

TOP OF THE HEAP: LADERA

In Spanish, *ladera* means “hillside”; for the founders of Ladera, grower-producers Pat and Anne Stotesbery, the word signifies their mission to make exceptional high-elevation wines—one that they’ve been fulfilling for a quarter century. Starting in 1996 with a vineyard on Mount Veeder, they bottled their first harvest of Cabernet Sauvignon two years later, then went on to acquire a property on Howell Mountain in 2000.

They’ve since sold the latter, but winemaker Jade Barrett continues to oversee day-to-day operations, and they haven’t stopped living their dream of producing elegant, food-friendly expressions primarily from Napa Valley mountain fruit. On the contrary, says Pat, “[Our] knowledge and experience . . . is resulting in our finest wines ever.”



Ladera 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$36) This small-production blend of 58% Sauvignon Blanc and 42% Sauvignon Musqué is sourced from Ryan’s Vineyards in the Oak Knoll District AVA. The mouthfeel is in another dimension, while the fruit has a mysterious quality, both ripe and opulent. Penetrating notes of jasmine rice, tangelo, pea tendrils, and lemon sorbet form its juicy core. A luxurious sheath of creaminess sparks with fine acidity and herbal tones. **94** —*M.M.*

Ladera 2016 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$75)

Grapes from Howell Mountain and Calistoga make up this sturdy yet silky red with just a small percentage of Petit Verdot. For all its concentration and power, the mountain fruit enables the wine to maintain its complexity without overwhelming the palate. Cedar and chocolate braid through high-toned blue fruit. Fennel, black tea, soy sauce, and black pepper merge on a highway to heaven. **96** —*M.M.*



Ladera 2016 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley (\$115)

Ladera is Spanish for “hillside,” and this winery lives up to its name with its wonderful interpretations of mountain fruit. Winemaker Jade Barrett refers to 2016 as “one of those classic vintages in Napa Valley, with no serious heat spikes or threat of rain. Our Cabernet Sauvignon was able to mature gradually.” Thanks to that maturity, luxury comes in via a blissfully generous array of black and blue fruit. While dark chocolate paints the palate, sturdy tannins are bound with fine acidity and a balanced richness. **97** —*M.M.*



Ladera 2018 Chardonnay, Pillow Road Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$55)

The vineyard’s 10-mile proximity to the Pacific forms this wine’s alert, eloquent personality, and sur lie aging in French oak for 15 months provides its lush texture. A veil of chamomile and custard surrounds a creamy core. Daffodil and lemon blossom merge to create an acute sense of focus on the palate, where they’re bolstered by high-toned acidity. **95** —*M.M.*

