

## **Rocca Family Cabernet Wows Bordeaux!**

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*Adam Lechmere / Decanter*

California has triumphed again at an extraordinary tasting at Chateau Brane-Cantenac – but this time there was no competition.

Last Friday's blind tasting of 12 iconic California wines was attended by dozens of Bordeaux top brass, among them May-Eliane de Lencquesaing of Chateau Pichon-Lalande, Christian Seely of AXA Millesimes, Hubert de Bouard of Chateau Angelus, Kees Van Leeuwen of Chateau Cheval-Blanc, Eric d'Aramon of Chateau Figeac, and Liliane Barton of Leoville Barton.

Visiting American winemakers included Chuck Wagner of Caymus, Amelia Ceja from Ceja Vineyards, and Ravenswood founders Jim and Julia Wisner. Guests tasted and marked the wines using the 20-point scale, and ranked them 1-12. The tasting was organised by the American Vintners Club - all the wines were 2002 Cabernets, and all have been top performers in previous club tastings.

There were surprises. Ridge's Monte Bello, one of America's – and the world's – most lauded wines, came 11th out of 12. Last position was taken by the Isosceles Reserve from Justin Vineyards in Paso Robles.

**In first position was Rocca Family Vineyards**, followed by Caymus Vineyard's Special Selection, and in third, L'Aventure's Estate Selection.

The tasting was characterised by vigorous and good-humoured debate. As Brane-Cantenac owner Henri Lurton said in his introductory speech, 'We don't often do this sort of thing [examine California wines in depth] in Bordeaux.'

The Bordelais were fascinated. 'I very much enjoyed it. It was very interesting to be able to "lose" Bordeaux and think of California for a while,' de Lencquesaing said, adding that she thought only one or two of the wines had true potential for ageing.

Van Leeuwen was impressed by the elegance of the wines. 'I had expected more blockbusters, but there was much less extraction than I thought there would be.'

He added, 'You have fixed ideas about how wines will taste but the reality is very different – and much more complex.'

Brane-Cantenac's marketing director Corinne Conroy, who initiated the tasting, said, 'It is very educational and enlightning . A lot of people in Bordeaux are open minded and curious and on Friday, and it showed.'

For their part, the visitors were delighted to be there. Jim Wisner, addressing the room, said, 'Bordeaux is an animal many of us had never seen before, and we were unsure how the wines would be received. But it has been wonderful. When I see all the Bordeaux people of importance here today, I am super-pleased about that.'

**The wines** (ranking in brackets):

Rocca Family Vineyards, Cabernet Sauvignon, Yountville, Napa Valley (1)

Caymus Vineyards, Special Selection, Napa Valley (2)

L'Aventure, Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (3)

Wente Vineyards Nth Degree, Karl Wente Cabernet Sauvignon, Livermore Valley (4)

O'Shaughnessy Estate Winery, Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (5)

Ramey Wine Cellars, Jericho Canyon Vineyard Cabernet Blend, Napa Valley (6)

Robert Craig Wine Cellars, Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (7)

Flora Springs, Rutherford Hillside Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (8)

ZD Wines, Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (9)

Palmaz Vineyards "Gaston", Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (10)

Ridge Vineyards, Monte Bello, Santa Cruz Mountains (11)

Justin Vineyards, Isosceles Reserve, Paso Robles (12)