



words by CATHERINE STEFANI, CERTIFIED SOMMELIER

# "CAB" DRINKER

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**BigLife believes in wine education and wine appreciation—and we believe diligent study makes for the perfect dinner companion. We also believe in salutation and celebration. In the service of this, we asked Catherine Stefani, our in-house certified sommelier, to elaborate on the benefits and the popularity of the Cabernet grape.**

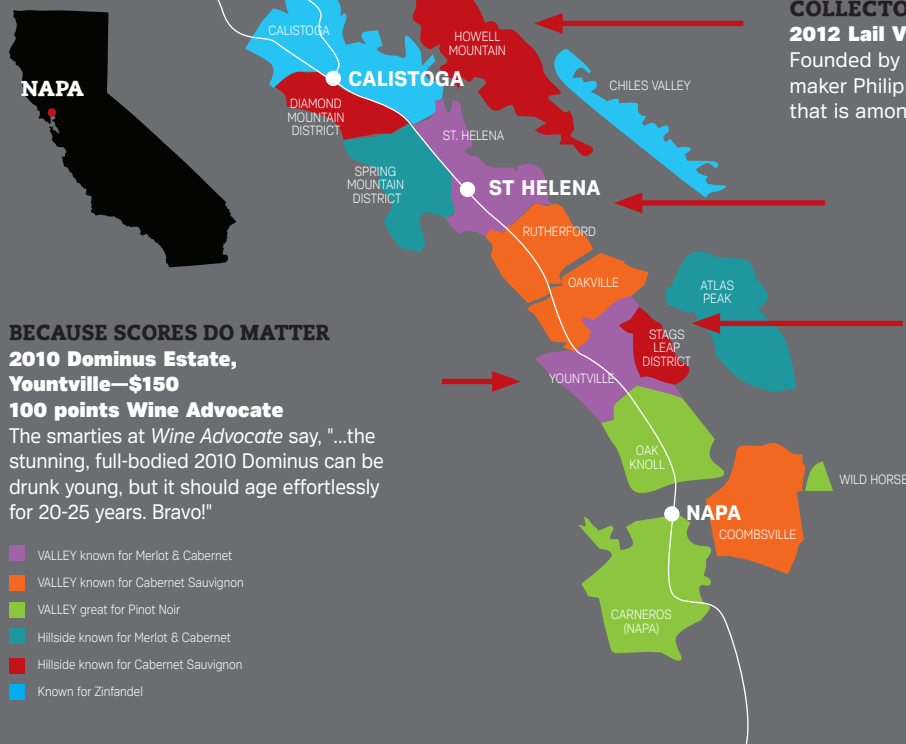
The world's most prestigious wine club includes the likes of Screaming Eagle, Quilceda Creek, Lafite-Rothschild, Ornellaia, Sassicaia, GAJA Darmaji, and Vega Sicilia (blended with Tempranillo). All of these labels have one thing in common—they are premium Cabernets from around the world. For hundreds of years, winemakers and collectors have known the importance of the Cabernet grape. Thomas Jefferson, a noted collector of Lafite, Mouton, and Haut-Brion in the late 1700s, wasn't just lucky—he understood the value and longevity of these wines. The Cab grape today is produced in the most prestigious growing regions around the world, and there is a wide range of quality and prices. And for many reasons, Cabernet is the most collected wine in the world.

For many, the word "Cabernet" served as an introduction into the wine world. Cabernet is a wine that even the most casual of wine drinkers can count on and know what to expect when drinking it. As I've traveled the world talking (and tasting!) wine, one theme I hear over and over is what I like to call the "Confession of a Cab Drinker." You know how it goes—when gathered around a table and the conversation turns to what sort of wine to order with dinner, invariably there is a chorus that goes something like this—"I'm a Cab drinker." Or "I like a big Cab." Or the variation on that, "I always go for a big red." The statement "I usually prefer a Cab" might be the most uttered phrase in the wine world.

Cabernet is a full-bodied red wine with high tannins

and noticeable acidity, often considered a "masculine" wine. As the most widely planted grape worldwide, it's impossible to deny its sheer bravado and prominence in the wine world landscape. There's a seemingly insatiable demand for the grape and for many reasons. On the viticulture side, this is a thick-skinned tannic rugged varietal that can withstand a multitude of growing conditions, weather, soils, and elevation. On the collector front, this varietal is best suited for aging, easily aging 30+ years (with proper storage). And finally and probably most importantly, as wine is traditionally part of any meal, a Cabernet is the most classic wine to pair with food. The tannins in the wine stands up best with high-fat foods—namely red meat.

# napa valley



## BECAUSE SCORES DO MATTER

**2010 Dominus Estate, Yountville—\$150**  
100 points *Wine Advocate*

The smarties at *Wine Advocate* say, "...the stunning, full-bodied 2010 Dominus can be drunk young, but it should age effortlessly for 20-25 years. Bravo!"

## COLLECTOR LABEL

**2012 Lail Vineyards, J. Daniel Cuvée, Howell Mountain, CA—\$175**

Founded by John and Robin Lail, the Lail winery has specialized (under wine-maker Philippe Melka) for years in producing the John Daniel Cuvée, a wine that is among the most prized Napa Cabernets.

## UP & COMER

**2009 Harlan Estates, The Mascot, St. Helena, CA—\$130**

A new project by Will Harlan made from the younger vines of Harlan Estate and BOND. Keep an eye out for this new wine in collector circles.

## A GOOD GET

**Grassi Wine Co, 2011 and 2012 Reserve, Napa Valley, CA 2011—\$75 & 2012 Reserve—\$100**

Grassi Wine Co. has been praised for their Cabernet by *The New York Times* and *Wine Spectator*. According to Eric Asimov of *The NY Times*, the 2011 Grassi Cabernet was his panel's "top bottle—rich, dense yet beautifully balanced." The 2012 Grassi release (\$75) is out and and watch for their first release of the highly-anticipated 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve.

## WHY ARE NAPA WINES SO MUCH PRICIER?

Perfect scores, scarcity, and high demand drive the prices of the wines from the Napa Valley. Average pricing is over \$150 per bottle on most wines.

## KNOW YOUR NAPA<sup>1</sup>

- + The Napa Valley grows 4% of California's entire wine grape harvest.
- + In 1981, Napa became the first designated Californian Viticultural Area (AVA).
- + While Napa enjoys international renown, the valley is one of the smallest winegrowing regions in the world with only one-eighth the planted acreage of Bordeaux.
- + 95% of the Napa wineries are family-owned.
- + The region produces low yields of high-quality grapes.

<sup>1</sup> Napa facts respectfully lifted from the Napa Valley Vintners Association

# washington

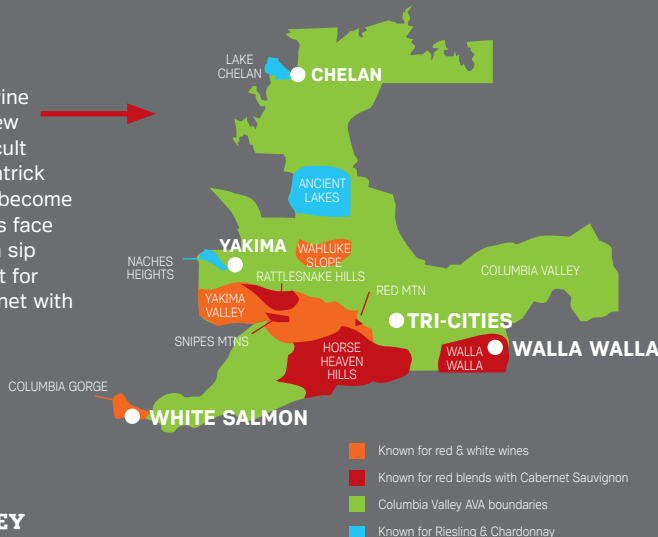
## CULT LABEL

**Sleight of Hand, The Conjurer, Columbia Valley, WA—\$28**

Winemaker Trey Busch is making wine that between a mailing list and a few major markets has gained a huge cult following. One cult member, Neil Patrick Harris, joined their mailing list and become friends with the Solomons. Now, his face graces "The Conjurer" label. Have a sip and try hard not to say, "Legen-wait for it-dary" as a response. It's a Cabernet with a bit of Merlot and Cab Franc.



COLUMBIA VALLEY



## COLLECTOR LABEL

**2012 Leonetti Cellar Reserve, Walla Walla, WA—\$108**

Leonetti, a benchmark estate, helped define the Walla Walla AVA, and the Figgins family continues to represent the finest from the Northwest on the world stage with their Cabernet Sauvignon and Walla Walla Reserve. A Bordeaux blend, the 2012 Reserve is 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, and equal parts Malbec and Petit Verdot.

## KEY FACTS ABOUT WASHINGTON WINES

- + 13 appellations
- + 2nd largest wine grape producer in the U.S.
- + 750+ wineries in Washington
- + Most vineyards planted 1970 or later

# bordeaux

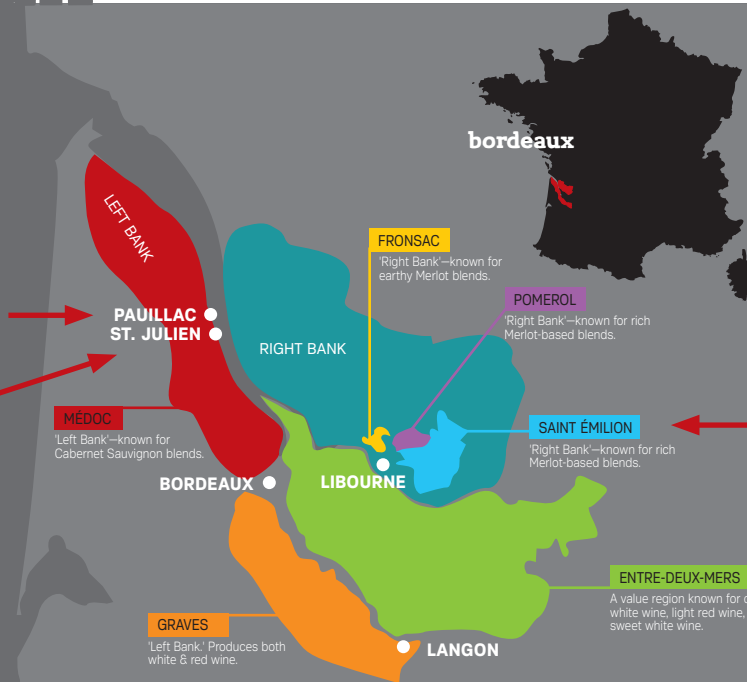
## COLLECTOR LABELS

### 2010 Chateau Duhart-Milon Rothschild. Pauillac, Bordeaux—\$100

Robert Parker says, "If you can't afford Lafite-Rothschild (few can), you still have Duhart-Milon... This blend of 73% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Merlot is fabulous, a dead ringer for Lafite in a great vintage."

### 2009, Chateau Saint Pierre, St. Julien—\$120

This 2009 was one of the top wines of the vintage in terms of quality to price ratio (QPR). The smallest classified growth in St. Julien, this tiny production chateau should be on the short list of every Cabernet-based wine lover's list in both 2009 and 2010. Best bottle ever from this estate. 98 points from *Wine Advocate*.



## STRATEGIES: WINE AS AN INVESTMENT

With the U.S. Dollar playing strong against the Euro, it's a good time to invest in European wines. Look for a vineyard and winemaker with an established lineage with a history of consistent, high-performing wines. and you're in luck if you buy before the high scores are announced! Hello, return-on-investment.

## CELLAR STARTER

### 2009 Chateau Teyssier, Saint-Émilion Grand Cru—\$25

Made by the innovative Jonathan Maltus in St. Émilion—who also produces Le Dome (\$250+)—this '09 (*OK—not Cabernet but a blend of Merlot and Cab Franc—call us cheaters if you must*) offers so much richness and silky fruit with a core backbone of minerality and structure that it will last for years to come even at this price. If you want to start collecting, this is a great way to get your feet wet.

# THE 411 ON CAB

- + DNA testing at UC Davis in 1996 uncovered that the Cab grape is a cross dating back to the 1600s. This popular grape is the progeny of Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc.
- + Tasting notes can often include: black currant, black cherry, blackberry, tobacco, oak, vanilla, cedar, green pepper.
- + In America, Cabernets can contain up to 25% other grapes and still qualify as a Cab.
- + Cabernet has its own day! Held on the Thursday before Labor Day at the end of August, Cabernet Day started in 2010 as a social media drive to attract attention to the varietal. Since then, Cab Day tastings have sprung up in cities around the country.

# Salut!

## MOST POPULAR GRAPE VARIETIES IN BORDEAUX

- + Merlot
- + Cabernet Sauvignon
- + Cabernet Franc
- + Sémillon
- + Sauvignon Blanc

**290,000 VINEYARD ACRES**

# CAB

## MAJOR REGIONS

- + France (~124k acres)
- + Chile (~100k acres)
- + United States (~95k acres)
- + Australia (~65k acres)
- + Italy (unknown)
- + South Africa (~41k acres)
- + Argentina (~16k acres)

(over 650,000 acres worldwide)

# ONLINE

For more of Catherine Stefani's Cabernet selections and to follow Catherine Stefani, visit [biglifemag.com](http://biglifemag.com).

Follow Catherine on Twitter for new discoveries & tasting notes: @CatStefaniWine