

The Star-struck Wines of Crocker & Starr



Can Napa Valley wines really be that different after all?

On a recent trip to California's premier wine destination, it occurred to me that Napa Valley is like Disneyland for wine lovers. You can cruise up and down Highway 29 and see all of your favorite rides; Mondavi, Rudd, Heitz, Grigich, Corison, just to name a few. And everywhere you look, there is a sea of Cabernet Sauvignon grape vines. On the valley floor, on the hillsides and even on the mountain tops. After a while, it gets harder and harder to discern one rollercoaster cabernet wine from the next.

Not that there is any wrong with that. If you like big, fruit-driven, oak-enhanced wines, then Napa Valley cabernet can offer plenty of choices over a wide spectrum. But if you are looking for something a little more distinctive, something a little unexpected, then jump out of the Highway 29 line and head over to Crocker & Starr, the joint effort between longtime businessman-turned-farmer Charlie Crocker and Napa Valley wine consultant extraordinaire, Pam Starr.

After graduating from the University of California, Davis with a degree in fermentation sciences, Pam jumped right into the wine world working her first harvest with Sonoma Cutrer in 1984. Over the next 18 years, she gained experience, working for several wineries, including Edna Valley Vineyard in San Luis Obispo and Carmenet Winery in Sonoma. In 1991, Pam took on the role of winemaker for Spottswoode Vineyard & Winery in Napa Valley. In 1997, Pam teamed up with Charlie Crocker, whose large vineyard property on the valley floor near St. Helena, was in need of resuscitation. Together, they developed a partnership that allowed Pam to create world-class wines from quality new-world grapes that express a sense of place and an old-world winemaking philosophy.

And while most of Napa Valley is struggling to be heard above the cabernet noise, Crocker & Starr is producing standout wines from a couple other noble grape varietals, namely Malbec and Cabernet Franc.

The **2013 Crocker & Starr Sauvignon Blanc** exemplifies Pam Starr's ability to capture pure Napa Valley in a bottle. Alluring aromas of white peach, nectarine and fresh citrus blossom burst from the glass. The palate reveals a wonderfully textured wine with crisp acidity, wet stone minerality and ripe, juicy flavors of lime, guava, honeydew and peach. A lingering and refreshing finish, conjuring images of white flowers and another sip! **\$30**

Visually vibrant and dark garnet in color, The **2012 Crocker & Starr Casali** captures aromas of ripe wild blackberry, huckleberry, and plum, fresh violet, mint and cocoa. A blend of 82 percent Malbec and 18 percent Cabernet Franc combines for a cool and juicy mouth feel that accentuates ripe black fruit, hints of cedar, red clay and peppercorn spice. An extremely balanced, big bodied and delicious wine with a long, dark fruit finish. **\$75**

The powerful aromas of ripe blueberry, black raspberry and plum compote in the **2012 Crocker & Starr Cabernet Franc** is stunning. Made from 100% Cabernet France, this wine displays flavors of fresh violets and notes of cedar, sandalwood, red clay and fresh mint. A velvety texture with layers of red raspberry, cocoa, jasmine tea and tobacco dance inside a well-structured and balanced wine. **\$80**

And if you absolutely must have a big Napa Cab, then the **2011 Crocker & Starr Stone Place Cabernet Sauvignon** is for you. Made from 95 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 5 percent Petit Verdot from the heart and soul of the 36 year old vines grown on the legendary Crocker Estate, this wine delivers beautiful floral aromas of fresh violets, cedar and dried red rose petals on the nose. Complex flavors of fresh black plum on the palate combine with wild blueberry, ripe dark cherry, huckleberry and black raspberry on a supple and silky frame with mouthwatering acidity and a long, luscious finish. **\$110**

And remember, regardless of what wine ride you take, you must be this old – 21 - to ride...