

# Robb Report

FOOD & DRINK / WINE

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## 11 Outstanding Reds From Famed Napa Winemakers That Won't Break the Bank

The rise of second labels from the likes of Opus One, BV and more are reason for oenophiles to rejoice.

By SARA L. SCHNEIDER 



Photo: Courtesy of Lail Vineyards

No one in their right mind would see good fortune in 20 months of a global pandemic. Yet for those of us—to be perfectly honest—for whom relief comes in the form of a glass of wine at the end of the day, there's been a silver lining. As dinner shifted from restaurant dining rooms to takeout and delivery, and winery shopping went online, patterns emerged that made it a little easier to ride out the pain. Bottles from restaurant wine lists became available with that takeout, and the wine options delivery companies offered became almost endless. Savvy vintners started beaming their rich tasting experiences right into our living rooms via Zoom.

Now, as restaurant dining is an option once again, and wine country is fully open to visitors (albeit mostly by appointment—another pandemic adjustment that only enhances the experience), some of those accommodations seem likely to stay in place. But one consumer-friendly trend that has emerged from the era has the potential to improve our wine consumption at home for the foreseeable future: a small flurry of “little sister” wines—new labels created by exclusive (and elusive) brands at wallet-friendly prices that over-deliver with good fruit and great winemaking. In broad strokes, many of these so-called “second” wines are products of pedigreed estate vineyards, made from fruit that didn’t quite make the cut for the winery’s flagship bottling—a perfect win-win use of grapes that have enjoyed leaf-by-leaf farming alongside the barrels that did make the cut. Others are blended from great vineyards across the region, the fruit acquired through the vintner’s or acclaimed winemaker’s grower connections. (Who you know matters in Napa Valley.) In all cases, though, the “decommissioned” wine benefits from the skill of star winemakers.

Of course, second wines aren’t a new invention. Pahlmeyer has had its Jayson, and Opus One its Overture. As Beth Novak Milliken, president and CEO of Spottswoode, quipped to me once, “Our members have to have something to drink while our Spottswoode Estate [a coveted acquisition] is coming around in their cellars.” Her solution: Lydenhurst, a terrific Cabernet made from both the Spottswoode Estate Vineyard as well as acclaimed family-owned vineyards from other parts of Napa Valley. Which brings me to one more advantage of “little sister” wines—many are crafted to be enjoyable at an earlier age than their older sibs. What better excuse (along with the lower price tags, of course) to grab a bottle on a whim to punch up taco Tuesday!

These 11 “seconds,” old-timers and new, do their older siblings proud. We’ve listed the price of the flagships’ current releases, to let you know just how much you’ll save.

## **Blueprint 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley, from Lail Vineyards**



2019 Blueprint  
Photo: Courtesy of Lail Vineyards

*Flagship wine: J. Daniel Cuvée, \$275, 100 points for the 2018 from Jeb Dunnuck and 99 from the Advocate’s Lisa Perrotti-Brown.*

The 2019 Blueprint from Lail Vineyards, in the hands of winemakers Philippe Melka and Maayan Koschitzky, is a rich, inky, generous beauty, ready to sip (or maybe gulp) right now. Fresh-turned loam opens, delicately layered with rose petal, cedar, graphite, espresso, blackberry and cardamom aromas. The palate is all about plush fruit—mulberry liqueur—tempered by savory crushed herbs and dark chocolate. Ripe tannins carry into a lingering finish.

**BUY NOW: \$90**

