**SMITH-MADRONE 2015 CABERNET SAUVIGNON COMPILED REVIEWS**

**Terroirist, Isaac Baker, January 25**

Spring Mountain’s Smith-Madrone has long made incredible, age-worthy, unique wines, and their new Cabernet delivers oodles of goodness for not much money.

94 points: Light purple color. Wow, the aromas pop with juicy yet crunchy red and black currants, plum skins, along with earthy, rocky tones, graphite, coffee and violets. Full but balanced so nicely on the palate. Solid tannic structure for aging, vibrant acidity, the mouthfeel sets the stage for smooth black cherries and tart red currants. Fruit is laced with violets, clove, graphite, tobacco, and there are lots of earthy, savory tones that need years to fully show themselves. Gorgeous concentration, yet balanced and lively. Includes 16% Cabernet Franc, aged 18 months in 65% new French oak. For my palate, this is one of the most insane bargains in Napa Cabernet. I’m so stoked this wine exists.

**International Wine Review, Don Winkler, January 22, 2020**

93 points: Sourced from dry farmed vineyards high up (1800’) on Spring Mountain, this is a superb example of mountain Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa. It offers black currant, plum, and berry fruit complemented by dried herbs and mountain underbrush aromas and flavors. It’s highly aromatic, firmly structured, and a delight to drink as it evolves in the glass, revealing a complexity of flavors that matches the bouquet. It shows a youthful exuberance, so additional cellar time will only add to its drinking pleasure.

**Good Vitis, Aaron Menenberg, January 21, 2020**

Welcome to 2020! Our first Try This Wine piece, posted back on July 1, 2018, featured one of our favorite white wines here at Good Vitis, Smith-Madrone’s Napa Valley riesling, which is produced entirely from the winery’s estate vineyards on Spring Mountain. Today, we’re writing about the winery’s 2015 estate cabernet sauvignon. Clearly, we have a bit of a fixation with the winery, and we think it’s for good reason; the wine is excellent and excellently priced.

Stu Smith, one of the three Smith family men working the property and making the wine, has many opinions. One of them is that riesling is a great grape for making wine. Another is that what he and other like-minded producers call “mountain wine” is superior to other wine. By “mountain wine,” Stu means wine made from grapes grown on mountain slopes.

The steeper slopes, elevation and orientation of mountain side vineyards offer particular perks that vineyards planted on flatter ground do not. I’ve written about this before in a piece on merlot. In brief, you get better drainage and more radiant energy than flat land vineyards, which drives flavor concentration and skin development while aiding ripening. While that’s too brief to do the argument justice, it’s not really the point of this post, and, plus, the proof is in the bottle. It’s one reason why you should try this wine; tasting is believing.

Smith-Madrone cabernet sauvignon is priced around $45-65 depending on where you find it, which means for the quality it’s an absolute steal in the Napa cabernet category. I’ve not had another Napa cabernet as good for less than $75, while many of the $100+ bottles don’t match its complexity or elegance.

I’ve been a fan of the 2014 vintage of the cabernet, which is still available on shelves. I tasted the 2015 for the first time about two weeks ago and was blown away. I reached out to Stu to talk about it briefly, and he described the 2015 as “a clean, pure expression of mountain cabernet.” I found it to be a substantive wine layered with complexity, but far from heavy or thick. The tannins are ever-present but refined and encourage the flavors rather than extinguish them, a productive feature not found in abundance in Napa. It offers immediate appeal with several hours of decanting and is really impressive on the second night.

This experience with the 2015 is a bit different from the 2014, which as Stu wanted to point out highlights the purpose of Smith-Madrone’s approach to making wine. “2014 was a relatively big vintage. 2015 was on the smaller side. Alcohol is on the low end, and it has good acidity and bright cabernet fruit. 2014 is a bit more lush, fuller, richer. They’re two different styles of wine, and in some ways they show together what we’re trying to do, which is to get the vintage into the glass of wine and not pound a round peg into a square hole. The reason we vintage date [our wines] is to celebrate the diversity of the vintage. It’s a real value to the consumer.”

I gave the 2014 vintage 92 points, which ain’t bad. The 2015, though, well:

Decanted this for an hour and as it revealed itself, it became the best vintage of this wine that I’ve had. The nose is a mountain slope of dark sweet cherry and strawberry, wet barky soil, Herbes de Provence, licorice, molasses, black olive and smoke. It is medium plus in weight with elegant and refined tannin and acute acid that combine to form a traditional Old World style structure. The flavors are layered and extended aging will reveal them all. Right now they include salty cherry, strawberry, plum and rhubarb fruit that cohabitate nicely with olive tapenade, black pepper, rose water and graphite. I’d sit on this for at least another five years and then enjoy through 2030. 94 points. Value: A.

This is a wine to try because of the quality, value and intrigue it offers as an elegant, Old World-style wine with a mountain slope twist that drinks well now and will drink well into the future.

**Washington Wine Blog, Owen Bargreen, January 8, 2020**

I recently had the chance to review the wines from this historic estate in Napa and was hugely impressed with the quality of wines from the warm vintages of 2015 and 2016. 92 points: marvelous with its balance and poise, with deep darker fruit flavors.

**BiggerThanYourHead, Frederic Koeppel, December 16, 2019**

The color is a deep yet radiant ruby-purple hue; there’s no mistaking this cabernet for anything other than mountain-grown, with its array of iodine and iron, dusty heather, sage and rosemary; a few moments in the glass unfold layers of black currants and raspberries, with notes of plums, black olives, bell pepper and tar; though the wine displays plenty of structure in its stony, graphite infused tannins and star-bright acidity, its perfect balance and poise lend surprising elegance and balletic grace; these qualities are not contradicted by but bolstered by a chiseled, granitic finish. Now through 2026 to ’28. Excellent.

**WrittenPalate, Cori Solomon, December 23, 2019**

Definitely one of the pioneers in the Spring Mountain area of Napa, I remember discovering their hideaway winery in the 80s. Revisiting them today, I found they have developed a nice style. You might call their Cabernet Sauvignon an old styled Napa wine. This winery represents a high elevation Cabernet. The wine consists of mostly Cabernet Sauvignon mixed with Cabernet Franc while it ages for 18 months in 65% new and 35% one-year-old French oak. The wine displays the herbaceous green pepper and spice offset by dark fruit and typical of many old school Napa wineries.

**Orange County Register, Paul Hodgins, November 28, 2019**

Stuart Smith, who founded this winery in 1971, almost lost his Spring Mountain estate to wildfire a couple of years back, which would have eliminated one of Napa’s best higher-altitude wineries. Smith says this about the 2015 Cab: “Aromatically the wine is thrilling in its laser-like focus and intensity of fragrance. At the same time, it delivers remarkable complexity; every inhalation reveals a new and surprising element. Bright fruit, dark fruit, black currants, red plums, lavender, spices violets, green olives, all are present and more. The aroma is so intriguing it is an end in itself.”

**Decanter, Dave Allen, Stephen Brook, Terry Kandylis, December 2019 Californian Cabernet 2015 Panel Tasting**

90-94 points, Highly Recommended: Creamy start to the palate, good freshness and very drinkable. Shows some leafy and tomato characters with a bit of dried fruit and sage. Long finish. Drinking window 2022-2032.

**Stephen McConnell, Wine1Percent, November 15, 2019**

Medium ruby with an abrupt pink edge. Despite the transparency, it manages a typical glass-staining ability. Heavy perfume pours from the glass, but right where you might expect banana or vanilla, it heads green, averting flabbiness with petrichor and minerality. Blackberry and pomegranate continue their onslaught, overturning piles of wet decomposing wood and black earthworm-filled loam. The cassis and licorice continue building with heavy applications of air, but equally suffocating is the matching build-up of fruit. This thing just CAN’T slow down. Liniment, wet wool and Vicks take their turns through the nose, but like every other amazing nuance of the bouquet, are spread thin on softly-undulating waves of fruit so crystal-clear you can see the bottom many feet below.

Decanted heavily. I can’t wait to taste this thing. Do I have to explain about Smith-Madrone? Nah… I didn’t think so. If you know, ya know. If you don’t, there’s more for the rest of us. They only make 3 wines, all estate, all hillside, all dry-farmed: A Cab, a Chard and a Riesling. Been doing it the same way high up on Spring Mt. forever and it’s getting harder and harder to find wineries where NOTHING changes to suit marketing styles and popular palates as the years progress, Smith-Madrone remains one of the few who stick to the basics, what works, a formula tried and true and not trendy.

In the mouth, an absolute blockade of impenetrable fruit packs every pore. Bright but ridiculously concentrated SHRILL acid conjoining and shearing it apart–first to balance the blackness and then to leverage the concentration. One of those wines you taste with bling-bros raised on tourist-wines and they’re like, Hmmm is there even fruit? OMG YES This is EXACTLY the kind of fruit you WANT at this age. You shouldn’t have to go looking for it, but it also shouldn’t be flopping around giving you cavities. Pie cherry goes directly into the dryness of angels, gunpowder jasmine tannin doing the lord’s work on your tongue and enamel.

Buy 3 cases of this and drink one per year.