

Tasters rate 10 cabernets

The quality of the vintage each year in California is measured by the response of the cabernet sauvignon grapes to the season's heat, rain, sun and growing season's length.

Other grapes are important, of course, but the cabernet is the key to the harvest, and the quality of wine each season is the benchmark against which a vintage is measured. Few can remember what kind of a year 1975 was for napa gamay or chenin blanc, but it is readily known as a mediocre year for cabernet.

And there is a great deal of variation, year to year, for cabernet. The 1974 was known for its elegance and holding power, 1977 as a light year in spite of the drought, and 1980 for the power and intensity of the wines. The 1970 vintage has since not been equalled, and so it goes.

The 1981 vintage, now that enough time has elapsed to permit perspective to develop along with the wines, can be evaluated as a fair year, lacking the grace of 1978 but exceeding that of 1979. Not known as "keepers," most 1981s are now available. These are being purchased with an eye to immediate consumption for many, storage the role for others.

A group of tasters recently gathered to evaluate 10 of the most publicized, awarded and promising of the perhaps 50-60 now on local shelves. It is always difficult to select those wines to be



wine
Richard Watson

used in a tasting, but one must make a set of choices and live with it.

Using a nine-point scale, the following results came about. Each listing includes the wine preceded by its ranking, then its mean score, and approximate price:

- 1) David Bruce, 6.30, \$14
- 2) Newton, 6.11, \$14
- 3) Laurel Glen, 5.93, \$15
- 4) Viechon, 5.70, \$14
- 5) Flora Springs, 5.6, \$15
- 6) Girard, 5.44, \$16
- 7) Sierra Vista, 5.37, \$11
- 8) Alexander Valley, 4.96, \$10
- 9) Sequoia Grove, 4.67, \$14
- 10) William Wheeler, 4.44, \$10

ALL IN ALL, a rather imposing group. Its strong performance suggests that the 1981 vintage, with few exceptions, is now quite ready for drinking. As a group they are full of fruit, moderate in tannins and show excellent acidity. No hurry about drinking any of these, however. This is the time to ac-

quire them.

There is little to choose between the David Bruce and the Newton. Both are fruity, highly approachable wines of sound character. The former has a bit more balance, the latter an earthiness and intensity. The Laurel Glen, new in the state, is a huge and intense wine that should not be drunk for years. Full and round, its tannins will carry it long enough for it to develop into something quite decent.

The Viechon and Flora Springs, both most prestigious Napa properties, are more elegant than full, the former being especially classy.

The rest of the wines, except for the Wheeler, are all well worth drinking, especially the hearty Girard. The Wheeler was probably a defective bottle; it did not taste like earlier bottles have.

All in all, a vintage to esteem if not cherish, the 1981 cabernets reported here are not wholly dissimilar to others and suggest the vintage is safe for present consumption and limited storage.

Esser records holiday song

Metro-Detroit entertainer Phil Marcus Esser, a Livonia resident, has recorded a new Christmas song called "Beside Her Christmas Tree." The record is available in single 45 RPM stereo format at many local record stores.

Flip side of the record is a new Christmas carol for children, "Ring-a-Ding-Ding," featuring 16-year-old Jody Lee Green and 12-year-old Michael Bolling and Jack Brotherton. Both songs were written by Michael's stepfather, Bob Webb.

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