

A detailed line-art illustration in a single blue color on a grey background. The central focus is a circular emblem containing the text '34th ANNUAL' and 'BEST OF THE BEST'. Radiating from this center are various luxury items: a rocket ship in space at the top, a bottle of spirits on the left, a trench coat and hat on the left, a large watch on the right, a camera on the right, a yacht on the bottom left, a sports car on the bottom right, and a grand building with palm trees at the bottom. The entire scene is framed by a border of stars and decorative lines.

# Robb Report

34th ANNUAL

## BEST OF THE BEST

REAL ESTATE • GEAR • SPIRITS • DESIGN • MARINE • AUTOS • STYLE • WATCHES • AVIATION • JEWELRY • CIGARS • TRAVEL • ART • DINING • WINE • ANTHROPOLOGY

LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE





ONE TO WATCH

### Yannick Benjamin

While most sommeliers want to be recognized for their blind-tasting skills or pairing expertise, Yannick Benjamin possesses not only that prized palate but also an innate sense of fairness that has led to a pioneering inclusiveness. Through this rather unique combination, he may have changed the way restaurants will be designed going forward. Confined to a wheelchair since a 2003 car accident rendered him paralyzed from the waist down, Benjamin sold wine in a retail shop and worked as a sommelier before opening Contento in Manhattan's East Harlem last year. He added a wheelchair-height bar and tables, adaptive cutlery and braille menus. The restaurant's staff undergoes sensitivity training. "Our goal at Contento is to get rid of any anxieties someone with a disability may have when they go out to eat and make them feel as free as possible," says Benjamin. Contento's award-winning wine list is also inclusive, though in a different way: It highlights wines from regions often left off the fine-dining menus, such as older-vintage icon wines from Chile and Argentina and standouts such as a rosé from Chateau Musar in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley or a sparkling made with indigenous Armenian grapes from Kaush winery. The wine list also showcases wineries that promote social and environmental programs. One final note: Benjamin also founded "Wine on Wheels," a series of charitable events that bring sommeliers, wine and the public together to raise money to benefit individuals with limited mobility.

ILLUSTRATION BY PHILIP J. ANDERSON

### PINOT NOIR

#### FLOWERS

2019 Cielo, Pinot Noir,  
Sonoma Coast, Calif.

Mountain wines often have a lauded intensity of both aroma and flavor, with tannins that speak of years to come in the cellar. Flowers Vineyards capitalized on these qualities with a complex new Pinot Noir from its Sea View Ridge site. After doing some soil studies with terroir experts, the winery learned the specifics of what lay beneath its vines: At Sea View Ridge, for example, within the same block, the soils range from 90 percent stone to 50 percent stone just 20 vines away. This new knowledge gave longtime winemaker Chantal Forthum "more precision in how we farm, how we pick and how we make wine." Her deep understanding of the site combined with this recent research allowed her to connect all the dots to fully magnify the terroir in her winemaking. \$125

### NEWCOMER

#### STALWORTH

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon,  
Rutherford, Napa Valley

It's hard to find a 2018 Napa wine made by a talented winemaker that isn't excellent. And Stalworth, in the hands of Celia Welch, stands out, especially as a newcomer in the region. Its name reflects the tenacity of owners and second-generation winemakers Tim and Sabrina Persson. After moving to Napa in 2012 to run the family business, they decided to modernize and focus on making premium Cabs. But just as they were getting underway, they experienced a series of natural disasters: from an earthquake in 2014 to the 2015 drought to a landslide in 2016 to smoke taint from the 2017 wildfires. Finally, the weather gods delivered a near-perfect growing season to the Perssons in 2018, and Stalworth could be made. It reflects the best of the Rutherford bench, with aromas of dark, ripe cherries and black raspberries and hints of mine. Softened tannins lend an elegant mouthfeel, and the finish lingers with hints of vanilla and that earthy Rutherford dust. \$250

### SAD TO SEE IT GO

#### RUDIUS

2017 Kaley Elizabeth,  
Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville,  
Napa Valley

We liked this wine so much we included it in our Robb Report 672 Wine Club, but we were heartbroken to learn that the 2017 is the final vintage that vintner Jeff Ames will make of it. The fruit was all in—and in barrel—before that year's wildfires ripped through the vineyard, but sadly the 30-year-old vines burned down to their roots. And what a way to go out. This wine is something of a blaze of glory, tantalizing with wafts of roasted game bird on the nose, giving way to more fruity and herbal scents. On the palate, it's a perfect balance of acid and fruit, with baking spices on the finish. Rudius wines are a passion project for Ames, who has won acclaim for the 100-point bottles of Tor he also makes. \$135

### BUCKING THE SINGLE-VINEYARD TREND

#### ACCENDO

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon,  
Napa Valley

Champions of terroir seem to have narrowed the concept into something of an obsession in single-vineyard wines. Burgundy, with its mosaic of tiny crus, might be the poster child for this. In the US, Bart and Daphne Araujo know the concept well, having played a part in elevating the trend in Napa. However, in 2013, the Araujos embarked on tastings that led them back to the balance and longevity of earlier Napa Valley reds—wines made from multiple sites across the valley. So for their new Accendo Cellars brand, they pivoted to the art of the blend, mingling fruit from a mix of the valley's most coveted vineyards, the strengths of each chosen wine, according to Bart, complementing the high points of all the others. The result is their Accendo 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, which was awarded 100 points by Antonio Galloni of Vinous. It's a wine both powerful and plush—ripe-plum and black-raspberry flavors layered with savory notes, for perfect balance. \$365



By SARA L. SCHNEIDER

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