

Exploring Napa Valley Through The Single-Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons Of Alpha Omega

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Now that the 2019 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons are available throughout the United States, it's worth looking at one of the region's more highly regarded producers to consider not just what the vintage is capable of achieving at the highest end of the proverbial spectrum, but also to reconsider the character of the famous producer's wines themselves.

Alpha Omega has been a critical and consumer darling for years now. It was founded in 2006, and while it produces excellent Chardonnay and age-worthy Sauvignon Blanc, it's built much of its reputation on the generosity and longevity of its lineup of Cabs. The 2019 Napa Valley bottling brings together fruit from throughout the region and includes valley floor, hillside, and mountain fruit, and is emblematic of the style of wine that shines so brightly there: It's excellent already and promises a long life ahead in the cellar.

But it's Alpha Omega's single-vineyard bottlings that are most intriguing to me, especially from a vintage like 2019, which I have found to generally be beautifully detailed without sacrificing any sense of ripeness or exuberance. And the work they're doing with these wines is fantastic.

Much of that is thanks to their world-class winemaking team, which is helmed by head winemaker Matt Brain, who's been with Alpha Omega since 2020 and whose passion for sustainability works perfectly with the producer's commitment to environmental responsibility: Alpha Omega is certified Napa Green, and they farm their land sustainably. Recently, Matt and assistant winemaker Melissa Paris (who was once a

student of Matt's at Cal Poly) were joined by consulting winemaker Andy Erickson, who has been instrumental in expanding the vineyard sources that AO has access to. Between Erickson's deep connections throughout Napa Valley, Brain's knowledge (he's not only been making wine in California since 2006, but he also has lectured on viticulture and enology at both Fresno State and Cal Poly), and the involvement of founders Michelle and Robin Baggett, it was perhaps inevitable that Alpha Omega would ultimately be able to continue to build and refine a portfolio of renowned sources for their single-vineyard Cabs. (The program began in 2007, and now, with Brain and Erickson there, it has continued to expand.)



Andy Erickson and Matt Brain have been instrumental in expanding Alpha Omega's already excellent single-vineyard Cabernet program.

COURTESY OF ALPHA OMEGA

Tasting them side by side, and from a year as nuanced as 2019, provides an outstanding de facto tour of not just Napa Valley in general, but also a delicious reminder of just how diverse the geology and terroir are throughout America's most iconic wine region.

It takes serious work to produce wines like these; sourcing top-quality fruit is just the beginning. "All leading up to harvest this year," Erickson told me during a zoom tasting with the team this past winter, referring to the legendary Beckstoffer - Georges III Vineyard in the Rutherford AVA, "my mantra was, 'This is classic Napa Valley.' You walk through, you taste the fruit, it tastes like old Napa Valley. You want to be in that window where the Alpha Omega style is this intense, volume-turned-up richness, but you should still get that sort of old Napa Valley feel. And I think...that we nailed it this year. If you put that next to, let's say, To Kalon [Vineyard in Oakville], which is more dark and black and kind of brooding, you should find those differences in the wine even though you're trying to make it in a certain style. And I think that's the real key, right?"

It's easier said than done. "Looking at lab analysis does not help you with that," Brain added. "And it's more than just the sensory; you know, 'I smell cherries, I smell leather.' It's understanding the nature of the vineyard and the nature of the potential wines that could come out of it. Finding that match and having that vision, and understanding what decisions get you to that end point along the way, because we're constantly making decisions after fermentation. The way the cooperage is handled, racking the wines, obviously the ultimate blending decisions. Each of those decision-making points come up and you really want to keep the soul of that wine and your idea of what that should be in mind, and it does influence everything you do all along the way. Getting to know these wines, and keeping that picture of that wine in your head, and what that ideal expression in your head is, and constantly fighting for it at every point, that's kind of what we do. And we love to do it. We can't *not* think about it that way."

And because of how little margin for error there is with the single-vineyard bottlings, every last decision takes on even greater importance: Whereas the Napa Cab may have more than a dozen different vineyard and vineyard-block sources, the single-vineyard ones don't benefit from that sort of blending safety net.



Alpha Omega vintners Robin and Michelle Baggett have helped create a Napa Valley powerhouse.

JASON TINACCI

Right now, Alpha Omega produces 10 single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons (though they work with more than two dozen total vineyards across their entire portfolio). And while they'd like to add a few more for the Cabs, they are approaching the maximum number that they'd prefer to hit. Given the success of the 2019s that I tasted, the balance of vineyard specificity, age-worthiness, and pleasure they provide already, the team at Alpha Omega seems to be approaching its sweet spot.

Here are my notes on six of their 2019 single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons. Any one of them would make an outstanding addition to a collection.

Alpha Omega Sunshine Valley Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Oak Knoll District

Inky in color, with effusive aromatics of plums and ripe purple fruit, candied violets, vanilla-kissed cocoa powder, and cedar, all teeing up a palate of pure silk in texture that belies real power beneath, with flavors

of blackberries, black and purple plums, black figs, melted licorice, Chinese five-spice powder, toasted coconut shreds, and hot-rock minerality. Enjoy this now through 2042.

Alpha Omega Sleeping Lady Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Yountville

Transportingly spiced aromatics—toasted fennel seeds, fenugreek, coriander—are joined by crushed blueberries and minerals before a plush-textured palate with excellent acidity, the energy of crunchy autumn orchard fruit joined by brambly and mountain berries, slate-like minerality, and pencil shavings alongside cassis, red cherries, and pomegranate juice. Very fresh and lively with a great core lifted by the suggestion of flowers through the long finish. Drink now and for the next several decades.

Alpha Omega Beckstoffer Georges III Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Napa Valley

Forest floor bass-notes are joined by aromas of purple fruit, bluebonnet flowers, sun-warmed wild strawberries, and fig Newtons. On the palate, this is far more savory than expected from the nose, with soy sauce, cracked peppercorns, and cured black olives that ring especially true through the finish with cherry pits, graphite, scorched earth, and a deep core of saline umami riding along. Brooding and terrific. Give it a year and then enjoy it for the next two decades or more.

Alpha Omega Drew Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Mt. Veeder

Dense and brooding, with cassis and blackberry liqueur aromas alongside the toasty vanilla top of a perfect crème brûlée, all before a palate of excellent acidity, which is a fantastic counterpoint to the plushness of the wine. Flavors of candied red apples, blackberry preserves, a touch of blood orange, and black raspberries are long and lively alongside its core of power. The ripe, beautifully managed tannins promise a very long life ahead. Drink now through 2052.

Alpha Omega Cordes Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Atlas Peak

This is a serious mouthful of wine, rich, dense, and muscular, with sappy tannins that are impeccably ripe and well-managed. Flavors of singed sage and rosemary serve as counterpoints to brambly berries and higher toned acidity than expected. A bit reserved right now, but with so much promise for the future, and the deep seam of mineral and cigar tobacco are riveting. Wait until 2024 and then consider popping the cork for the following three decades.

Alpha Omega Thomas Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Rutherford

Black raspberries, wild strawberries, brambly berries, and Amarena cherries are pulsed with deep mineral notes that linger through the soy-sauce-splashed finish. There are flavors here that bring to mind blackberries and cassis sitting in a pot next to a humidor full of well-aged cigars. Candied violets, brandied cherries, rhubarb compote, black licorice, cocoa powder, and espresso oils develop with air. Savor 2023 through 2052 and beyond.



Alpha Omega's single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons showcase the fantastic range of America's most famous wine region.

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianfreedman/2022/07/18/exploring-napa-valley-through-the-single-vineyard-cabernet-sauvignons-of-alpha-omega/?sh=6b4a1e622d51>