



## A LOOK AT LARKMEAD WINERY THROUGH THE LENS OF SOLARI CABERNET SAUVIGNON

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Wine is born in the vineyard, but not all vineyards are created equal. At Napa Valley's Larkmead Winery, Block A is what Winemaker Dan Petroski calls "the golden triangle." This is "where the magic happens," he explains. "There is something about this parcel we cannot define, after eleven years of testing the vines and soil we cannot decipher or replicate in our other vineyards the balance of this block. That's the beauty of terroir." Two parcels from Block A comprise their flagship wine—Solari.

Representing a microcosm of Napa Valley, this vineyard block, located in Calistoga, is bordered by the Napa River to its east, with Howell Mountain looming behind in the northeast. The Silverado Trail flanks the eastern border, with Diamond Mountain standing tall in the northwest and Spring Mountains rising in the southwest. Benchlands disappear this far north in the valley, creating a wider diversity of soil that allows the vines in this block to take on more mountain fruit qualities. "In blind tastings, some of our wines are confused for Howell Mountain wines," adds Petroski.

From the Mayacamas Mountains (Spring and Diamond) spills rocky, gravelly, almost cobble style stones called Cortina gravel, explains Petroski, while the valley floor is comprised of a clay-based Pleasanton series, spilling onto the property along both sides of the Napa River. Further east, the Vaca Mountain Range (Howell) imparts a sandier, Bale loam soil. All of these unique soils come together to create a perfect location for cultivating Cabernet Sauvignon. "Solari delivers the power and high-tones of Howell Mountain, the structure and brightness of Diamond Mountain, and the elegance of Spring Mountain—all in this vineyard triangle," he shares.

After ten years of steadily plotting, Larkmead's vineyards were fully converted to organic farming in the summer of 2015, although certification is not part of the plan. "We are not looking for a stamp of approval, we are just being true to ourselves," he explains.

"Solari is intrinsically tied to who we are as a property," explains Petroski. In the early days, Petroski joined the winery in 2006 and became head winemaker in 2012, each parcel was cherry picked, only selecting certain fruit to achieve a more prescribed flavor. Today there is "no more tinkering with the blend," Solari is comprised of 100% of both parcels. "One parcel is floral, the other is brooding, opposites that come together to create a very special togetherness, demonstrating tension in the glass—floral, earth driven minerality, structure."

While tasting through a vertical of Solari from 2013-2018, Petroski calls to mind two boxers—George Foreman and Mahammad Ali, both heavyweights with two different styles. He likens the 2013, 2014, and 2015 vintages to Foreman, and contrasts them to the Ali style he seeks in vintages 2016, 2017, and 2018. "Ali because he is sexy, he is everything I want in a glass of wine—speed, agility, perseverance, persistence, longevity, and moves in a sculptured elegance, floating like a butterfly," he shares.



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In 2013, Larkmead hired a wine consultant who told Petroski all of the wines tasted the same. Feeling “pissed—I don’t want all my wines to taste the same,” he took a step back and recognized in terms of music volume, Larkmead has a high capacity to make loud wines, but nuances are lost to volume. What he now seeks is soft and elegant wines, like a polished diamond, “more nuanced and complex.” He took the challenge to task and has created “his Larkmead—high toned, textural, and aromatic.”

**2018 Solari Tank Sample:** hot vintage with high yields; grapes harvest second week of September, tasted mid-January; red fruit, purple flowers, youthful, high-toned, persistent.

**2017 Solari Tank Sample:** hot vintage with low yields; release fall 2020; dense notes of black and red fruit, purple flowers, powerful.

**2016 Solari:** cool year, high yields; represents the style of wine Petroski wants to make; red fruit, floral, menthol, graphite, complex, focused.

**2015 Solari:** hot vintage, low yield; dark fruit, cassis, graphite, juicy, textural.

**2014 Solari:** cool vintage, average yield; bramble fruit, forest floor, herbaceous, potpourri, rich.

**2013 Solari:** cool vintage, above average yield; bright fruit, graphite, cassis, powerful.