



Robert Parker's
Wine Advocate

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LARKMEAD

LARKMEAD	2012	SAUVIGNON BLANC LILLIE	NAPA VALLEY	(\$55.00)	WHITE	92
LARKMEAD	2011	PROPRIETARY RED WINE FIREBELLE	NAPA VALLEY	(\$75.00)	RED	87
LARKMEAD	2012	PROPRIETARY RED WINE FIREBELLE	NAPA VALLEY (not yet available)		RED	(92-94)
LARKMEAD	2011	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA VALLEY	(\$70.00)	RED	90
LARKMEAD	2012	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA VALLEY (not yet available)		RED	(92-95)
LARKMEAD	2010	PROPRIETARY RED WINE LMV SALON	NAPA VALLEY	(\$90.00)	RED	94
LARKMEAD	2012	PROPRIETARY RED WINE LMV SALON	NAPA VALLEY (not yet available)		RED	(95-98)
LARKMEAD	2010	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI	NAPA VALLEY	(\$125.00)	RED	96
LARKMEAD	2012	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI	NAPA VALLEY (not yet available)		RED	(94-96+)
LARKMEAD	2009	THE LARK	NAPA VALLEY	(\$125.00)	RED	95+
LARKMEAD	2012	THE LARK	NAPA VALLEY (not yet available)		RED	(96-100)

This splendid estate situated in the heart of Napa Valley, just north of St. Helena, has enjoyed a reputation for high quality for well over a century. Tasting with winemaker Andy Smith and Larkmead's proprietor Cam Baker demonstrated once again just what brilliant wines these can be. All of the top cuvees (Solari, LMV Salon and the Lark) were declassified and not produced in 2011. 2012 appears to be a fabulous vintage for proprietor Cam Baker.

The only white wine produced is the 100% Sauvignon Blanc from 12-year-old vines that is aged 10 months on its lees in 12% new French oak. A beautiful white, the **2012 Sauvignon Blanc Lillie** exhibits a white Burgundy-like texture that gives the wine a rich, savory quality. Exotic aromas of mangoes, marmalade, lemon grass and pineapples jump from the glass of this medium-bodied, gorgeously fruity, exuberant Sauvignon that should drink well for 4-5 years.

The **2011 Proprietary Red Firebelle**, a blend of 42% Merlot, 27% Malbec, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Cabernet Franc, displays a dark ruby/plum color along with sweet red and black currant fruit intertwined with hints of sweet and sour cherries, a whiff of herbaceousness and a medium-bodied, elegant style. Drink it over the next 5-8 years. The **2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) offers up notes of mulberries, licorice, plums and tobacco leaf in its medium-bodied, surprisingly concentrated, well-made personality. There are over 3,000 cases produced, and it is one of the top wines made on the valley floor in 2011. The healthy deep ruby/purple color is accompanied by lots of fruit, soft tannins and low acidity. Consume it over the next 8-10 years.

2012 appears to be a fabulous vintage for proprietor Cam Baker. The classic **2012 Proprietary Red Firebelle** (a 1,700-case blend of 39% Merlot, 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Malbec and 9% Petit Verdot) boasts lots of sweet blackberry and red berry fruit notes intermixed with licorice, loamy soil and foresty scents in a richly fruity, exuberant, full-bodied, loaded style with enough acidity to provide delineation and clarity. This beautiful, opulently-styled red should age effortlessly for 10-12 years. A blend of 86% Cabernet Sauvignon and 14% Petit Verdot, the **2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** is a dead-ringer for a first or second growth Pauillac. Aromas of spring flowers, creme de cassis, licorice, cedarwood and lead pencil shavings are followed by a wine with that wonderful sweet fruit that the French call sucrose, which is an impression of sweetness even though the wine is totally dry. A superb texture, stunning purity and a full-bodied, blockbuster finish make for a wine that should be reasonably drinkable when released next year. It should age nicely for 20-25 years. A special 1,100 case cuvee is the blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Cabernet Franc aged 20 months in 70% new French oak, the **2012 Proprietary Red LMV Salon**. If more complexity

develops, this prodigious red may merit a perfect score. This particular offering reminds me of some of the rich, boisterous 2002 Napa Cabernet Sauvignons. It possesses an inky/blue/purple color, velvety tannins and hints of licorice, white chocolate and toast as well as super-generous quantities of blackberries, black currants, kirsch and subtle barbecue smoke. This full-bodied, voluptuously textured wine should drink well upon release and last for two decades or more. There are 1,100 cases of the **2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari**, which is also aged 20 months in 70% new French oak. It is a more tannic, backward and structured effort, which is somewhat of an anomaly for the way most 2012s performed. It is meant for long-term cellaring and will require 3-5 years of bottle age once it is released. The wine reveals lots of smoky graphite notes intermixed with mulberry, black currant and floral characteristics. Some wood is noticeable and the formidable tannins are obvious, but the wine is super-rich, powerful, muscular and masculine. Forget it for 3-5 years and drink it over the following three decades. Absolutely compelling is the **2012 Proprietary Red The Lark**, a wine made from a single block of their rockiest soils. Fabulous aromas of crushed rocks, creme de cassis, charcoal and blackberries jump from the glass of this opaque purple-colored wine. Full-bodied, dense, rich and sensationally concentrated, this stunning 2012 will need a few years of bottle age, and should last 25-30 years.

I also tasted two 2010s and one 2009. The **2010 Proprietary Red LMV Salon** (78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Cabernet Franc and 9% Petit Verdot) possesses a European-styled structure imposed on its white chocolate, black currant, cedarwood and Christmas fruitcake notes. This classic Cabernet Sauvignon-based wine reveals abundant aromas, rich fruit and a medium to full-bodied, youthful, firmly structured finish. Drink it over the next 15-20 years. The compelling **2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) boasts an opaque purple color as well as notes of black currants, licorice, graphite and charcoal, sweet black fruits on the entry, and hints of pen ink and toast. The terrific aromatics are followed by a textured, multidimensional wine with a 45-second finish. As the wine sits in the glass, aromas of crushed rock and spice box also emerge. This complex, intriguing effort should drink well for 25+ years. The **2009 Proprietary Red The Lark**, which was released in early 2013, comes from a single plot of rocky soils as well as the Eisele clone of Cabernet Sauvignon. More tannic, backward and brooding, this classic red needs more time in the bottle. Like many 2009s, it appears to have gone into a dormant state with the tannins dominating at present. However, the wine exhibits impressive purity, power, richness and a full-bodied mouthfeel. Cellar it for 3-4 years and drink it over the following 20-25 years.