



## Spottswoode: Napa's Undeniable First Growth

by JEB DUNNUCK | AUGUST 23, 2021

Owned by the Novak family since 1972, with a storied history going back to 1882, Spottswoode Estate lies on the western edge of St. Helena, with the vineyard (located near other extraordinary sites such as Dr. Crane, Las Piedras, Madrona, and Hayne) spanning 37 acres broken into 24 blocks of classic Napa alluvial soils. The oldest vines today go back to 1991, when the estate undertook extensive replantings due to phylloxera, and the vineyard has been farmed organically since 1985.

From their first vintage in 1982, production has been overseen by a talented succession of winemakers, starting with Tony Soter in 1982, followed by Pam Starr (1992), Rosemary Cakebread (1997), Jennifer Williams (2002), and today Aron Weinkauff (2011). Aron started as the assistant winemaker in 2006 under the guidance of Jennifer Williams and also became Spottswoode's assistant vineyard manager in 2009. In 2011, Aron became the fifth head winemaker for this incredible estate.

I was lucky enough to take part in this retrospective, which took place at the estate late in 2020 and included every vintage from 2000 to 2017. Despite the different winemakers and vintage profiles, the quality and style here have remained remarkably consistent. These are wines of incredible class, balance, and elegance that still bring gorgeous California fruit and opulence. In addition, these are long-lived, age-worthy wines, and not a single wine was over the hill or tired. Production levels are generally around 1,000 cases, and alcohol levels range from the high 13s to the mid 14s, which in today's uber-charged and tiny production world of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon makes Spottswoode unique. As I hope these reviews show, Spottswoode is undeniably one of Napa's greatest estates, and I was honored to take part in this tasting.

<https://jebdunnuck.com/2021/08/spottswoode-napas-undeniable-first-growth/>

<u>Vintage</u>	<u>Wine</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Rev</u>
2017	<a href="#"><u>Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate</u></a>		96	NA	1
	<p>One of the wines of the vintage, the 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate shows what a great terroir and winemaking team can do even in very challenging vintages. Offering full-bodied aromas and flavors of jammy cassis and blackberry fruits as well violets and tobacco, it has wonderful tannins, a seamless texture, and a good spine of acidity. This is a classic, balanced, impeccably put-together Spottswoode that will keep for 25-30 years.</p>				
2016	<a href="#"><u>Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate</u></a>		100	\$200	1
	<p>Also perfect, yet in a very different style, the 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate can be thought of as mix of the 2010 and 2015. Classic Cabernet notes of green tobacco, pure cassis, sappy flowers, crushed stone, and cedar all emerge from the glass, and it's full-bodied, with a layered, multi-dimensional texture, building tannins, and one blockbuster of a finish. This continues to show incredibly consistency and I've been lucky enough to have multiple bottles, all of which have topped out my scale. This is unquestionably a legendary Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon that will hit maturity in about a decade or so and keep for 40-50 years.</p>				
2015	<a href="#"><u>Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate</u></a>		100	\$200	1
	<p>Both the 2016 and 2015 are pure perfection and an incredible back-to-back duo. The 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate has a kiss of 2007 in its massive, full-bodied, yet incredibly pure style, and it's overflowing with cassis and blueberry fruits as well as lots of floral and cedary nuances. It's a big, ripe, exuberant beauty, yet it never goes over the top, and has flawless balance, perfect tannins, and a great finish. As with most truly great wines, it's drinkable today and will be drinkable in 10 years – and in 30 years.</p>				

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2014	<p><a href="#"><u>Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate</u></a></p> <p>The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate shines for its incredible purity of fruit, and it shows the vintage's seamless, supple, incredibly charming, and approachable style. Perfumed notes of red, blue, and black fruits as well as white flowers, graphite, and spice define the nose, and it has a great mid-palate, velvety, supple tannins, no hard edges, and both breadth and length. It's still a baby yet offers incredible pleasure. Given its balance, it's going to evolve for 30-40 years.</p>		98	\$190	1
2013	<p><a href="#"><u>Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate</u></a></p> <p>The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate, like many 2013s, is still dense, concentrated, and powerful, with an almost gangly style that needs another 5-7 years of bottle age (I wouldn't turn down a bottle today). Lots of ripe black fruits, cassis, chocolate, and graphite as well as a hint of mint define the nose, and it's full-bodied, with a stacked mid-palate, building yet sweet tannins, and a great finish. It's loaded with potential but needs bottle age.</p>		98+	\$200	1
2012	<p><a href="#"><u>Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate</u></a></p> <p>A wine that would easily rate a perfect score on its own, the 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate is a full-bodied, ripe, exuberant 2012 that brings lots of richness yet still stays weightless and graceful on the palate. Giving up plenty of pure cassis fruit as well as spice, chocolate, graphite, and tobacco, it's that rare mix of power without weight. It does everything right and can be drunk any time over the coming two decades.</p>		99	NA	1
2011	<p><a href="#"><u>Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate</u></a></p> <p>The 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate shows the cooler nature of the vintage, revealing some herbal, green notes as well as ample cedar, chocolate, and darker fruits. Classicly Cabernet aromatically, it's medium to full-bodied on the palate and has great tannins, plenty of</p>		94	NA	1

Vintage   Wine   Color   Rating   Price   Rev

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sweet fruit, and a seamless, elegant texture. This is another wine offering a classic, old school, yet pure, balanced, classy style that's a joy to drink. Complex and nuanced today, with a supple texture, drink this beauty over the coming 10-15 years.

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2010   [Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   100   NA   1

Another perfect wine from this team, the 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate is a deep, concentrated, incredibly pure Cabernet with incredible crème de cassis fruits as well as complex notes of sandalwood, cedar, sappy flowers, and graphite. This puppy is still young and exuberant, with an inky purple color, yet it still has remarkable complexity. Full-bodied, concentrated, and balanced, it has sweet tannins giving it ample drinkability today yet will no doubt cruise for another 30 years. I wouldn't put it past evolving for another 40+, and it might be one of the longest-lived wines from this estate out there.

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2009   [Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   97   NA   1

The 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate is another dead ringer for a top Bordeaux, offering pure blue fruits and crème de cassis nuances as well as violets, spice box, and flowers. The tannins are polished, the balance is spot on, and it has a terrific mid-palate and a great finish. I'd put this in the early to middle of its drink window and I'd certainly be thrilled to drink a bottle today. Nevertheless, it will continue to deliver the goods over the coming 15-20 years. The blend of the 2009 is 95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot, and this was the first vintage to include Petit Verdot.

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2008   [Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   98   NA   1

While all these wines have a certain Bordeaux-like character, the 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate is unquestionably a dead-ringer for a great vintage of Château Margaux and has an incredibly complex, full-bodied, layered style carrying ample darker currant fruits, lots of chocolate, spice, smoked earth, and incense notes, ripe tannins, and a great finish. It

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opens up nicely with time in the glass and is fully mature yet should continue evolving for another 15-20 years.

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2007   [Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   100   NA   1

The 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate continues to show how special this vintage was for the valley and is pure perfection to my palate. Ripe and sexy, with off-the-charts sexiness, it just about jumps from the glass with ample red, black, and blue fruits are interwoven with tobacco leaf, spice box, flowers, and incense-like aromas and flavors. Still youthful, it's as seamless as they come and has a deep, layered, multi-dimensional texture, one stacked mid-palate, awesome tannins, and a great finish. It's one of the most exuberant, sexy wines in the lineup, but it still shows classic Spottswode purity, elegance, and balance. Don't miss it!

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2006   [Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   94   \$160   1

A more mid-weight, charming, elegant wine that lacks the density found in the top vintages, the 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate nevertheless has wonderful red and black currant fruits, notes of spice, sandalwood, and dried earth, medium to full body, and silky, polished tannins. It's a wonderfully complex, endearing, classy wine to enjoy over the coming decade.

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2005   [Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   95   NA   1

Lots of eucalyptus, mint, currants, cedary spice, and tobacco notes emerge from the 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate, which shows lots of ripeness on the nose yet pulls back nicely on the palate with wonderful purity and elegance. More smoky, chocolatey notes as well as ample black fruits emerge with time in the glass, and it's another wine with incredible purity and finesse in its tannins.

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2004   [Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   96   NA   1

Still youthful and in the middle part of its drink window, the 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate boasts a ruby, purple hue to go with full-

Vintage   Wine   Color   Rating   Price   Rev

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bodied aromas and flavors of crème de cassis, tobacco leaf, graphite, chocolate, and gravelly earth. The tannins are mostly resolved, it has no hard edges, and it offers flawless balance as well as a great finish. Classic balance and elegance are all characteristics that come to mind with this beauty.

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2003   [Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   98   NA   1

I was surprised at the youthfulness and purity of the 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate (but probably shouldn't have been, given the terroir and winemaking team). It's another deep, rich, full-bodied, even unctuous Cabernet with a gorgeous sense of elegance. Loaded with textbook Cabernet notes of darker currants and berry fruits as well as graphite, tobacco leaf, and cedarwood, it has wonderful tannins, a layered, multi-dimensional texture, and a fabulous finish. It's mature, yet given its mid-palate density and ripe, sweet tannins, has lots of life ahead of it.

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2002   [Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   99   NA   1

The 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate is a richer, bigger version of the 2001 and has loads of crème de cassis, pipe tobacco, chocolate, and spice-laced aromas and flavors. Possessing full-bodied richness, a deep, unctuous mid-palate, and ripe tannins, it too is fully mature and drinking at point, yet has another decade of life or more if stored correctly. I have a slight preference for the more elegant 2001, but this is simply another magical Napa Valley Cabernet that will stand up to the best in the world.

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2001   [Spottswoode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate](#)   100   NA   1

The 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate is liquid gold and as magnificent a Napa Valley Cabernet as I could imagine. Incredibly complex notes of crème de cassis, tobacco leaf, sandalwood, and dried flowers all emerge from the glass, and this full-bodied, flawlessly balanced beauty has perfectly integrated tannins and a finish that keeps you coming back to the class. As with all the wines here, it has a classic elegance paired with

**Vintage**   **Wine**

**Color**   **Rating**   **Price**   **Rev**

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beautiful richness. It's drinking at point today (one bottle of this vintage was clearly tired) yet should continue to evolve gracefully for another decade and have a gradual decline.

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2000

**Spottswode Cabernet Sauvignon Estate**

The 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate showed beautifully, with a deep plum hue as well as Saint-Julien-like elegance and purity, revealing lots of cassis fruits as well as chocolatey herbs and underbrush aromatics. It has plenty of classic, old school Cabernet herbal notes, silky tannins, and a beautiful finish, all making for an ultra-classic, mature Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

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