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A N G E L O G A J A



ENJOYABLE FROM BIRTH

NAPA VALLEY VINTAGE 2007

LAST SEPTEMBER FINE ORGANISED A LARGE HORIZONTAL TASTING OF 2007 NAPA CABERNET IN NAPA ITSELF. OUR INTENTION WAS TO UPDATE THE NAPA VALLEY CLASSIFICATION OF THE NAPA VALLEY WINES WE CREATED A YEAR AGO. AFTER TASTING AROUND FORTY NAPA CABERNETS BLIND, WE WERE CONVINCED AND IMPRESSED. NONE OF THE WINES DISAPPOINTED US; IN FACT THE QUALITY OF THE WINE WAS EITHER EXCELLENT OR AT LEAST GOOD. ADMITTEDLY, THERE WERE ONLY WINES FROM THE REGION'S VERY TOP PRODUCERS AT THE TABLE. THEY ALL HAD THE SAME SILKY TANNINS AND LIVELY ACIDIC MOUTHFEEL – THESE WERE ELEGANT WINES! THE TYPICAL HEAVY AND STURDY ALCOHOLIC NATURE OF NAPA VALLEY WINE WAS LEFT BEHIND: WAS THE 2007 VINTAGE THE REASON FOR SUCH A CHANGE IN STYLE? WE ALSO LOOKED INTO HOW THE VINTAGE DIFFERED FROM THE AVERAGE, AS WELL AS WHAT THE TOP PRODUCERS IN THE AREA THOUGHT OF THIS VINTAGE.

TEXT: Pekka Nuikki & Juha Lihonen PHOTOS: Pekka Nuikki

The 2007 Napa Valley harvest season was exceptionally long, mild and dry. Thanks to the dryness and warmth, the spring growing season started a week earlier than normal. The rainfall for the year was low: only sixty per cent of normal. By withholding the rain, Mother Nature ensured that the vines did not grow too much, and she also made sure the grape's phenols had the ideal amount of ripening time.

Scarce waterfall was a major factor in determining the concentration of the grapes, but the exceptionally mild weather during the summer and autumn also played a part in the slow and even growth of the grapes. So, what happened?

Bond's winemaker *Cory Empting* mentions that one of the greatest things about the 2007 vintage was that the climate was nearly ideal for the tannin maturation and flavour development. He mentions that the harvest

season had only two days when the temperature rose above 38 C (100 F). Because both of these days occurred at the beginning of the growth season they did not cause any the water evaporation problems, nor did they affect the sugar formation or the grapes' physiological ripening.

Another notable point, according to Empting, was the low rainfall. The average for Oakville over the last twenty years has been around 83 centimetres. During 2007 it was only around 50 centimetres. At the beginning of the harvest the weather was mild, and at times cool, which guaranteed the picking of the ideal grapes in fabulous conditions. At Harlan's, Bond's sister estate, the harvest was finished during the first week of October and at Bond itself the process was completed a week later.

Empting praises the ripe tannins of the grapes, as well as the rich aromatics that give the wines a wide and juicy



mouthfeel, fine concentration and flexible soft tannins.

"As the wines finished fermentation and went into extended maturation, it became apparent that they had lots of fleshiness and concentration, combined with a large amount of very voluminous yet supple tannins. We decided to age the wine a few months longer due to the weight and structure, so they spent nearly 29 months in new oak. They continue to put on weight in the middle as they age in the bottle, but they seem to retain the freshness and acidity levels that are a result of a long temperate growing season. I think they are going to be wines that live a very long time but are enjoyable now. They should continue to evolve beautifully for the next 30 plus years," Emptying sums up.

Colgin's winemaker *Allison Tausiet* agrees with these comments and says that year was a super vintage. She has been charmed by the wine's outstanding aromatics, rich tannins and intense colours, which according to her have soaked into the wine from the grape skins with exceptional ease.

At the Araujo estate in Calistoga, former winemaker *Matt Tyler* says that the growth season started in the middle of March. Due to the low rainfall during spring, the vineyards avoided mould and pest problems. Indeed, the long and ideal season continued all the way through to the end of September, when the last Cabernet Sauvignon grapes were picked at Araujo.

Doug Shafer, from the Shafer's Vineyard in the Stag's Leap area, says that the vintage's quality has been the best for decades but it was also an exceptional harvest year due to the lack of traditional heat or rainfall-related problems.

"In spite of the early start to the season the fruit matured at a leisurely pace thanks to a long and cool summer with no surprises. There were no worries about high heat or incoming rain, and we left the fruit on the vine until the best possible moment. The lack of rain early in the year gave us smaller clusters, which by harvest time had resulted in smaller berries with outstanding concentration," *Doug Shafer* says.

Winemaker *Kristof Andersson*, from the Oakville based Gargiulo Vineyards, says of the vintage:

"We were able to essentially dry-farm most of our vineyards and they





didn't require much irrigation. The autumn weather was warm and consistent with no early rains, so picking decisions were based on perfect grape maturity being reached. The yields per acre were slightly below average due to stress factors the year before, thus the flavours and intensity were heightened. Our wines from the vintage are slightly more extracted than in general and the purity of ripe fruit flavours were achieved due to the overall balance of the vintage, especially in our Oakville terroir."

At the Gargiulo's next-door neighbour, Screaming Eagle, winemaker *Andy Erickson* brings up the harvest's exceptional nature. "What was remarkable about 2007 was the ease of harvesting. The weather conditions were excellent between the middle of September and October. We were able to pick the grapes with precisely the level of ripeness that we wanted. The end result was that we got exactly the grape material we wanted, with balanced tannins, acids, colour pigmentation and aromatics. We succeeded just as well with all the other varieties we cultivate. This is an ideal starting point for winemaking and blending; as a winemaker I could not wish for more."

At Heitz Cellars, where the vintage is still maturing in the barrels, they say that the wines have a deep colour, clear aromatics and rich extraction; they are especially happy about the perfect tannin structure and excellent acidity.

According to *David Heitz* from Heitz Cellars, all of their Cabernet vineyards ripened evenly and fully, so harvest time was quite compact. The picking began in the third week of September and was finished by the second week of October.

Heitz says: "Although the cluster count was about what we usually expect, the yield per acre was considerably lower due to the small size of the berries. That means more skin-to-juice contact, which has resulted in an exceptional wealth of concentrated flavours. Heitz Cellars' 2007 Cabernet Sauvignons are maturing slowly and beautifully in the barrel right now. They are displaying magnificent depth and purity of flavour with plenty of extraction. We are especially pleased with the overall balance of near-perfect tannin levels and brisk acidity. We will bottle the final lots selected for our 2007 vineyard-designated Cabernets next year, and they will be released in 2012. We can definitely promise these wines will be worth the wait!"



THE RESULTS OF THE TASTING

Even though the equal quality of the wines that were tasted blind attracted our attention, there were several wines that attracted our particular attention and the results were certainly surprising. The most prestigious wines from Napa – namely Harlan and Screaming Eagle – were not at the top, but were much more reserved in nature than many of the more unknown names. Several of the 1st and 2nd growth Napa Valley wines FINE has tasted did not succeed as well as expected in the tasting. Along with Harlan and Screaming Eagle, Araujo Eisele Vineyard, Bryant Family's Cabernet Sauvignon and Dalla Valle's Maya did not meet expectations. There is no denying the potential of these wines, but on the day of the tasting they were refrained and even closed in parts, which is rather typical of these top quality wines when they are young. On the other hand, the surprises were definitely Hourglass's Blueline Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Tim Mondavi's Continuum, Blankiet Estate and Darioush Signature Cabernet Sauvignon. The tasting of Gargiulo 575 OVX divided opinions, but when scored highly it was amongst the region's very best. It is also worth mentioning the Bond wines, which were successful overall; of particular note was Bond's newest wine, Guella, whose style charmed us. So-called traditional names, such as Opus One, Caymus Special Selection, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and Joseph Phelps Insignia, were left in the background when compared to these 'new classics'.

After the tasting we were able to draw at least a one conclusion about the 2007 vintage: the wines are extremely balanced and exceptionally enjoyable already. They are also multilayered and have a sophisticated body. It can be estimated that they may even have an ageing potential of thirty years. ♦

NAPA VALLEY CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2007 TASTING

1-30

Ranking		Points
1	Hourglass Blueline Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	95
2	Blankiet Estate 2007	94
3	Continuum 2007	93
4	Darioush Signature Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2007	93
5	Bond Guella 2007	93
6	Colgin IX Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	93
7	Bond St. Eden 2007	93
8	Gargiulo 575 OVX Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	93
9	Dalla Valle Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	93
10	Bond Pluribus 2007	92
11	Harlan Estate 2007	92
12	Araujo Eisele Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	92
13	Bryant Family Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	92
14	Screaming Eagle Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	91
15	The Maiden 2007	91
16	Colgin Tychson Hill Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	91
17	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars S.L.V. Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	91
18	Dominus 2007	90
19	Pahlmeyer Proprietary Red 2007	90
20	Dalla Valle Maya 2007	90



Ranking		Points
21	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cask 23 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	90
22	Opus One 2007	90
23	Bond Melbury 2007	90
24	Joseph Phelps Backus Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	90
25	Caymus Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	90
26	Matriarch 2007	89
27	Realm Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer To-Kalon Vineyard 2007	89
28	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars FAY Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	89
29	Colgin Herb Lamb Cabernet Sauvignon 2007	88
30	Bond Vecina 2007	88



TASTING NOTES IN RANKING ORDER



**1 Hourglass
Blueline
Vineyard
Cabernet
Sauvignon 2007**
D 5 h / G 4 h
95 p 2010 / 2020

Medium intense, ruby colour. Seductive nose with cassis, cedar, vanilla and roasted coffee. Intense, medium-bodied palate shows a silky texture. Soft tannins support broad and pristine palate that shows lingering length. Warming alcohol is very well integrated and the wine is harmonious and beautifully balanced.



**2 Blankiet Estate
2007**
D 8 h / G 4 h
94 p 2010 / 2024

Deep, purple colour. Seductive, elegant and Intensive spicy nose that delivers dark chocolate and cassis aromas. The palate is elegant, yet full-bodied. Intensive fruitiness, vivid acidity and supple tannins form a harmonious balance on palate. The finish is lingering long and opulent. Great wine to drink already but will definitely benefit from 10 to 15 years ageing.



3 Continuum 2007
D 5 h / G 4 h
93 p 2010 / 2020

Medium-intense, purple colour. Open and seductive nose that shows toasty and sweet spicy aromas. Medium-bodied palate that shows mellow acidity and smooth tannins. Intense black fruit flavours with mint and chocolate tones. Long harmonious finish.



**4 Darioush
Signature
Cabernet
Sauvignon Napa
Valley 2007**
D 8 h / G 4 h
93 p 2010 / 2017

Deep, ruby colour. Intense smoky nose with jammed cassis and spicity tones. Full-bodied, broad and rich mouthfeel. Plentiful of ripe black fruit. Soft tannins and mellow acidity. Harmonious palate with long toasty finish combined with sweet vanilla flavour.

TASTING NOTES IN RANKING ORDER



5 Bond Guella 2007

93 p D 8 h / G 5 h
2010 / 2022

Deep, dark ruby colour. A charming aromas in a bit closed nose. However it shows seductive spiciness, coconut, chocolate and fine touch of toastiness. Rich and intensive, full-bodied palate that has satin-like texture formed by smooth tannins, supple acidity, intensive fruit and high alcohol. Opulent wine with toasty and persistent character.



6 Colgin IX Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

93 p D 8 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2025

Deep, purple colour. Complex and lovely toasty nose with roasted coffee and touch of bacon. Full-bodied and elegant mouthfeel with satiny texture, well-integrated tannins and vivid acidity. Elegant and refined cassis fruit character. Long and harmonious finish that shows power as well as elegance.



7 Bond St. Eden 2007

93 p D 4 h / G 3 h
2010 / 2020

Deep, dark red colour. Intense, perfumey and spicy nose with jammed black berries, violets and vanilla. Full-bodied, silky mouthfeel with mellow acidity and smooth tannic structure. Layered palate show plenty of ripe black fruit. Long and spicy finish with cassis, bramble and dark chocolate notes.



8 Gargiulo 575 OVX Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

93 p D 6 h / G 3 h
2010 / 2025

Quite deep, purple colour. Intense black fruit nose with roasted coffee, cassis, touch of bacon, and smoke. Medium-bodied and very elegant palate. Silky tannins, vivid acidity and ripe cassis fruit. A sophisticated and long finish has fresh cassis, bell pepper and coffee flavours. A seductive wine with lovely toastiness.



9 Dalla Valle Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

93 p D 5 h / G 3 h
2010 / 2018

Moderately deep, purple colour. Elegant nose that has complex aromatics – black fruits, spiciness and roasted coffee. Medium-bodied, vivid palate has silky texture formed by intense fruit and supple tannins. Lingering long finish with lovely toastiness. Elegant wine.



10 Bond Pluribus 2007

92 p D 10 h / G 6 h
2010 / 2030

Very intense, dark ruby colour. Rich and toasty nose with smokiness, licorice, dark chocolate and brambles. Explosive mouthfeel with superb concentration, rich and spicy palate. A macho wine that has power but still smooth elegance in great balance.

TASTING NOTES IN RANKING ORDER



11 Harlan Estate 2007

92 p D 10 h / G 7 h
2010 / 2030

Deep, ruby red colour. Intense and spicy nose with ripe black currants and brambles, dark chocolate, and violets. Full-bodied palate has silky structure and high alcohol strength that is well-integrated into the palate. Elegant, dense and harmonious wine that has a long and concentrated finish.



12 Araujo Eisele Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

92 p D 5 h / G 3 h
2010 / 2020

Medium-intense, purple colour. Smoky, toasty, and vanilla flavoured nose that shows elegant and ripe black fruit nose with perfumey touch. Medium-bodied palate which is highlighted with supple tannins and mellow acidity. Charmingly elegant and long finish shows some jammed cassis, tobacco and coffee flavours.



13 Bryant Family Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

92 p D 5 h / G 3 h
2010 / 2016

Deep, ruby red colour. Pronounced toasty nose with ripe cassis and dark chocolate aromas. Full-bodied, powerful but still sophisticated style. Intense fruitiness is married well with spicy flavours and toasted oak. Long and harmonious finish. Smooth style.



14 Screaming Eagle Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

91 p D 8 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2025

Medium-intense, ruby colour. A reserved nose shows ripe black currant aromas with touch of mint and spices, even some floral notes. Medium-bodied and vivid palate formed by lively acidity, velvety tannins and intense fruitiness. Long finish with licorice notes. Elegant structure and complex wine that is still closed. Further ageing is definitely recommended.



15 The Maiden 2007

91 p D 10 h / G 6 h
2010 / 2020

Deep, dark ruby colour. Pronounced jammy nose with elegant spicy character – cassis, brambles, vanilla, licorice and dark chocolate. Full-bodied palate shows broad fruity character with intense spicy and toasty flavours. Long warming finish.



16 Colgin Tychson Hill Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

91 p D 8 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2020

Intense, deep purple colour. Seductive floral nose with fresh ripe cassis aromas. Medium-bodied and elegant palate with good concentration of fruit. Firm and persistent tannic structure. Long, spicy and tight finish.

TASTING NOTES IN RANKING ORDER



17 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars S.L.V. Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

91 p D 8 h / G 3 h
2010 / 2020
Moderately intense ruby colour. Complex and very intensive nose that shows black fruits, dark chocolate, toasty and smoky aromas. Intense and full-bodied palate is rich, firm and concentrated. Spicy and warming finish with mouthdrying tannins. Firm and intense palate that needs ageing to get rounder.



18 Dominus 2007

90 p D 8 h / G 5 h
2010 / 2030
Medium intense ruby red colour. Intense, toasty and roasted coffee nose. Medium-bodied, smooth, supple mouthfeel with soft tannins and elegant fruit. Long and harmonious finish that has dark chocolate flavours.



19 Pahlmeyer Proprietary Red 2007

90 p D 9 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2025
Deep, purple colour. Robust and rich nose with dark chocolate, ripe black currants and touch of roasted coffee. Full-bodied and opulent palate that has polished tannins, supple acidity and jammy fruitiness. The wine is very concentrated, expressive and harmonious.



20 Dalla Valle Maya 2007

90 p D 12 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2030
Moderately intense purple colour. Closed, slightly dusty nose with jammed black fruits with spicity tones. Intense medium-bodied palate delivers jammed fruitiness with fresh black currant and bramble flavours. Firm tannic structure. A long, spicy, and warming finish. The wine has potential but is currently closed.



21 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cask 23 Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

90 p D 8 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2025
Moderately intense, ruby colour. Intense, ripe cassis notes combined with spicy tobacco nuances. Full-bodied, supple acidity and bit edgy tannins. Ripe black fruit character forms a supple balance. Moderately long spicy and mineral finish with tar and smokiness.



22 Opus One 2007

90 p D 7 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2025
Deepish, purple colour. Pronounced, black currant nose with toastiness and vanilla tones. Full-bodied, spicy, oaky and tannic palate forms a tight mouthfeel. Ripe black currant fruit and high alcohol are making the palate a bit softer. The aftertaste is concentrated and oaky. The wine needs for at least ten years bottle ageing to open and become harmonious.

TASTING NOTES IN RANKING ORDER



23 Bond Melbury 2007

90 p D 10 h / G 6 h
2010 / 2018
Deep, ruby red colour. Intense, rich and toasty nose with touch of violets. Full-bodied and intense palate with ripe black currant fruit, mellow acidity and firm tannins. A bit tight finish.



24 Joseph Phelps Backus Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

90 p D 8 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2022
Moderately deep, ruby colour. Intense and toasty nose with sweet spices, licorice, tar and coconut. Full-bodied and very concentrated palate with toasty oak and spicy flavours. Vivid acidity and firm tannins. Long mouthdrying finish is escorted with oaky and jammed cassis tones.



25 Caymus Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

90 p D 8 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2022
Moderately deep, dark ruby colour. Intense spicy nose with cappuccino and hot chocolate aromas. Full-bodied, intense and jammy palate with sturdy tannins. Long smoky and spicy finish. A robust style.



26 Matriarch 2007

89 p D 10 h / G 6 h
2010 / 2022
Deep, ruby colour. Intense, smoky and toasty nose with new oak, dark chocolate and licorice aromas. Full-bodied, round and smooth palate delivers vanilla, licorice and toasty oak flavours. Warming long finish with jammed and spicy flavours.



27 Realm Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Beckstoffer To- Kalon Vineyard 2007

89 p D 10 h / G 6 h
2010 / 2022
Deep, ruby colour. Intense, smoky and toasty nose with new oak, dark chocolate and licorice aromas. Full-bodied, round and smooth palate delivers vanilla, licorice and toasty oak flavours. Warming long finish with jammed and spicy flavours.



28 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars FAY Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

89 p D 10 h / G 6 h
2010 / 2022
Moderately intense, purple colour. Jammed black fruit, spicy and roasted coffee nose. Silky and smooth palate with polished tannins and long spicy and mineral aftertaste with licorice tones.

TASTING NOTES IN RANKING ORDER



29 Colgin Herb Lamb Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

88 p D 8 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2022
Deep, ruby colour. Rich and opulent nose with dark chocolate and cassia aromas. Full-bodied and powerful palate with polished dry tannins and elegant ripe black fruit. The high level of alcohol is pronounced in the long finish. The wine lacks some persistence and focus.



30 Bond Vecina 2007

88 p D 8 h / G 5 h
2010 / 2025
Deep, dark ruby colour. Elegant nose with floral tones – jasmine flower, ripe raspberries, black currants and smoke. Full-bodied and intense palate. Good dose of jammed black currants, seductive toastiness and chunky tannins. Long and concentrated finish. The wine needs at least 10 to 15 years ageing to deliver its best.



31 Joseph Phelps Insignia 2007

88 p D 8 h / G 5 h
2010 / 2022
Moderately deep, ruby red colour. Rich, intense and complex nose that has pronounced smoky and jammed black fruit aromas. Full-bodied and opulent mouthfeel. The palate shows jammy fruit with silky tannins and heavy oakiness. A warming finish that is highlighted by sweet spicy flavours. The wine lacks bit of persistency.



32 Colgin Cariad Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

88 p D 12 h / G 6 h
2010 / 2030
Deep, purple colour. Powerful nose with smoky, toasty and spicy tones – licorice, gravel and mineral notes. Full-bodied palate with good concentration of acidity, black fruit and minerality. Spicy and mineral finish that is dominated by dry, tight and mouth-drying tannins.



33 Darius II Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

87 p D 8 h / G 5 h
2010 / 2022
Intense, deep, ruby red colour. Opulent, rich and spirity nose with sweet spices, pronounced toastiness and jammed cassia. Full-bodied, very intense, rich and jammy palate with sweet spicy and warming alcoholic finish. The wine will deliver its best after 10–15 years of ageing.



34 Gargiulo 575 OVX 'G Major 7' Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

86 p D 6 h / G 4 h
2010 / 2025
Fairly intense ruby red colour. Pronounced toasty nose with roasted coffee and black fruits. Full-bodied, yet delicate palate with moderately tight tannic and woody mouthfeel. Toastiness and ripe black fruit aromas in the mid palate are overtaken by mouthdrying tannins in a moderately long finish. Very tight and restrained still. The wine benefits from 4–6 years bottle ageing and reaches its peak in 2025.