Organic biscuits. She was trying some organic methods herself, she told him, at the Bordeaux vineyard she and her husband had recently bought. No more “drugging” the grapevines with pesticides, she said, eliciting Charles’s approval.

Now that vineyard, Château Smith Haut Lafitte, is a “biodynamic” operation, one that relies on medicinal plants to protect the vines from disease, uses llamas to weed the fields, takes the lunar calendar into account when pruning and has pioneered the capture of carbon dioxide from wine fermentation, transforming it into baking soda.

It is here where King Charles III on Friday concluded his first state visit to France, a three-day trip in which he seemed in his element, reviving some of the vocal climate advocacy he kept largely in check during his first year as monarch.

Charles has said he accepts that he can't speak out on issues the way he once did — political neutrality is widely considered essential for the survival of the monarchy in modern times. But in France, he demonstrated that he hasn't left his past identity behind.

On Friday, Charles visited environmental projects in Bordeaux and the surrounding area and traveled via the province's network of electric trams. He met emergency workers affected by the massive wildfires in 2022 and spent time at Forêt Experimentale, a project designed to monitor the responses of urban forests to climate change.

His final stop was Château Smith Haut Lafitte, where the Cathiards guided him and Camilla on a tour, including the llamas at work. Then the French couple opened a Grand Cru Classé from the year the British royal couple was married and offered a toast to the king's health.



The Washington Post visited the vineyard and spoke with the owners when they were preparing for the royals' arrival — and when British officials and French police officers made what Cathiard said was about their sixth visit since the chateau had been informed it was on the short list to host. Florence and Daniel Cathiard, who met as skiers on the French national team, bought the property from Walker in 1990 and set about transforming it from a middling chateau to one that would attract international acclaim.

Like Charles in his early environmental years, the couple was initially mocked for experimenting with organic techniques and biodynamics — a holistic approach pioneered in the 1920s by Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian occultist and social reformer. The vineyard prides itself on blending innovation and tradition. So there are solar panels. And the carbon-capture technology — which the couple’s daughter, Alice Cathiard Tourbier, presented at COP21, the 2015 Paris Conference on Climate Change.

But there are also horses, which Florence Cathiard explained are better than tractors on “more fragile soil” and help to work the fields with the white wine grapes. During The Post’s visit, Daniel Cathiard led to way to a wood shop area that dreamily smelled of toast. It’s rare for a vineyard to make its own barrels by hand, but a cooper was there, hammering away and “toasting” the locally sourced French oak wood in a fire. The British royals were invited to have a go at this artisan craft.

They were also taken up to a tower that offers sweeping views of the property. From up there, you can’t see the challenges of running a French vineyard in an era of climate change — like the mildew that reduced the yield on many Bordeaux estates this year. All you can see are rows and rows of grapes. And the beehives, hedges and forests that help maintain biodiversity. It’s a view fit for a climate king.



San Francisco Chronicle

The 5 best new wine tasting rooms of 2020 *By: Jess Lander - December 13th, 2023*



Napa Valley has become synonymous with showy, glass-walled and distinctly modern wineries. But Cathiard Vineyard, arguably the most under-the-radar opening of the year, is refreshingly French. Owners Florence and Daniel Cathiard restored the rundown Château Smith Haut Lafitte in Bordeaux and brought inspiration from the famous French region for a three-year renovation of one of Napa's oldest wine estates. Featuring an ivy-cloaked, 1885 stone winery and caves, the Cathiards' addition of 19th-century European antiques, fountains and stone statues complete the property's moody, Old World vibe.

The estate also complements Cathiard's old-school winemaking style. The St. Helena winery produces three estate reds that stand out for their freshness and elegance versus Napa Valley's signature power and ripeness. Tastings (from \$125) require a splurge, but Cathiard offers a different kind of wine experience — and it's certainly cheaper than a flight to Paris.

En Californie, l'irrésistible ascension de Cathiard Vineyard

By Stéphane Reynaud



Les vins du domaine de Rutherford, dans la Napa Valley californienne, acquis début 2020 par Florence et Daniel Cathiard, ont trouvé leur style, à mi-chemin entre Ancien et Nouveau Monde.

Et si les vins californiens de la Napa Valley retrouvaient leur style des années 1970. Si, après trois bonnes décennies d'excès boisés, de body-building en cuvier, la mode était à nouveau à la sobriété et à la douceur. Et si Cathiard Vineyard comptait parmi les précurseurs de ce louable mouvement. Il faut déguster les trois cuvées du domaine de Rutherford - Hora, Founding - Brothers et Cathiard Vineyard - pour prendre la mesure du travail réalisé par l'œnologue Justine Labbé et comprendre les grandes ambitions de la propriété. Au nez, les trois sont dominés par une symphonie de fruits. Si ces arômes constituent la marque de fabrique des vins rouges de la Napa Valley, ils sont ici déclinés avec une rare élégance. On remarque en particulier le nez de pétales de rose, de réglisse et d'anis, marqué par des pointes de menthol et de romarin, de Cathiard Vineyard, le premier vin. L'autre trait dominant de ce trio demeure la texture des jus, leur grande buvabilité. Nous avons ici à faire à des rouges enveloppants, soyeux, à peine épicés par l'élevage. Notons au passage le faible - et bienvenu - titrage alcoolique du trio : 13,6° pour Hora, 13,9° pour Founding Brothers et 14,1° pour Cathiard Vineyard. Aujourd'hui, bien peu de crus de cette région de Californie peuvent mettre en avant ces qualités.

Viticulture biologique

C'est aussi la géologie qui distingue les trois jus. Hora (60 % cabernet-sauvignon, 30 % merlot, 10 % malbec) est issu des vignes les plus basses en altitude du domaine, situées sur le plateau. Les cuvées choisies pour Founding Brothers (55 % cabernet-sauvignon, 5 % cabernet franc, 40 % merlot) sont situées sur les premiers contreforts. Enfin, les raisins du premier vin (100 % cabernet-sauvignon) sont cueillis sur les parties hautes de la propriété. Environ 60 000 bouteilles du millésime 2020 ont été produites, soit une baisse sensible des volumes par rapport à l'ancien propriétaire. Entre-temps, le domaine s'est converti à la [viticulture biologique](#). L'objectif étant un passage à la biodynamie, une méthode de culture maîtrisée depuis longtemps au Château Smith Haut Lafitte, à Pessac- Léognan, la propriété bordelaise des Cathiard, avec qui les vins du domaine de Rutherford présentent une évidente parenté stylistique. Les jus du domaine acquis en 2020 peuvent sans doute être considérés comme la version «nouveau monde» de ceux de Pessac-Leognan. Les tarifs, quant à eux se révèlent plus élevés, car échelonnés entre 125 \$ et 385 \$, dans l'épure californienne.

Des visites sur mesure

La sortie d'une gamme cohérente en un temps record, durant une période perturbée par la crise du Covid, relève de l'exploit. Chacun sait que les chausse-trapes ne manquent pas pour les Français qui s'installent dans la région. Il a fallu s'adapter au marché et aux usages sans perdre leur âme vigneronne. «Nous ne nous attendions pas à ce que la réglementation locale soit aussi dense. Et nous ne nous attendions pas non plus à ce que tout soit aussi cher ici !» reconnaît Florence Cathiard.

Dans ce royaume de l'œnotourisme haut de gamme qu'est la Napa Valley, Cathiard Vineyard propose des visites sur mesure du domaine, en Range Rover de safari électrique, assorties de dégustations des trois vins du domaine et du [second vin blanc de Château Smith Haut Lafitte](#). L'occasion de découvrir l'architecture surprenante des lieux, l'histoire de la winery (domaine), fondée en 1885 par deux frères écossais, James et William Rennie, et l'environnement du domaine. À quelques centaines de mètres à l'est passe la highway, l'axe routier principal de Napa Valley. À l'ouest, une forêt parfois impénétrable où évoluent cerfs, ours et pumas. Nous sommes bien au far west.

JANE ANSON

INSIDE BORDEAUX

Daniel Cathiard: the power of quiet determination

By Adam Lechmere



Most of my dealings with Château Smith-Haut Lafitte over the last 20 years or so have been with Florence Cathiard, chatelaine, brilliant administrator and tireless promoter. Her husband Daniel I always saw as a mild-mannered presence somewhat in the background. But on his new Napa estate, in his late 70s in a pearl-snap denim shirt, and at the wheel of his safari series Land Rover, he seems a different man.

He's particularly proud of this Land Rover. "I had a Tesla engine put in," he says, patting the bonnet in an admiring sort of way. He points out the raised benches in the back, and the seat bolted to the front, just above the bumper, which is designed for when you need to be up close and personal with a wild animal, to put a stun dart in a rhino, for example. I never get a proper answer as to its purpose in a Rutherford vineyard.

Anyway, in we climb. There are five of us: my friend the wine writer Elaine Brown; Cathiard at the wheel; winemaker Fabien Teitgen (who has been with Cathiards for 30 years); winemaker Justine Labbé, who runs the operation in Napa; and self.



Cathiard Vineyard, formerly Flora Springs, is a beautiful property even by Napa standards. Its 280 acres are tucked into the top north-west corner of Rutherford; bordered to the north by the St Helena AVA, the 58 acres of vineyard (Cabernet Sauvignon with a smattering of the other Bordeaux varieties) rise up into the stony foothills of the Mayacamas range. The vines follow the contours.

“Multiple aspects,” Cathiard says with satisfaction – at blending they work with samples from 30 or 40 different blocks. We descend through sun-dappled woodland (Cathiard came face to face with a mountain lion up here a few weeks before. “I was a little bit afraid. We are French. We have no guns”); there’s a reed-skirted pond and everywhere the baked-earth-and-sage aromas of the California hills in summer.

The Cathiards bought the property – which comes with a beautiful wood-and-stone Victorian house – in early 2020. “The price was far too high but we fell in love with it,” Cathiard says. But then the pandemic hit. “It was a nightmare. I thought, this is a terrible idea, I’ve bought this vineyard and everything is closed and we can’t go there.”

There was worse to come: in summer and autumn 2020 devastating wildfires ravaged California. Hundreds of thousands of acres were burned; smoke taint caused the loss of thousands more tonnes of grapes. “I thought, this is hell. It’s a disaster. First Covid then the fires. What am I doing here?”

Problem solving

But the Cathiards are resourceful. They had employed vineyard consultants Bettinelli to manage the vines, and recruited an American intern who had been with them in Bordeaux. Cathiard: “I said, ‘I’ll give you the keys and we’ll tell you what to do’.”

He must have been a capable choice, because it was the intern who started the 2020 vintage under instruction on FaceTime (Cathiard and Teitgen got permission to travel at the end of 2020, and Labbé flew out soon after). As soon as they were able, they cleared out the huge stainless steel tanks from the forecourt and fitted new small tanks in the refurbished cellar. “We knew that if we worked very carefully, we could make a beautiful wine.”

We sit down to taste. I’m nervous (we both are, Brown and I agree later): 2020 was a famously difficult vintage and the Smith-Haut-Lafitte team had hardly set foot in the vineyards. Would we have to be polite? But no. The wines are superlative. The Hora 2020, 60% Cabernet Sauvignon: “Wonderful spice, a fine, perfumed California wine,” I note. The Founding Brothers, 55% Cabernet Sauvignon with Merlot and a drop of Cabernet Franc: “Bravo! Fresh, delicate and concentrated”. And the \$395 Cathiard Vineyard (sold through the Bordeaux Place): “Rutherford dust, with a powerful, bitter, intense core.” Brown thought the wines “impressive. All three wines deliver finesse, energy, and intrigue.” Like me she thought the Founding Brothers the “stand-out” wine, with the “focus on restraint and ageability.”



Of course, we should have expected something pretty smart – Daniel and Florence Cathiard are a formidable pair. They met in 1965 when they were both stars of the French Olympic ski team, alongside the multiple gold medallist Jean-Claude Killy.

They married and put their energies into Daniel’s family company, the supermarket chain Genty, turning it into a 300-outlet operation; they started a sports clothing brand called Go Sport; Florence ran an advertising agency which she sold to the huge McCann group.

They bought the neglected Smith-Haut-Lafitte in 1990 and (in the face of some toxic snobbery from the Bordeaux establishment) built it into a world-renowned property, and provided the inspiration for their daughter to create the global wellness brand Caudalie along the way.

Such a career requires a single-minded dedication, but I remember reading that he and Florence had hitchhiked to Woodstock festival in 1969 – they were hippies then? A knowing smile. “Yes, it’s true. We’d just finished with the French ski team and Florence and I were working hard [managing Genty]. We were in the States, and saw some ads for Woodstock and decided to go. And then we met some people who were living in San Francisco, and we went to see them. It was quite a hippy time, you know. The people we knew were very hippy in their heads.” I bet.

Discipline and focus

There are two kinds of elite sportsperson: those who can make the transition to civilian life, and those who can’t. The Cathiards are definitely of the first group. The soft option didn’t attract them, Daniel says. “The hippy time was very sympathique, but we never went in 100 per cent. We watched it, and we said, that’s not what we want to do.”

I’m put in mind of what the American journalist Hunter S Thompson wrote about Cathiard’s team-mate Killy in a 1970 profile, of the “discipline of rigid training” necessary to ski at the highest standard; of the “almost superhuman concentration, the ability to see and remember every bump and twist on a race course, and then to run it without a single mistake: no mental lapses, no distractions, no wasted effort.” It can’t be that different to running a multi-million dollar business.

Even so, there’s more than a trace of the revolutionary left in Daniel. Not content with the conversion to organic and biodynamic farming at his family estates in Bordeaux and California, he was the driving force behind building a carbon-neutral submerged cellar at Smith Haut-Lafitte, and introducing a system of carbon capture during the fermentation process to produce potassium bicarbonate. They began working with Alcion Environnement on the project back in 2013, a good five years before Montrose (now also joined by Latour) – and it’s partly why this week in Bordeaux, [King Charles III has selected Smith Haut-Lafitte for a visit to explore their environmentally-conscious viticulture.](#)

Back in his Napa estate, Cathiard is relaxed at the wheel of the electric Land Rover, steering the big car one-handed through the steep vineyards. He gets up a bit of pace on the descents, and we’re bouncing up and down in the back. “You haven’t lost your taste for speed,” I remark facetiously. Cathiard doesn’t turn round but I see him grin in acknowledgement. “I’m a downhill racer. I love hills,” he says.

Adam Lechmere is a journalist and general manager of the IWSC Foundation

walnut creek

M A G A Z I N E

Napa's New Cathiard Vineyard Boasts Pedigree *By: Fran Miller*



After purchasing Bordeaux winery Smith Haut Lafitte in 1990, Florence and Daniel Cathiard set their sights on the Napa Valley. “We had spent some time in Napa and had a far-off dream of one day owning an estate there,” said Florence, a native of Provence. “This dream sat on the back burner for a long time until an old contact called with an idea: there was an estate in Napa Valley we could consider, which had many similarities to Smith Haut Lafitte.”



The duo purchased their historic Napa estate in 2020, and officially opened the doors this year. Situated in Rutherford and St. Helena at the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains, Cathiard Vineyard features 60 acres of estate vineyards, several blocks of which are organic and biodynamic, as well as a new winery and a refurbished horseshoe cellar in the heart of the mountain. In development is an on-site cooperage, an important signature of the Cathiard family. The winery's tasting boutique offers on-site experiences featuring Cathiard Vineyard's new range of limited-production wines.

“The property enjoys a long history, which was part of the appeal,” said Florence. “Long ago the Rennie Brothers planted the vineyards and built their stone gravity flow winery; one of our wines, “Founding Brothers,” a Cabernet-based blend, pays tribute to them. These previous vintners cultivated this land for more than a century before us, and we are grateful to carry the torch forward.”



Cathiard Vineyard's flagship wine is a Cabernet Sauvignon from the estate's oldest hillside vineyards. The range also includes an additional Cabernet-based blend, Hora, as well as additional exclusive offerings for members. The Cathiard Vineyard team includes Winemakers Justine Labbé, agricultural engineer and oenologist, as well as Hospitality Lead Candice Bernard Cathiard who oversees on-site experiences and the membership program.



Florence and Daniel were attracted to the Napa property's biodiversity; just as at Château Smith Haut Lafitte, Grand Cru Classé of Pessac-Léognan, and its 78-hectare estate, they felt a profound connection to the land. "The Napa terroir is incredible," said Florence. "We fell in love with the property's biodiversity, and felt compelled to bring our love of nature and art de vivre here."

The couple, who long ago met as members of the French national ski team, currently live at their Château Smith Haut Lafitte residence, but plan to take extended trips a few times annually to oversee things at Cathiard Vineyard. "We love the Napa community and the warm welcome we received," said Florence. "It's something we felt many years ago when we first visited, and it continues."

Photos courtesy of Cathiard Vineyard

| Cathiard Vineyard's New Releases

By Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW

In January 2020, Florence and Daniel Cathiard, owners of Château Smith Haut Lafitte in Pessac-Léognan, Bordeaux, purchased the homestead and historic winery that was once the residence of Napa Valley winemaking forefather Louis M. Martini, renaming the property Cathiard Vineyard. Formerly owned by the Komes family of Flora Springs, the purchase included 220 acres of land extending from the valley floor and up into the Mayacamas Mountains. The first vintage off the estate was the 2020, which was a tough year to kickstart this venture due to the wildfires that year. Take Two—the 2021 vintage—is soon to be released, more clearly revealing the extraordinary potential of this estate.



Take Two

Cathiard Vineyard is located in the Mayacamas Mountains, on the front side of Bald Mountain, with 58 acres currently planted to vines. The vineyard is mainly within the Rutherford AVA, although it's on the St. Helena border, and one block is within the St. Helena AVA. This partly sloped vineyard extends to an altitude of 650 feet (200 meters) and has mature vines, including a couple of blocks of free-standing old-timers on St. George rootstock.

Soon after their purchase in early 2020, the Cathiards tore down the eyesore of an outdoor tank farm and have recently converted the space into a stunning waterfall feature. The historic stone winery was refitted entirely with small, upright, and inverted conical vats.

‘The team the Cathiards have put in charge of winemaking is impressive’

Justine Labbé is the general manager and winemaker, aided by Fabien Teitgen (winemaker at Château Smith Haut Lafitte) and Michel Rolland (consultant winemaker).



Justine worked with the dedicated cooper at Smith Haut Lafitte to adjust the toasting levels of barrels, especially for aging the wines from the Cathiard Vineyard. There are plans now for Cathiard Vineyard to eventually have its own cooperage like its sibling winery in Bordeaux.

The Cathiards have established three labels. At the top level, the flagship “Cabernet Sauvignon” is made entirely from this variety, from a section of the oldest vines on the estate (35-45 years old) grown exclusively on the hillsides. It’s aged in oak barrels, 80% new. “Founding Brothers” is made from 25+ year old vines and is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc, aged in 50% new oak, 30% older oak, and 20% large foudres. The third label, “Hora,” is a blend of just over half Cabernet Sauvignon, with the rest being Merlot and Malbec. This comes from the youngest benchland vines and is aged in oak barrels, 40% new.

‘These 2021s reveal the intensity, energy, and perfume this vineyard wants to give in a great vintage. This second vintage of releases from this resurrected and sensitively rebuilt estate comes highly recommended. I have to hand it to the Cathiards and their talented team—they nailed it on Take Two!’

Cathiard Vineyard Launches Wine Range & Opens Doors in Napa Valley

Owners of Bordeaux's Smith Haut Lafitte bring their Art de Vivre to Napa Valley Estate



Cathiard Vineyard, the historic property recently acquired by Florence and Daniel Cathiard of Bordeaux's Smith Haut Lafitte, has officially opened its doors in Napa Valley. The prestigious estate is situated in Rutherford and St. Helena at the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains, and the winery's tasting boutique offers on-site experiences featuring Cathiard Vineyard's new range of limited-production wines.

To capture the essence of this unique terroir which covers 60 acres of estate vineyards, Cathiard Vineyard has prioritized a few critical developments: a new winery next to the historical one, a long, refurbished horseshoe cellar in the heart of the mountain, and organic and biodynamic blocks in the vineyard. In addition, the on-site cooperage in development is an important signature of the Cathiard family, a traditional Bordeaux expertise to be shared with their new Napa Valley visitors.

"We fell in love with the property's biodiversity, and felt compelled to bring our love of nature and art de vivre here," said Owner Florence Cathiard. "Vintners cultivated this land for more than a century before us, and we are grateful to carry the torch forward."

The team is devoted to creating expressive wines that bring the individual energy of this terroir. The flagship wine Cathiard Vineyard is Cabernet Sauvignon from the estate's oldest hillside vineyards, and will have exclusive access for members given its limited production. The range also includes two Cabernet-based blends, Founding Brothers and Hora, as well as additional exclusive offerings for members. www.cathiardvineyard.com

About Cathiard Vineyard

Florence and Daniel Cathiard purchased the estate in 2020 after developing a deep respect for its biodiversity and terroir. This connection to nature has been the cornerstone of the Cathiard Family's properties in Bordeaux, including Château Smith Haut Lafitte which they have owned since 1990. The team at Cathiard Vineyard includes Winemakers Justine Labbé and Ryan Montgomery, agricultural engineers and oenologists, as well as Hospitality Lead Candice Bernard Cathiard who will oversee on-site experiences and the Membership Program. The wines of Cathiard Vineyard include its namesake Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as Cabernet-based blends that reflect the unique terroir of Rutherford and St. Helena.

About Château Smith Haut Lafitte

Château Smith Haut Lafitte, Grand Cru Classé of Pessac-Léognan, was purchased by Daniel and Florence Cathiard in 1990. The 78-hectare estate (67 of red and 11 of white) is located on a hill "Lafitte", surrounded by incredible biodiversity. In addition to the wines, the property is known for its artistic spirit and collection of sculptures. It is also the birthplace of the skincare brand Caudalie as well as the luxury Palace des Vignes Les Sources de Caudalie, which comprises a 2 Star Michelin restaurant, country-inn restaurant, wine bar and vinotherapy Spa.

Outpost and Cathiard Vineyard

By Jancis Robinson

The Smith crew get in on the act

Just two years after AXA bought Outpost, Florence and Daniel Cathiard of Château Smith Haut Lafitte in Pessac-Léognan followed a host of Bordelais to acquire a Napa Valley estate and winery, in this case the original site of Flora Springs in Rutherford on the west side of the valley, now named Cathiard Vineyard.

They now admit that 2020, just before lockdown and the devastating wildfires whose effects can still be seen on the Napa hillsides, was a terrible time to buy. 'We bought too fast and too high a price', Florence admitted at a bold, potentially crazy, blind tasting she hosted recently in London, 'but it was a coup de coeur because of the mountain site. I prefer Smith Haut Lafitte, but Daniel loves Cathiard Vineyard. There is beauty everywhere.'

The property runs from the benchland at the foot of the Mayacamas mountain range up to 1,200 feet (366 m) – so not as high as Outpost but in especially varied, wild country. Biodiversity and wildlife (including a mountain lion or two) need no encouragement.

Yields are low, averaging just 22 hl/ha, for the Cathiards and their technical director Fabien Teitgen strongly espouse organic and biodynamic methods in the vineyard – very different from the old Flora Springs regime – with total annual production cut to little more than 5,000 cases. They will be certified organic in 2024 – a process described as 'much easier in Napa than Bordeaux'. Although Florence noted wearily that it is much more difficult to get permission to do any building work in heavily protected Napa Valley than in Bordeaux. The site's winery is an extraordinary horseshoe-shaped cave drilled into the mountain and they have finally, after three and a half years, got permission to install their own cooperage there, as at Smith Haut Lafitte. Much of the wrangling has been done by Justine Labbé, the young French general manager who was trained by Teitgen. One of her many jobs is regulating irrigation (25% of their vines are dry-farmed, a proportion they are trying to increase). General vineyard work is in the hands of Bettinelli Vineyard Management who, they claim, merely do what is asked of them rather than taking over.

The estate was established by the Scottish Rennie brothers who had an engineering bent, and the second wine produced, from 35-year-old vines, is called Founding Brothers. Vines for the grand vin are 46 years old while there is a third red, Hora, from 20-year-old vines.

The blind tasting in the London HQ of the Cathiards' daughter's Caudalie beauty empire was apparently the Cathiards' publicist's idea. It involved a comparison of Cathiard Vineyard and Founding Brothers 2021 vintage (only their second!) with eight top-scoring 2021 Napa Cabernets, including Screaming Eagle and Scarecrow which are very much more expensive.



Teitgen, who said both he and his winemaker son were thrilled when he heard about the Napa acquisition, was at the London tasting. He explained that by 2021 they understood their vines better (although I was quite impressed by their 2020s). Teitgen described the 2021s as 'more in the style we're looking for than the 2020. 2021 was an early vintage, with budbreak mid March. It was a dry year like 2020, especially the winter, so short pruning was needed. In Napa there's no rain in summertime anyway. We were after a good canopy to shade the bunches. It wasn't too warm, with some heat spikes and some freshness. Berries were small and we picked 6 to 29 September.'

He commented in general that, 'it's funny because we grow the same grapes [as in Bordeaux] but there's a completely different taste and balance. We don't use the same recipe. If we have to make wine in Napa, we have to make a Napa wine. The only thing I brought from Bordeaux was the idea of balance.'

He admitted that, 'it's a challenge to tame the tannins, to make them more polished because in Napa there's a much greater contrast between day and night temperatures so the skins tend to be thicker. So if you extract too much you get a wine that's too tannic. So we don't let things get too hot and don't do too much pumping over.'

Michel Rolland, who has retained his Napa Valley clients, comes twice a year. But I got the impression it's the gossip he can offer at the end of his Napa tour that is especially highly valued.

Florence was able to report on the 2024 vintage in Bordeaux, too. It will be very small, with the Merlot crop down by 40% and a wet season with rampant mildew putting severe pressure on anyone following organic practices. The white wines escaped the worst apparently but, in today's shrunken market, many Bordeaux vigneronns have given up altogether.

Napa must seem a much more encouraging location for wine production than Bordeaux at the moment.

My notes on the Outpost wines and then the blind-tasted 2021 Napa wines are presented below, in the order they were tasted.

Blind tasting of top 2021 Napa Cabs

TOR, Vine Hill Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon 2021 Oakville - 17.5

Scarecrow Cabernet Sauvignon 2021 Rutherford - 17

Cathiard Vineyard, Founding Brothers 2021 Napa Valley - 18.5 ++

59% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc. Divided the room!

Tasted blind. Paler than most. Not very forthcoming on the nose but quite bordelais. Opened out in the glass to be quite intriguing. Spice and minerals rather than sweet fruit on the nose. Quite complex and appetising. Real grip and layers. Tannins are almost covered and should see the wine through for a long life. The most lifted and distinctive wine in this line-up of top 2021 Napa Cabs, which stood the test of time in glass. (JR)

Continuum 2021 Napa Valley -18 ++

Cathiard Vineyard 2021 Napa Valley - 18 ++

100% Cabernet Sauvignon.

Tasted blind. Mid dark crimson. Some shading at the rim. Minerally nose. Very round and smooth and flattering on the palate initially and then the (well-managed) tannins kick in. Just a hint of dark chocolate on the end. Complete and well balanced. Luscious and flattering. Well behaved but didn't grow in the glass. Still to develop. Gentle! (JR)

Dominus 2021 Napa Valley - 18

Screaming Eagle 2021 Oakville - 17.5 ++

Lokoya Cabernet Sauvignon 2021 Spring Mountain District - 17.5

Lithology, Alejandro Bulgheroni 2021 Napa Valley - 17

TOR, Black Magic 2021 Napa Valley - 17++

French Invade the US

By Jancis Robinson



Following in the footsteps of Georges de Latour, who founded Beaulieu Vineyard in the Napa Valley in 1903, French wine producers have long played a part in California viticulture. But why, since 2013, have so many flocked to buy American wine estates?

The modern wave began in 1973, when Moët et Chandon chose Napa Valley as the location of their second non-French sparkling-wine facility, after Argentina. The next milestone in Franco-California wine relations came in 1976, when the late Steven Spurrier's *Judgment of Paris blind tasting* demonstrated that California was producing wines that France's wine gurus preferred to their own top wines. One of the tasters, *Aubert de Villaine* of world-famous *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti* in Burgundy, quietly went into business the following year with Napa grape grower Larry Hyde, a relative of de Villaine's American wife, to establish HdV Wines.

Then in 1979 came the shock announcement that Baron Philippe de Rothschild, of Bordeaux first growth *Château Mouton-Rothschild* no less, was going into business with Robert Mondavi of the Napa Valley to produce a California wine in the image of red bordeaux. (It would eventually become known as *Opus One*.) The fact that the Dewavrins, who ran the eminent Bordeaux château *La Mission Haut-Brion* decided to buy a wine property in Napa Valley in 1980 eventually caused such a rift in their family that *La Mission* was put up for sale the next year.

The next wave of French investment in California wine production came soon after François Mitterrand became president in 1981. His Socialist policies spread doom and gloom in the French business community, especially among those producing champagne. Louis Roederer, Mumm and Taittinger all established sparkling-wine outfits in northern California in the 1980s, when Christian Moueix, who had been managing his family's estates in Pomerol, including Petrus, laid the foundations of his Dominus Estate in Napa Valley (and in 2008 added Ulysses up the road).

There were a few individual initiatives around the turn of the century. Jean-Charles Boisset of Burgundy had long been in love with California and bought his first winery there in 1999. He went on to establish a family of Napa and Sonoma wineries while growing the Boissets' Burgundy operations considerably with his sister Nathalie, as well as establishing his own next generation with Gina Gallo of California wine's most powerful family. And in 2001 the French luxury conglomerate LVMH bought Newton Vineyard in Napa Valley to make it a sister company to Domine Chandon.

But the major wave of French investment has come in the last 11 years. In the vanguard was the Pinault family's Artémis Domaines, which approached Bart and Daphne Araujo out of the blue to buy their Araujo Estate in Calistoga, renaming it Eisele Vineyard. Biodynamic techniques were already firmly established at the California property while they were still in their infancy at Artémis's French properties.

Another of Bordeaux's best-financed wine producers, the owners of Chanel as well as Châteaux Rauzan-Ségla and Canon, acquired St Supéry in 2015 from Robert Skalli, most famous for his inexpensive southern French varietals, entailing quite a step up the ladder of glamour for this Napa winery. Since then, French investment has come thick and fast, mainly but not exclusively from Bordeaux to northern California: the Tesserons of Château Pontet-Canet bought actor Robin Williams' Pym-Rae in 2016; 2017 was the first vintage from the Trinité Estate established by Gonzague and Claire Lurton of the Médoc in Sonoma's Chalk Hill; AXA Millésimes bought Outpost high on Howell Mountain in 2018 (and two years later added Platt Vineyard on the cool, in both senses, Sonoma Coast); and in 2020 the Cathiards of Château Smith Haut Lafitte turned the original Flora Springs property in the western foothills of Napa Valley into the Cathiard Vineyard.

The giants of Champagne followed suit. Champagne Louis Roederer went on a buying spree, adding Merry Edwards of Sonoma in 2019 and terroir-driven Diamond Creek Vineyards in 2020 to their initial sparkling wine investment in Roederer Estate in Anderson Valley. Similarly, LVMH, via its various divisions including dominant champagne producer Moët Hennessy, added a majority stake in Napa Valley's luxurious Colgin Cellars in 2017 and then bought Joseph Phelps in 2022, to be run by Opus One veteran David Pearson.

So why has there been such a transfer of funds from l'hexagone to the golden state? According to Christian Seely of AXA Millésimes, they decided in 2016 that they wanted to buy in Napa because 'it's rather logical and quite interesting to see somewhere else that makes great Cabernet but is very different'.

And transatlantic transactions have not been restricted to northern California. Several Burgundy producers, including Drouhin as early as the late 1980s and Louis Jadot in 2013, have invested in Oregon, intrigued by the challenge of applying their expertise in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay to the west coast. More recently, Étienne de Montille from one of Burgundy's most famous families decided 'having another hectare of a [Burgundy] Premier Cru would not move us forward. So [we thought] let's go outside of our comfort zone.' They looked all along the west coast of the US, eventually plumping in 2017 for Sta Rita Hills in one of the coolest parts of Santa Barbara County for their impressive Racines label.

But experimentation, and the realisation that France may not have a monopoly on fine-wine production, are far from the only drivers of the current phenomenon. French wine producers, especially those in Bordeaux, are becoming increasingly frustrated by their distance from their end consumers. Not only does this mean they don't know enough about them, it also involves handing over part of their potential income to intermediaries. The California wine model of selling wines direct to consumers (DTC), via 'wine clubs', mailing lists and preferably on allocation, has become increasingly attractive to them.

Furthermore, owning an American wine producer gives them the precious right to sell their French wines direct to American consumers without having to rely on the US's notorious three-tier distribution system (which encouraged DTC sales in the first place).

The most recent purchase, by France's powerful Bouygues family, owners of second-growth Château Montrose as well as cult Loire estate Clos Rougeard and Domaine Henri Rebourseau in Burgundy, has been on the east coast. Lost Mountain, a small but successful venture in Virginia, is the latest recruit to a wine group now known as Eutopia Estates. General manager Pierre Graffeuille, ex Château Léoville Las Cases, explained to me by email after we met at a small celebratory dinner in Paris, why they are so pleased to have a foothold in the American market. It's not just the educational value of discovering a new terroir, and the advantages of geographical diversification in an era when weather effects on the growing season are increasingly unpredictable, but 'owning a vineyard in the US gives direct access to one of the largest wine markets in the world. Moreover, US wineries have a great expertise in "direct to consumers" through their wine club and hospitality programs which can be inspiring.'

Florence Cathiard of Château Smith Haut Lafitte and Cathiard Vineyard was in London recently on a daring mission: to hold a blind tasting of 2021s, only their second California vintage, for a handful of us wine media with eight stars of the Napa Valley Cabernet firmament, including Screaming Eagle and Scarecrow (\$2,450 and \$824 a bottle respectively). She chose them on the basis that these were all 2021s that had already been released – no Harlan, for instance – and which had garnered high scores.

The group ranking, with one point given to our favourite, 10 to our least favourite, is in the box below, but Anthony Rose of The Independent, who has been writing about wine almost as long as I have, and I actually chose the least expensive wine, Founding Brothers from the Cathiard Vineyard, as our favourite.

Florence, who also tasted the wines blind, was mightily relieved to see Cathiard Vineyard's principal wine do so well even if she preferred Screaming Eagle. Her husband Daniel, less convinced by the tasting exercise, and possibly nervous about the outcome, stayed at home.

But the tasting, and my experience of the produce of virtually all the names mentioned above, does seem to suggest that French wine producers are capable of making excellent wine in the US, at the same time as being able to sell their French wines more profitably to millions of American wine consumers.

Referring to the traditional sales system for Bordeaux wines, the Place de Bordeaux, Florence Cathiard admitted that she and her husband had 'made our small fortune in wine thanks to the Place, but now that interest rates have risen, the Place is sick'. She mimed slashing her throat. 'My niece is now running our Napa boutique, selling our wines at the same price as the Place but at a much higher margin.'

I wonder how many more French vigneronns are currently scouting westwards?

Blind tasting results

2021 NAPA CABERNET	AGGREGATE RANKING (FAVOURITE AT THE TOP)
Continuum (\$330)	40
Dominus (\$360)	43
Cathiard Vineyard (\$395)	44
Screaming Eagle (\$2,450)	46
Lokoya (\$399)	54
TOR Vine Hill Ranch (\$370)	59
TOR Black Magic (\$499)	60
Founding Brothers (\$225)	60
Scarecrow (\$824)	63
A Bulgheroni (\$495)	71







**CATHIARD
VINEYARD**

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