



The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine

LARKMEAD

LARKMEAD	2013	SAUVIGNON BLANC LILLIE	NAPA VALLEY	\$55.00	WHITE	89
LARKMEAD	2012	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA VALLEY	\$80.00	RED	96
LARKMEAD	2013	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA VALLEY	NA	RED	(95-97)
LARKMEAD	2012	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA VALLEY	\$80.00	RED	93+
LARKMEAD	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA VALLEY	NA	RED	(95-97)
LARKMEAD	2012	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA VALLEY	\$110	RED	94
LARKMEAD	2013	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA VALLEY	NA	RED	(96-99)
LARKMEAD	2012	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI	NAPA VALLEY	\$125	RED	99
LARKMEAD	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI	NAPA VALLEY	NA	RED	(98-100)
LARKMEAD	2012	THE LARK PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA VALLEY	\$175	RED	99
LARKMEAD	2013	THE LARK PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA VALLEY	NA	RED	(98-100)

As I have written before, this is an extraordinary estate spread out in one contiguous parcel (unusual) in the center of the Napa Valley floor, north of St. Helena and south of Calistoga. Proprietor Cam Baker farms 110 acres, and the Cabernet Sauvignon is the Olmo Clone which became well-known as the Eisele Clone when it was planted in the famous vineyard of that name. A singular characteristic of the Larkmead vineyard is that it has a strong vein of old river gravel. Former winemaker Andy Smith has moved on and has been replaced by Dan Petroski, who has not missed a beat finishing the 2012s and producing the 2013s, which Cam Baker believes might be the vintage of the century for Larkmead.

A small amount of white wine is made and the current offering is the **2013 Sauvignon Blanc Lillie**. Made from 100% Sauvignon Blanc (433 cases produced) and aged eight months in 15% new French oak and the rest in neutral wood and larger foudres, it exhibits lots of honeysuckle, melon, caramelized citrus and grapefruit. This fragrant, fresh, light to medium-bodied, delicious white has lots of character. Ten percent of the Sauvignon Blanc is the Musqué Clone, which gives the wine a more exotic character. Drink it over the next 4-5 years.

Living up to its barrel tasting notes, the **2012 Proprietary Red Firebelle** (54% Merlot, 21% Malbec, 13% Petit Verdot and the rest Cabernet Sauvignon) was aged 18 months in 62% French oak. Sweet blackcurrant, blackberry, licorice, chocolate and loamy soil notes are followed by a savory, expansive, opulent, dense yet approachable and exuberant wine. It is best consumed over the next 12-15 years. The **2013 Proprietary Red Firebelle**, a blend of 76% Merlot, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot, offers up mocha, chocolate, espresso roast, black cherry and blackcurrant fruit notes as well as terrific density and thickness. It should prove to be the finest Firebelle made to date. It should drink well when released as well as over the following 15+ years.

The soft, delicious, complex **2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** offers notes of cedarwood, blackcurrants, baking spices, Asian soy, crème de cassis, licorice and a touch of graphite. It continues to remind me of a hypothetical blend of a second or third-growth Bordeaux Pauillac with a Napa Valley Cabernet. Composed of 94% Cabernet Sauvignon and 6% Petit Verdot aged 18 months in 54% new French oak, it possesses full body, sweet tannin and should drink well for two decades or more. The **2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** (2,775 cases produced of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon)

exhibits lots of blueberry, blackberry, cassis, chocolate and graphite, full body, a majestic texture, and terrific purity and length. Drink 2016-2030+.

The fabulous **2012 Proprietary Red LMV Salon** is a 1,090-case blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon and 33% Cabernet Franc. It reveals a refined nose of mulberries, blueberries, raspberries, spring flowers and forest floor. A dense, ripe, opulent, medium to full-bodied 2012, I rated it slightly lower than last year from barrel because it seems somewhat closed. Give it another 3-4 years of cellaring and drink it over the following 15+ years. The **2013 Proprietary Red LMV Salon** is composed of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Cabernet Franc (850 cases produced). Its inky/black/purple color is accompanied by notes of ink, barbecue smoke, chocolate, forest floor, blueberries and black raspberries. Dense, rich and fuller-bodied as well as deeper than its brilliant 2012 counterpart, this profound wine should drink well for two decades.

The **2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon aged 20 months in 70% new French oak) is even better than I thought last year. This spectacular wine boasts notes of white chocolate, hot gravel, crème de cassis, blackberries, licorice and forest floor. A subtle smoky barbecue character is noticeable in the background. This is a thrilling, full-bodied, majestic Cabernet Sauvignon to drink over the next 25-30 years, although its tannic structure suggests cellaring it for 2-5 years will be beneficial. A candidate for perfection, the **2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari** is a blend of 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot (975 cases produced). Locked and loaded with huge structure, massive concentration, and amazing power and richness, it is a seductive 2013 that, ideally, needs 5-10 years of cellaring. It should be a 50-year wine by Napa Valley standards.

There are 290 cases of the 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, and the most expensive wine from Larkmead, the **2012 Proprietary Red The Lark**. Coming from rocky soils, the wine displays wet rock-like minerality and flavors. Full-bodied with great texture, it is a dense, pure red offering blueberry and blackberry fruit intermixed with camphor and acacia flowers. This killer effort should drink well for 20-25 years. The same can be said of the **2013 Proprietary Red The Lark**, made from a single block of the Eisele (Olmo) clone planted in rocky soils. It is hugely rich with very sweet blueberry and blackberry fruit intermixed with the gravelly note that is so evident in this terroir, and a fabulous finish. This killer effort is one of the vintage's many profound wines. It has at least 30 years of upside potential.