

Vinous Event: 2010 Napa Valley at the NoMad Rooftop

I knew it the moment I first tasted the wines from barrel. Two thousand ten had the potential to be a great vintage for Napa Valley. It was so obvious. The wines had great color, intensity, freshness and persistence, much of that the result of an unusually cool, long growing season by Napa Valley standards. Heat spikes in the weeks leading up to harvest gave the fruit a final burst of ripeness, but also caused sunburn and over-ripening where canopies had been opened too much. The most exciting wines combine the aromatics and structure of a cool year with the exotic ripeness of a warm vintage.

This retrospective, set in the NoMad Hotel's dramatic Rooftop, provided a great opportunity to get a progress report on a number of the vintage's very best wines. Executive Chef James Kent prepared a brilliant menu, while Wine Director Thomas Pastuszak and his team did a fabulous job handling the wines. A few of the winemakers were in attendance, which only added to the richness of the conversation.

As always, the primary objective of Vinous tastings and events is education. I had a hard time limiting the lineup to something manageable, as there were so many wines I wanted guests to experience in this retrospective. The wines were arranged in five flights that opened the door to some of the main themes that run through Napa Valley today. We just scratched the surface, though, as these wines represent just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Napa Valley's oenological riches.



Vinous's Kelli White flanked by NoMad's Ryan Bailey and Thomas Pastuszak

The bottles were opened starting around 5:00pm. I personally tasted nearly every bottle. Because of the inherent structure of the vintage, most of the wines were double decanted, which means on average they got between three to five hours of air. Two exceptions were the Blankiet and Kapcsándy, which were so beautiful and finessed out of the bottle that I was afraid to disturb them. Those two wines were simply opened and allowed to breathe. Each flight was served ahead of food, so the wines could be tasted both alone and with the cuisine.

We served magnums of Aubert's 2005 Chardonnay Lauren with the hors d'oeuvres as guests settled in and explored the stunning room and rooftop terrace at the NoMad Hotel. The 2005 Lauren is still in great shape, but on this night, from the big bottle, it was truly spectacular.

What follows are brief impressions of the wines. My full tasting notes describe the wines over the time I was able to follow them, which means before service, during dinner, and, in many cases, into the next day, as opposed to just how the wines showed during dinner itself.

Where do you start with wines like this?

Flight One focused on three reference-point wines from **Yountville**, each stunning in its own right. Blankiet's Proprietary Red was all finesse, 2010 Kapcsándy's Cabernet Sauvignon Grand Vin State Lane Vineyard showed tremendous depth and refinement, while the 2010 Dominus may in time turn out to be one of the handful of the very finest wines of the year. I can't imagine a better way to start the evening.

Flight Two: Stags Leap and a Bit of Mystery, was magnificent. First, the 2010 Hillside Select was off the charts. It remains one of my very favorite wines in this style. The 2010 is ripe and voluptuous, but also possesses superb energy. It was also fabulous with the foie gras, with a touch of sweetness that balanced the dish perfectly. What a match. The benchmarks of Napa Valley are well known, but I also wanted to show a wine most people had not heard of, much less tasted. MacDonald's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon, from the fabled To-Kalon vineyard, was utterly magnificent. I think I heard more than one swoon in the dining room. What a great showing.

One of the signatures of 2010 is the interplay of structure from the cool year and ripeness from the late season heat spikes. Those qualities came through loud and clear in the three wines in our:

Flight Three: Valley Floor & Benchland flight; the Corison Kronos, Spottswoode and Larkmead Solari were all especially open and radiant on this night, with the Spottswoode the most exotically ripe of the three. Spottswoode is a warm site in St. Helena, so I was not totally surprised by how that wine showed, but I did not expect the Corison Kronos to be so open. The Larkmead was the most backward of the three and will require the most time, even though I expect it will always be virile and imposing in style.



Another theme on this night was the concept of terroir, which is so fundamental in other parts of the world, but, sadly, less understood and discussed when it comes to Napa Valley.

Flight Four: Eastern Hills, we wanted to explore the similarities and differences of three wines that almost certainly originated from the same geological formation, starting with Ann Colgin and Joe Wender's IX Estate, on Pritchard Hill, the Dalla Valle, which essentially sits mid-slope on the eastern edge of Oakville and then down to BOND's St. Eden, which lies on a gently undulating slope just across the Silverado Trail. The IX Estate was the most exotic and sweet of these three wines, but once some of the more mineral elements emerged, it was striking. The 2010 Maya was simply stratospheric. There is not too much to add. Sadly, the 2010 St. Eden did not show well. Perhaps it was the magnum format or maybe we caught the wine at an awkward stage, but the 2010 wasn't as expressive as I remembered, and I tasted all three magnums we served.



Flight Five explored the **Western Hills**. Philip Togni's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon continues to blossom. Of course it remains an infant, but I would be hard pressed to name another 2010 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon that has grown in bottle as much as Togni's 2010 has over the last few years. Diamond Creek's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Volcanic Hill was a bit perplexing, as I noted some bottle variation throughout the course of the evening that I don't recall seeing previously in this wine. The best bottles were typical Diamond Creek of the current era, which means a bit more accessible than in the past, but still with plenty of structure. But a few bottles weren't perfectly focused. Chef Kent's beef with quinoa, asparagus and Parmesan was utterly divine.



Beef Roasted With Quinoa, Asparagus & Parmesan

Flight Six: Howell Mountain brought the evening to a rousing finish. I found the Dunn absolutely stunning, but part of that was no doubt linked to a tasting the night before that featured a series of Dunn Cabernets back to the inaugural 1979 that stimulated the imagination as I wondered what the 2010 might develop into if given sufficient time. Forman's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon is another of the wines of the vintage. The style is a bit pushed for Forman, but it all works so well. David Abreu's 2010 Thorevilos took things to another level in terms of its pure intensity. While a number of the 2010s can be enjoyed now with some air, the Thorevilos needs at least another handful of years to enter what will likely be a long plateau of maturity.

I had a chance to revisit a few of the wines at the end of the night, which only reaffirmed what a magnificent tasting and dinner this was. Readers lucky enough to own any of these wines are in for a real treat, although the 2010s will undoubtedly take a number of years before they show us their full splendor.

-- Antonio Galloni

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- **Blankiet Estate 2010 Proprietary Red Paradise Hills Vineyard**

Yountville, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2030

- Blankiet's 2010 Proprietary Red is sleek, subtle and beautifully nuanced throughout. The flavors are dark, ripe and intense, yet there are lovely floral, spice and mineral veins running through the fruit that give the wine its sense of sophistication. One of the most understated wines of the night, the 2010 remains very young and in need of further time in bottle to develop the full breadth of its aromas and flavors. Nevertheless, today it is impressive, even if it is the first wine of the night.
- Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015

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- **Dominus 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon**

Yountville, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2022 - 2040

- The 2010 Dominus is one of the unquestioned stars of the evening. While some of the 2010s can be enjoyed young, Dominus is a powerhouse that will require a number of years to soften. It is a bit of a shame the 2010 is served early in this dinner, as it is truly magnificent. Tasted over several hours and into the next day, the 2010 only continued to grow. A wine of baritone-like depth and explosive structure, the Dominus is a long-distance runner. On this night it is dark, imposing and totally vertical in its sense of structure. The firm tannins beg for patience. Today, my impression is that Dominus will be one of the last 2010s to open up.
- Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015

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- **Kapcsándy Family Winery 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Grand Vin State Lane Vineyard**

Yountville, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2035

- Kapcsándy's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Grand Vin State Lane Vineyard is truly special. Supremely polished and refined, the 2010 is absolutely gorgeous right out of the gate. The 2010 is so beautiful, it is one of the few wines I chose not to decant for this tasting, as I did not want to disturb the fruit. Tasted over several hours, the 2010 just kept getting better and better. I revisited an unfinished bottle the day after the tasting, and it was still magnificent. Perhaps a bit less focused in its aromatics, with air, the 2010 became darker and more voluptuous. Overall, the 2010 Grand Vin stands out for its precision and focus, both qualities that are rare in a vintage that generally produced much more explosive wines.
- Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015

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- **Shafer Vineyards 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select**

Stags' Leap, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2035

- One of the most impressive wines of the night, the 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select is fabulous. Racy, exotic and flashy to the core, the 2010 delivers a classic, full-on Napa Valley experience. If I had to pick one Napa Valley wine that exemplifies modern viticulture and winemaking at its very best, but that remains relatively affordable (by Napa Valley standards), the 2010 Hillside Select would be it. Hard-core classicists might be troubled by the wine's sweetness, but in my view, this is as good as it gets within the genre of voluptuous, opulent Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. I have now served the 2010 at several events and it has never been anything less than magnificent.
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- **Abreu 2010 Thorevilos**

Howell Mountain, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2040

- David Abreu's 2010 Thorevilos stands apart from all of the other wines in this range for its massive, inky concentration. It is also the last of these wines to be released, which may explain its intense power. A host of graphite, smoke, incense, tobacco, spice and black fruit gradually open up, but the 2010 is a wine for the future. I won't touch another bottle until at least age ten, even though that is almost certainly not going to be enough time to find the wine at its peak of expression.
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- **Forman 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon**

Howell Mountain, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2040

- Forman's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon has become much more refined over the last few years. Initially a virtually impenetrable brute, the 2010 now shows gorgeous layers of aromatic nuance that have taken some time to develop. Crushed rose petals, mint, herbs and red stone fruits open up effortlessly in the glass. There is no shortage of depth or tannin, but the 2010 appears to now be headed in the direction of finesse, whereas when it was young it was a real powerhouse. This is a stellar showing from Ric Forman.
- Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015

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- **Dunn Vineyards 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain**

Howell Mountain, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2020 - 2040

- There's not much to say about Randy Dunn's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain that I haven't already said or written. A classic Howell Mountain Cabernet, the 2010 hits the palate with scents of graphite, pencil shavings, inky blue/purplish fruit, sage and spices, all backed up with swaths of broad yet impeccably balanced tannins. What a fascinating contrast it is to taste this next to David Abreu's Thorevilos as we round out the evening. The Dunn is powerful, structured and incisive, with magnificent expression of site and fabulous overall balance. Dunn's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain will go down as one of the great wines of this vintage. Readers have to be patient, but there is no question the 2010 is a real stunner. Knowing how hard it will be to wait, I expect the 2010 will start to open up around age ten.
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- **Diamond Creek Vineyards 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Volcanic Hill**

Diamond Mountain, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2035

- While most wines in this tasting are gorgeous, but young, Diamond Creek's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Volcanic Hill comes across as raw and not yet fully formed. There is impressive power and structure in the glass, even if the elements haven't fully come together yet. Some bottles show a slight trace of brett that I do not find overpowering or distracting, but it is there. I am shortening the drinking window a touch, not because I think the wine won't age, but rather because I am afraid the brett may become too overpowering as time passes.
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- **Philip Togni Vineyard 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon**

Spring Mountain, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2020 - 2035

- After going through a period of post-bottling dormancy, Philip Togni's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon has really begun to show well from bottle over the last six months or so. Of course, the 2010 is far too young to deliver maximum pleasure, but it is nevertheless superb tonight. Beams of acidity and tannin give energy to the dark fruit and its accompanying floral/savory/mineral overtones. The 2010 is a classic Philip Togni wine that will thrill readers who appreciate classically built Cabernets. Recent bottles from the early 1990s and 2000s show just how much these wines transform when given the proper time to develop in bottle. At their best, Togni's wines bring together an Old World sensibility with Napa Valley richness, a pretty appealing combination, in my book.
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- **BOND 2010 St. Eden (Magnum)**

Oakville, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2030

- One of the few disappointments of the night, the 2010 BOND St. Eden does not live up to my very high expectations. Perhaps the wine is going through a closed phase, but I don't see the vibrancy and energy that are so typical of the vintage and that this wine showed when it was young. These are the mysteries of wine. Frankly, this is a perplexing showing.
- Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015

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- **Dalla Valle 2010 Maya**

Oakville, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2020 - 2035

- Naoko Dalla Valle's 2010 Maya is every bit as breathtaking as it has always been. An exotic mélange of raspberry jam, espresso, mocha and rose petal scents opens up in the glass. Alluring, powerful and totally captivating, the 2010 hits all the right notes. One of the more complete wines in this tasting, the Maya is brilliant as soon as the bottles are opened and then just keeps getting better and better as the hours go by. The 2010 vintage is full of highlights, but then there is a summit of excellence where a few wines are perched. Maya is one of them. In a word: magnificent!
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- **Colgin 2010 Red Wine IX Estate**

Pritchard Hill, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2028

- Colgin's 2010 IX Estate opens with sweet, exotic aromatics before more savory elements start to emerge from the glass. A superb example of a wine that manages to be both flashy and true to its site, the 2010 has it all. Over time, the 2010 just gets better and better. The IX Estate is one of the wines that benefits most from double-decanting. Watching that transformation unfold is fascinating, to say the least.
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- **Larkmead 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari**

Napa Valley, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2040

- Black fruit, smoke, lavender, graphite, tobacco and incense are some of the many notes that appear in Larkmead's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari. A massive, hulking wine, the 2010 comes across as imposing, with huge tannins and tons of pure density. Here, alongside fifteen other first-class Napa Cabernets, the Solari comes across as a bit rustic in its tannin profile. That may just be the wine's youthful period in which the tannins have yet to fully soften, as the 2010 was a bit more polished from barrel and just after bottling. Time will tell.
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- **Spottswoode 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon**

St. Helena, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2017 - 2035

- It's interesting to taste Spottswoode's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon in this context, as it is one of the wines that shows the richness and power of the vintage most clearly at this stage. Racy and voluptuous in the glass, the 2010 is decidedly extroverted, with huge fruit that dominates over structure, at least today. Raspberry jam, wild flowers, mint, cinnamon and rose petals flesh out on the voluptuous, racy finish. The relatively open-knit, ripe fruit gives the 2010 plenty of up-front appeal, but there is also more than enough depth to support many years of fine drinking. The 2010 might find a bit better balance over time as the baby fat melts away, but in this context, the wine comes across as super-ripe, exotic and bold.
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- **Corison 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Kronos Vineyard**

St. Helena, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2035

- Cathy Corison's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Kronos Vineyard is one of the most surprising wines in this tasting, as I did not expect it to be so open and expressive. Made from diseased, head-trained vines just behind Corison's barn-like winery, the 2010 Kronos, is deep, savory and wonderfully expressive, with fabulous concentration and tons of depth. With air, some of the signature floral/savory/mineral notes come forward. Violets, lavender, graphite, licorice and blue/purplish fruits abound in a classically structured, pedigreed Cabernet Sauvignon of the highest level. The good news is the 2010 won't take as long to open up as I had initially thought.
- Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015

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- **MacDonald 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon**

Oakville, Napa Valley

Red wine from United States

Drinking window: 2018 - 2035

- I can't help myself. Even though all of the wines in this tasting are well-established benchmarks for excellence, our primary mission with events and tastings is education, so I throw in one mystery wine that is tasted blind. MacDonald's 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon, from the famed to-Kalon vineyard in Oakville, turns out to be one of the wines of the night. Explosive and exuberant to the core, the 2010 hits the palate with waves of blue/purplish fruit, dark spices and French oak. The 2010 is of course far too young to deliver maximum pleasure, but it is simply stunning tonight. Most importantly, in this vintage, the first commercial release, brothers Alex and Graeme MacDonald made a wine that has no problem sitting alongside Napa Valley's long established stars. This is a fabulous showing.
- Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015

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- **Aubert 2005 Chardonnay Lauren Vineyard (Magnum)**

Sonoma Coast, Sonoma

White wine from United States

Drinking window: 2015 - 2020

- Mark and Theresa Aubert's 2005 Chardonnay Lauren, tasted from magnum, is every bit as special as I remembered it. Time has softened the textures and added gorgeous nuance, yet the 2005 remains fresh, perfumed and extraordinarily beautiful. Hints of orange peel, mint and sweet spices lift from the glass, but it is the wine's balance that proves to be utterly captivating. Quite simply, this is one of the very finest California Chardonnays I have ever tasted. In magnum, the 2005 will drink well for at least another five years, while in standard bottle, the Lauren is naturally a touch more forward, although it should keep for another few years, perhaps longer. My own preference is to drink wines while the fruit retains at least some elements of freshness.
- **Antonio Galloni. Tasting date: April 2015**

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