

# Wine Spectator

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## BLOCKBUSTER CABERNETS FROM NAPA

ANNUAL TASTING REPORT

**WINE SPECTATOR  
ANNOUNCES  
\$10 MILLION GIFT  
WINE EXPERIENCE  
CELEBRATES 40 YEARS  
RISING STARS OF NAPA  
HONORING JOSÉ ANDRÉS  
WOMEN IN  
SPARKLING WINE**



# Wineries *To* Watch

Four new Cabernet producers making exceptional wines



Bella Oaks owner Suzanne Deal Booth

## RETURN ADDRESS { BELLA OAKS }

Insiders might recognize the Bella Oaks name from the long run of Heitz bottlings from the site. Planted in 1973 by Belle and Barney Rhodes, the vineyard was among the first in Napa devoted exclusively to Cabernet Sauvignon at that time. Heitz began purchasing the fruit in 1976 and continued to produce its single-vineyard version through the 2008 vintage.

Enter Suzanne Deal Booth, who in 2010 bought the vineyard from the Rhodes' relatives, the Gargiulos, who had taken it over after Belle and Barney died in the 2000s. Booth provided the fruit to her neighbors the Staglins for a joint venture under their label from 2011 through 2016. She then met Nigel Kinsman, winemaker for Accendo and his own Kinsman Eades, and they decided to create a new project from the site. After choosing not to release their '16 and '17 vintages, the pair has released the 2018 as their debut.

Of the site's approximately 20 acres, 12.5 are under vine, divided into two blocks of equal size. There has been some replanting along the way, and the vineyard now includes Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. Block 1 was replanted again after 2019 and is not yet back in production. Block 2 was replanted in 2016 and is already cranking along nicely, with the vines enjoying their well-drained footing of Bale gravelly loam. David Abreu handles the farming, which is being done biodynamically, and the site is certified organic.

The 2018 blends 12% Petit Verdot and 8% Cabernet Franc with the Cabernet Sauvignon—relatively high percentages. “That’s what the vintage and vineyard gave,” says Kinsman, who ferments mainly in stainless steel with a touch in barrel, before moving entirely to barrel for malolactic. Aging lasted for 22 months in 82% new oak, both factors that might shift in accordance with the vintage.

—James Molesworth

**95 Bella Oaks** Rutherford 2018

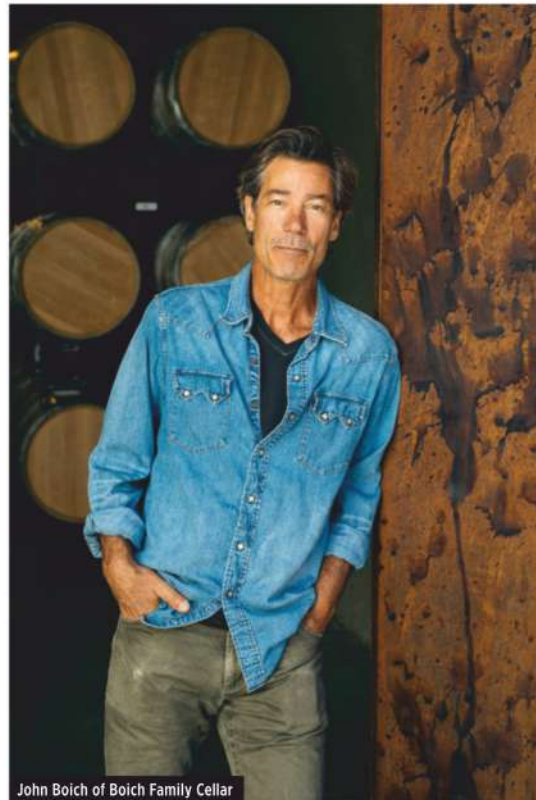
**\$275**

## MOUNTAINMAN { BOICH FAMILY }

The retiree-turned-vintner story is common in Napa, but John Boich's tale is more bootstrapped than most. After purchasing 10 acres of raw land high up on Mount Veeder in 1997, he spent weekends sleeping in a camping shed, toiling to clear the rugged terrain for eight years before planting his first vine.

This was a passion project at the time, but as Boich's day job as an economist and financial analyst in San Francisco was nearing its end in 2011, he decided to get serious about wine. “The more time I spent there, the more I loved it, so I began figuring out how it could be a bigger part of my life.”

A friend introduced Boich to Jeff Ames of Rudius in Napa, who makes the wines for Tor and consults for several other small labels. Boich had planted Syrah on his property, but there was too little of it to be commercial, so Ames procured a few rows of Cabernet Sauvignon from Rutherford's Beckstoffer Georges III Vineyard to get them started.



John Boich of Boich Family Cellar





Fe Wines on Napa Valley's Spring Mountain

“  
*It's a dream-come-true portfolio. As a brand, nobody necessarily knows who Boich is, but they know the vineyards.*  
 ”

—JOHN BOICH

From there, Boich added other single-vineyard Cabernets from Oakville's famed Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard and the nearby Missouri Hopper. The last piece of the puzzle was an estate vineyard, Wall Road, that Boich purchased in 2012. The site, which included 3.5 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc that were planted in 1999, sits at the northern tip of the appellation at an elevation of 1,850 feet.

“It's a true mountain site,” explains Ames, noting that the wines from the Wall Road vineyard are very tannic, so he aims to be selective with the barrels he uses, favoring those that add complementary flavor compounds rather than additional oak tannins.

Boich has since added two partners, Jnani Matson and Ed Kuchar, and grown from 250 to 2,500 cases, including a regional Cabernet dubbed NVS and a Chardonnay from Ritchie Vineyard in Sonoma's Russian River Valley, in addition to the four single-vineyard Cabernets. “It's a dream-come-true portfolio,” says Boich, noting that his mission was always to make a small number of fantastic wines. “As a brand, nobody necessarily knows who Boich is, but they know the vineyards—and that adds brand equity.”

—Aaron Romano

<b>94</b>	<b>Boich Family</b>	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2018	<b>\$225</b>
<b>94</b>	<b>Boich Family</b>	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer Vineyard Georges III 2018	<b>\$170</b>

## IRONCLAD CABERNET { FE WINES }

Jon and Joanne Goldstein had no intention of making wine when they purchased land in Napa Valley to build a home in 2012. Yet, when introduced to winemaker Aaron Pott through their realtor, they asked him for his opinion on their 17 acres of wilderness on Spring Mountain.

“He came to us and told us we should make wine,” says Joanne. In addition to his namesake brand, Pott consults for more than a dozen wineries in Napa. He says his first visit to the property reminded him of visiting a potential Spring Mountain vineyard site 10 years earlier with longtime Beringer vineyard manager Bob Steinhauer. “After looking at the soil, he said, ‘This is a no-brainer!’ and walked off the property,” laughs Pott, referring to Steinhauer. “I had the same experience here.”

For the Goldsteins, Pott is the X-factor that has brought the property to life. “He had the vision of what kind of wine to make, even though we hadn't committed to making wine,” Jon says.

Over the next five years, the Goldsteins prepared the land with Pott's help, establishing 6 acres of vines, about two-thirds of them Cabernet Sauvignon, along with individual blocks of Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot.

The inaugural 2018s make for an impressive debut. Pott aims to express the site through minimal intervention and indigenous yeast



The team at Wheeler Farms

fermentations. The brand's name, which refers to the atomic symbol for iron, draws inspiration from the volcanic, Aiken red, iron-rich soil of the property. With total production at about 750 cases, the couple is only producing two wines for the moment: a Cabernet and a proprietary blend called 26, the atomic weight of iron. "It took a lot of time and decisions and effort just to get the first vintage into the bottle," Jon says. "But we're optimistic about the future, and the vineyard is only going to get better."

—A.R.

*"It sounds kind of cliché, but I try to let the vineyard speak. I want to let the voice of the vineyard scream from the rooftops."*

—NIGEL KINSMAN

<b>94 Fe Wines</b> 26 Spring Mountain District 2018	<b>\$125</b>
<b>94 Fe Wines</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District Fe 2018	<b>\$175</b>

## ALL IN THE FAMILY { WHEELER FARMS }

**T**his new project combines the vision of an accomplished Napa winemaking family with a historic estate and a talented winemaker. The result is an impressive portfolio of expressive, detailed Cabernets.

The family is the Araujos, who managed the iconic Eisele Vineyard for more than 23 years before selling their estate in 2013. Immediately after the sale, the Araujos got back into wine, starting with their Accendo label, blending high quality Cabernet grapes from around Napa. Their new home, Wheeler Farms, also inspired

J.H. Wheeler, the Araujos' next line of wines, which focuses on single-vineyard expressions from top vineyards in and around Oakville.

Wheeler Farms was originally established in 1871 by Charles H. Wheeler, one of the largest landowners in the area, near St. Helena. Eleven acres remained in the Wheeler family until 2013, when the Araujos and a small group of investors purchased the plot, which now includes 7 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc. There's a familiar face making the wines: Nigel Kinsman, who was also winemaker for the Araujos at

Eisele (and has now been tapped by Bella Oaks as well).

"It sounds kind of cliché these days, but I try to let the vineyard speak," Kinsman says of his approach. "I want to let the voice of the vineyard scream from the rooftops." His focus, he adds, is more on structure than flamboyance. "I like to think of my winemaking style in general as New World with Old World sensibilities." This includes careful sorting, three to five days of cold soaking, and native fermentation for up to 35 days, drained directly into barrels.

Kinsman also helped design the efficient and high-tech Wheeler Farms winery, which has become a custom-crush facility home to several boutique Napa brands, including Bella Oaks, Tor, Vice Versa and Kinsman's own eponymous label.

—MaryAnn Worobiec

<b>95 J.H. Wheeler</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer Missouri Hopper Vineyard 2018	<b>\$225</b>
<b>93 J.H. Wheeler</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer Georges III Vineyard 2018	<b>\$225</b>