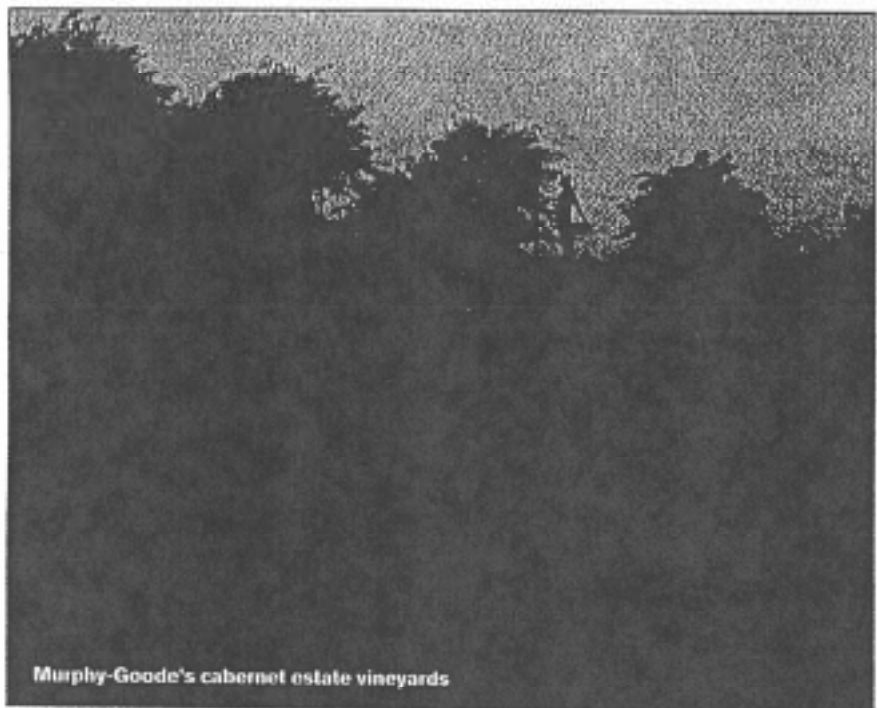




# Real Estates

**Choose your own personal favorites among  
California's classic estate cabernets**  
by **Ron Smith**



Murphy-Goode's cabernet estate vineyards

Many California wine estates have been producing cabernet for years. I've chosen a few that I've liked consistently, for reasons other than fashion. All of them have won critical acclaim and have ardent consumers. Oddly, longevity and steadiness can work against a producer's image in one sense. The wine world is cyclical. There is now a large new generation of consumers discovering wine for the first time; steered by tastemakers and media toward glamorous labels of the moment, they may tend to overlook tried-and-true producers such as these.

The reason all these estates have been producing and selling wine as long as they have is simply that they yield fine wine. While many of the current auction-house darlings were born yesterday, these estates have been proven over the years. In addition to their distinctive wines, they have interesting histories, some going back to the nineteenth century.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with you if you decide you don't like these estates, and prefer to go out and find your own favorite cabernet sauvignon properties. There are many other worthy candidates, in fact, and I'd be pleased to know that you found them. Since there is no right or wrong, the worst problem you're likely to face is discovering that a wine you assumed wouldn't mature for fifteen years has magically bloomed in the bottle and is scrumptious right now. Too bad. Nothing to do but toss another lamb chop on the grill and live with our mistakes.

An outstanding example of a cabernet sauvignon estate that deserves its burgeoning reputation is MICHEL-SCHLUMBERGER. Billed as a "benchmark estate" in Dry Creek Valley, it might be more accurately described as a linked set of vineyards in the contoured high ground of Wine Creek Canyon, part of the Dry Creek watershed in the first swellings of Bradford Mountain on the west side of Dry Creek Valley. The vineyard was originally planted by the prolific Sonoma County vineyardist Michael Rowan, who also developed the Jordan Vineyards estate, among others. Michel-Schlumberger now comprises some sixty-five acres (including several blocks in the midst of development and replanting due to phylloxera) planted to more than a half-dozen grape varieties. Grapes are also purchased for certain bottlings. But the reserve cabernet, made from the finest blocks of Bordeaux varieties, is the true expression of the estate.

Winemaker Fred Payne worked in Napa Valley for several years (primarily at Girard Winery, now the Rudd Estate) before moving to Sonoma County in 1989, his first vintage at Michel-Schlumberger. He was one of the first California winemakers to integrate vineyard management and winemaking skills into a complete European-style winemaking program.

One of the exciting things about the Michel-Schlumberger estate is that the newer cabernet sauvignon blocks include a pre-phylloxera French selection obtained from a nineteenth century University of

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California experimental vineyard that was forgotten during Prohibition and rediscovered just a few years ago. "It makes a dark, inky wine with fine tannins, rich and mouth-coating," said Payne. "I think that as part of a blend with other cabernet clones it will be spectacular."

MURPHY-GOODE is another interesting Sonoma County estate. It was founded in 1979 by Tim Murphy and Dale Goode, longtime Alexander Valley grape growers. For several years, the substance of the business was selling grapes to other wineries. Meanwhile, they built their own label to its present prominence on the strength of their excellent vineyards and the exuberantly fruity, richly wooded style of winemaker Christina Benz; the inaugural vintage was 1985.

The Murphys are a big family, and everybody seems to have their own vineyards. Several of them yield vineyard-designated wines such as the Brenda Block Cabernet Sauvignon (about 900 cases). Brenda Block (named for one of the eleven Murphy grandchildren) is a steep vineyard above the Russian River on the east side of Alexander Valley near Geyserville, across the road from the winery. The wine typically shows the characteristic Alexander Valley generosity of fruit on a solid frame of acidity and tannin, liberally seasoned with new oak.

LAUREL GLEN is the masterwork of renaissance man Patrick Campbell—grape grower, winemaker, Zen monk, violinist, philosopher, writer, and, however reluctant-

Chappellet occupies a world of its own on Pritchard Hill, a small mountain east of Rutherford with a wide variety of microclimates and volcanic soils.