

LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Robb Report

11 Outstanding Reds From Famed Napa Winemakers That Won't Break the Bank

The rise of second labels from the likes of Opus One, BV and more are reason for oenophiles to rejoice.

By SARA L. SCHNEIDER | NOVEMBER 8, 2021

No one in their right mind would see good fortune in 20 months of a global pandemic. Yet for those of us—to be perfectly honest—for whom relief comes in the form of a glass of wine at the end of the day, there's been a silver lining. As dinner shifted from restaurant dining rooms to takeout and delivery, and winery shopping went online, patterns emerged that made it a little easier to ride out the pain. Bottles from restaurant wine lists became available with that takeout, and the wine options delivery companies offered became almost endless. Savvy vintners started beaming their rich tasting experiences right into our living rooms via Zoom.

Now, as restaurant dining is an option once again, and wine country is fully open to visitors (albeit mostly by appointment—another pandemic adjustment that only enhances the experience), some of those accommodations seem likely to stay in place. But one consumer-friendly trend that has emerged from the era has the potential to improve our wine consumption at home for the foreseeable future: a small flurry of “little sister” wines—new labels created by exclusive (and elusive) brands at wallet-friendly prices that over-deliver with good fruit and great winemaking. In broad strokes, many of these so-called “second” wines are products of pedigreed estate vineyards, made from fruit that didn't quite make the cut for the winery's flagship bottling—a perfect win-win use of grapes that have enjoyed leaf-by-leaf farming alongside the barrels that did make the cut. Others are blended from great vineyards across the region, the fruit acquired through the vintner's or acclaimed winemaker's grower connections. (Who you know matters in Napa Valley.) In all cases, though, the “decommissioned” wine benefits from the skill of star winemakers.



Little sister to Immortal's Impassable Mountain, Slope is 100 percent from the Immortal Estate Vineyard, high on the Mayacamas Range just west of the Napa border in Sonoma. The source has its privileges, like the seven different (hand) picks over the course of two weeks that the signature wine received. The 2016 Slope opens with classic cassis notes joined by graphite, savory herbs and spices, and hints of sage and forest. There's an awful lot to love on the palate, with juicy, briary berry fruit—red, blue and black—layered over toasted spice and mocha, with impressive length. Flagship wine: Impassable Mountain Reserve, \$303, 100 points for the 2016 from Jeb Dunnuck.
