

FIVE TO WATCH

VALLEY HEROES

The winds of change roll through Napa apace, with new names debuting on a regular basis. We select five wineries that have not only made their mark in the past, but also aim to dominate in the future.

1. Accendo Cellars

BART and DAPHNE ARAUJO



Valley Nobility

Accendo Cellars is the newest venture from Bart and Daphne Araujo, who in 1990 purchased the historic Eisele Vineyard. Under their care, the wines from the Eisele Vineyard continued their run of excellence, and Araujo Estate quickly rose to join the ranks of Napa's greatest wineries.

Just weeks before the 2013 harvest, the couple sold the estate and the Araujo name to François Pinault, the owner of Château Latour. Since then, Bart and Daphne have bought two other vineyards, in Oakville and St Helena, both of which are undergoing major replants and being converted to biodynamics – a method of farming in which the Araujos believe passionately.

While waiting for the new sites to become fully operational the Araujos will produce their wine under the name Accendo Cellars, using purchased fruit pulled from a selection of undisclosed vineyards, from which they will

continue to draw grapes even after their new estates come online. Despite their success with Eisele, they also believe in creating blends from a variety of sites. "I'm intrigued to put together components from five or six great vineyards in the valley," says Bart. "This creates tremendous layers that you don't get from a single vineyard."

Stylistically, the wines are in keeping with those from their days at Araujo Estate. "With Accendo Cellars, we are trying to pay homage to the classic Napa Cabernets that were produced in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s," explains Bart. In addition to honoring the past, though, the Araujos are minding the future, with their children Jaime and Greg now fully involved in the new enterprise.

STAR BOTTLE

No releases available at press time

2. Vivier

STÉPHANE VIVIER
and DANA SEXTON VIVIER

Trans-Atlantic Alliance

"As a kid growing up in Burgundy, my brother and I would play soccer in the street," recalls Stéphane Vivier. "We trashed my neighbor's tulips and he said we could either pay him back or work it off in his vineyard. I was nine or 10 and that's how I began my life in viticulture."

He now lives in Sonoma and makes wine for Hyde de Villaine (HdV). The main focus is on Chardonnay – HdV's is among the finest in the United States – but small quantities of Syrah are also produced. What it did not make until 2012 was Pinot Noir. As a Burgundian, it was a gap Vivier felt compelled to fill. "It was my wife Dana who pushed me to start my own brand; she knew I needed to make Pinot Noir," he says.

Production is small: for each vintage, a couple of hundred cases of four or five different wines. They currently produce two single-vineyard Pinot Noirs, Sun Chase and Gap's Crown, which combine New World intensity of fruit with Burgundian finesse. Vivier also crafts a charming but refined Sonoma Coast Pinot, a fresh and vibrant rosé and an unusual take on Pineau des Charentes called Sexton Vivier.

STAR BOTTLE

Vivier Sun Chase Vineyard Pinot Noir 2013



3. Futo Wines

TOM FUTO

The Accidental Vintner

Tom Futo, a wine lover and native of Kansas, spent many years visiting Napa Valley as a tourist. “I didn’t set out to become a vintner,” he explains, “but once I saw this land, I knew that had to be my path.”

The land he is speaking of is the old Oakford estate in the undulating hillsides of western Oakville. This auspiciously located site counts among its neighbors the likes of Harlan Estate and Heitz’s Martha’s Vineyard, and came planted with seven acres (about 2.8 hectares) of red Bordeaux varieties.

After taking on the property, Futo produced his first vintage in 2004, leaning on the copious talents of winemaker Mark Aubert, who established a polished, mineral-laden style that won early recognition. Today, Jason Exposto, Aubert’s successor, continues to refine the wines, which balance full Napa flavor with a bright and thrilling acidity.

In late 2011, Futo significantly increased the scope of his operation through the purchase of a second vineyard, in the Stags Leap District. Tucked back in the far eastern edge of the appellation, the new property is as equally hilly and variegated as the first that Futo bought.

The debut wines from this vineyard were produced in 2012. In addition to the pair of flagship Cabernet Sauvignon-based blends – from Oakville and Stags Leap – Futo produces OV/SL, a kind of second label that combines fruit from both vineyards. The wines are yet to be released, but while the OV/SL offers compelling value, the purely Stags Leap wine shines through a dark, plummy fruit and a focused, elegant texture.

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Futo Red 2010



4. Inglenook

PHILIPPE BASCAULES

Second Coming

Inglenook is one of the most storied estates in Napa Valley. So while not a bright new star, it has undergone something of a rebirth in recent years. Established in 1879 by Gustave Niebaum, Inglenook operated at the highest level of quality from its founding through to the mid-1960s, when the estate was sold to corporate interests. What followed was a slow dismantling of the physical estate – and the brand’s reputation.

Film director Francis Ford Coppola bought the family mansion and a portion of the vineyard in 1975, eventually establishing the Rubicon brand, which enjoyed a fine reputation but never approached the renown of Inglenook. Coppola changed that in 2011 when he bought the rights to the Inglenook name, resurrected the old label and hired winemaker Philippe Bascaules, previously of Bordeaux first growth Château Margaux.

“The first time I saw Inglenook I thought it was very beautiful,” enthused Bascaules at the time. “Then I tasted the old vintages and was impressed by the quality; I was immediately convinced that this place was special.”

He has made significant changes at the winery. “We pick earlier now. My goal is just to



express the taste of the place. I want to avoid anything that will hide that taste, such as over-ripeness and over-extraction.”

The jump in quality was instant; the wines exhibit focus, purity, intensity and complexity – exciting from an aesthetic and emotional standpoint. The disassembly of the Inglenook reputation scarred the collective consciousness of Napa, but it now shows signs of healing.

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Inglenook Rubicon 2013

5. Seavey Vineyard

DORIE SEAVEY

A Rare Breed

Seavey has been a notable part of Napa’s fabric for many years. In 1979, William and Mary Seavey bought an old ghost winery along a remote, wild and wooded slope of Conn Valley. They planted a vineyard, selling the fruit to some of Napa’s larger wineries until they launched their own brand in 1990. Too small to warrant a dedicated winemaker, Seavey relied on consultants, and in 1995 the vineyard became the first official client of the now ubiquitous Philippe Melka.

The operation is now overseen by the second generation of Seaveys. “We are proud to continue the winemaking traditions established by our

parents – the production of Bordeaux-style wines that can age with grace and demonstrate a sense of place,” says daughter Dorie.

It is this understated, straightforward style of wine that has kept Seavey largely out of the limelight, although a recent return to fashion of restrained, age-worthy Californian wines has turned it into something of a hot brand.

The wines are not the only thing steeped in history – the very model of business is a throw-back. “We are a vertically integrated, family-owned and -operated winery that grows our own grapes and makes, ages and sells our own wine,” explains Dorie. “This is no longer the popular methodology of Napa Valley. We are an increasingly rare breed.”

STAR BOTTLE

Seavey Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1996

– Kelli White

ALSO ON OUR RADAR

BRAND ◇ GALLICA ◇ MAYACAMAS ◇ OVID ◇ PULIDO-WALKER