

Cinnabar Vineyards and Winery

Enveloped by scenic hills, blessed with rich soil, and cooled by coastal breezes, we are fortunate to live in a valley where some of the world's premium wines originate. In an effort to learn about the best vintages the area has to offer, we went straight to the winemakers. This month, George Troquato, of Cinnabar Vineyards and Winery in Saratoga, recommends his winery's choicest Cabernet, as well as three of his favorites from Napa Valley chosen for their food friendliness and flavor. All are excellent wines that will beautifully adorn your table.

George Troquato's Stellar Picks

2001 Cinnabar Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (\$40)

Cinnabar's "island vineyards" overlook Silicon Valley from the eastern rim of the Santa Cruz Mountains at 1,650 feet of elevation. The temperate climate and weathered mountain soil create ideal conditions for growing small, intensely flavored wine grapes. The 2001 growing season produced a lusty wine with aromas of blueberry, loam, bay leaf, and vanilla. The palate shows creamy dark fruit, cedar, and spice. All are anchored by fine-grained tannins and well-balanced acidity. The lengthy finish will complement tomato-based shellfish stew or filet mignon and a Cabernet reduction sauce topped with crumbled Gorgonzola.

2000 Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon, Pine Ridge Winery (\$70)

This Pine Ridge wine presents elements of grace and sophistication. Fragrances of toasted oak, dark fruit, and cocoa lead to flavors of black currant and plum. This medium bodied wine shows finesse, a velvety mouthfeel, and a judicious use of oak. It finishes with dark fruit, soft tannins, mocha, and sweet vanilla. Serve with pasta smothered in a thick marinara.

2001 Rutherford Salus Cabernet Sauvignon, Staglin Family Vineyard (\$60)

The hedonistic Salus Cabernet is enjoyable with or without food. The nose of this full-bodied wine has tons of black and red berries while the middle is packed with ripe cherries, cassis, and vanilla. Integrated tannins and balanced acids help form supple sensations on the tongue. The full, fat finish will complement Stilton or Brie with crusty French bread.

2000 Napa Valley Affinity, Robert Craig Wine Cellars (\$40)

Reminiscent of a complex zinfandel, this Robert Craig blend works in contrast to the other selections. This Bordeaux-style blend boasts great color, ripe plum aromas, and jammy fruit flavors. The soft tannins create an extremely delicate expression in the mouth. The finish is simple, but it has nice fruitiness and length. Drink with meat loaf topped with a layer of seasoned, diced Roma tomatoes.

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Winemaker George Troquato

