

Wine Wisdom

Superior Scores Are Not Given; They're Earned

by Ben Narasin

(NAPSA)—In the quest for exceptional products, and wine in particular, there lies a constant tension between quality and price. The easiest route to defining value before the bottle is even opened is the score a wine has earned from the experts we trust, especially the coveted scores of 90 points and above, which testify to the highest-quality wines.

These highly rated wines are a tribute to the passion of masterful winemakers dedicated to creating exceptionally well-regarded wines that we can enjoy. With their depth of character, flavor and sense of terroir, one sip tells us that the distinguished scores these wines receive are not freely given, but hard won. Wine producers don't receive a 90-point rating due to luck or caprice—the ratings are earned.

Blending Art And Science

As any chef is made better by the best ingredients, great winemakers rely on the best grapes from the regions most suited to the varietals of their choice. "Since 1933, my family has traveled Napa Valley and Sonoma to find the best grapes out there," says Mike Martini, third-generation winemaker for Louis M. Martini Winery. For the Martini family, "one grape always wins: Cabernet Sauvignon."

Martini was born into winemaking, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Louis M. Martini, and his father, Louis P. Martini. To refine his own winemaking style, he learned through observation and formal study. Martini traveled through France with the legendary Andre Tchelistcheff and earned a degree from the renowned winemaking program at the University of California, Davis.

Mike's style is one that "epitomizes the balance between art and science," because, he says, "you really can't make great wine without one or the other."

Martini's approach yields a signature flavor profile of "black cherry on the nose and the richness of these flavors on the palate," which earned some of the highest praise from one of the most respected wine critics, Robert M. Parker, Jr. (@RobertMParkerJr). Parker recently tweeted 1 Nov 13: "Best Cabernet in world for \$17... 2010 and 2011 Louis Martini Sonoma [County Cabernet Sauvignon.]" The 2010 Napa Valley



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Cabernet Sauvignon also earned an impressive 91 points from wine reviewonline.com, August 2013.

Creating Balance in the Barrel

Another winemaker producing highly regarded, top-rated wines in Napa Valley shares Martini's view of winemaking, but has opted for a different grape as his primary muse. "If I could look to one grape to illustrate the depth of our portfolio, it would definitely be Chardonnay," says Ralf Holdenried, winemaker for William Hill Estate Winery.

Like Martini, Holdenried first came to winemaking through his family-owned vineyard in Germany and later through formal education, both in Europe and at UC Davis. To Holdenried, "winemaking is a balance. It takes both creativity and scientific knowledge to craft the best wine possible."

He leverages the delicate art and science of the barrel to fine-tune the flavor profiles of his wines, particularly his Chardonnay. "As the wine ages in the barrel, the flavors of the wine marry with the notes of oak until we achieve a well-integrated, balanced blend," he says.

Holdenried captures the best from the terroir of Napa to create optimal flavors, by using grapes grown in cooler climate Carneros with those from the warmer St. Helena region. "The cooler climate contributes lively green apple flavors and a backbone of bright acidity. The baked apple and depth come from the grapes grown in a warmer climate. The combination produces a rich, ripe wine with pronounced acidity."

Holdenried's determination to achieve just the right balance has not gone unnoticed—his William Hill 2012 Napa Valley Chardonnay earned a coveted 91 points, Editors' Choice, from Wine Enthusiast, April 2014.

A Cool Growing Season

Edna Valley Vineyard is a winery that leverages its California Central Coast property for Chardonnay, its flagship wine. The eponymous property, nestled five miles from the Pacific Ocean, has one of the longest and coolest growing seasons in California.

Ben Narasin is an entrepreneur and venture investor. He also writes extensively on wine, food, travel and luxurious living.