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## Cream of the Crop

What goes into the making of a 100-point wine?  
We delve into Wine Country's most perfect creations.

By Molly O'Brien

**WHAT DEFINES A WINE** as absolute perfection? The answer depends on whom you're asking. There are multiple well-respected wine rating systems used in the U.S., but the most used is Robert Parker's original scoring system favored by his Wine Advocate ([www.robertparker.com](http://www.robertparker.com)). This 100-point scale applies specialized criteria for what's considered "perfection" at the time of tasting and has become something of a wine industry standard for rating quality wine. Wines that are given a score of between 96 and 100 points are considered to be "extraordinary" and worth the effort to find. For our purposes, the recommendations and information below are based on the Wine Advocate rating system as applied to Napa Valley's and the Sonoma region's wines, including many from the 2018 vintage.

**What makes a 100-point wine?** Creating a 100-point wine requires a perfect storm of internal and external factors. Both the vineyard's location and the winemaking process impact the outcome for the final product, but ultimately the quality of the wine largely depends on the climate of the year the grapes are grown. Uncontrollable forces of nature such as wildfires and weather factors like frost affect the grape quality, and not all years will yield good wines. Also taken into consideration are soil composition where the grapes are grown, the direction the vineyard is facing and the timing of the harvest.

In terms of climate, 2018 offered nearly flawless conditions for creating the ideal vintage. There were heavy rains early in the growing season and the remainder of the season was filled with warm days and cooler nights. This allows the grapes to mature to ideal ripeness on the vine while also retaining the acidity needed to create balanced wines that are capable of aging (an important factor on the Wine Advocate scale).

An impressive number of high scoring wines were produced throughout the Napa and Sonoma region in 2018. Now, in the fall of 2021, many of these wines are just beginning to become available for purchase.

### 100-Point Wine Experiences

It can be challenging to find a 100-point bottle of wine, as such wines are enthusiastically coveted by collectors, and disappear seemingly as soon as they're available. Luckily those wanting to indulge in one of these impeccable wines can enjoy a variety of unique wine-tasting experiences hosted at select wineries in the Napa and Sonoma region.

**Immortal Estate** ([www.immortal-estate.com](http://www.immortal-estate.com)) in Sonoma offers a one-of-a-kind "100-Point Experience." The winery is helmed by Napa wine industry veteran and Tusk Estates ([www.tuskstates.com](http://www.tuskstates.com)) co-owner Tim Martin and Randy Nichols, who is developing the new Auberge Resort at Stanly Ranch property. The pair thought it would be interesting to showcase four different vintages of their prized wines at once (each valued at more than \$300 per bottle), so they created a special and soon to be coveted experience.

This four-bottle vertical flight includes years 2013 to 2016 of the flagship Immortal Estate Cabernet Sauvignon. Two of the featured vintages — the 2013 and 2016 — have received perfect 100-point scores. The 2016 was a favorite among wine critics.

As there's a limited amount of these wines, the intimate tastings accommodate between four and eight people at \$500 per person for a 90-minute guided tasting experience and are held at an exclusive location in Napa.