



Closing Date: 12-23-10
Issue 192

The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine

LARKMEAD

LARKMEAD	2009	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(92-95)
LARKMEAD	2008	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA	(\$60.00)	RED	95
LARKMEAD	2009	CABERNET SAUVIGNON THE LARK	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(95-97)
LARKMEAD	2009	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(94-96)
LARKMEAD	2008	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA	(\$90.00)	RED	96
LARKMEAD	2009	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(91-94)
LARKMEAD	2008	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(\$60.00)	RED	94
LARKMEAD	2009	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(93-95)
LARKMEAD	2008	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(\$80.00)	RED	92
LARKMEAD	2009	SAUVIGNON BLANC LILLIE	NAPA	(\$45.00)	WHITE	92

When people talk about the greatest vineyards of Napa Valley, Larkmead has to be among the top half dozen or so *terroirs*. This historic vineyard dates back to the late 1800s and has been owned by the Solari family (currently Cam Baker and Kate Solari Baker) since 1948. The well-known Andy Smith is the consulting winemaker (he is also the force behind some of the brilliant wines of DuMol in the Russian River Valley). Larkmead has been making terrific wines over the last 5-6 years, but the 2007s were the finest wines I have ever tasted from this estate. The 2008s are very close in quality to the 2007s, and every 2008 performed better from bottle than it did last year from barrel (always a good sign). The **2009 Sauvignon Blanc Lillie** represents 400 cases of 100% Sauvignon Blanc aged 10 months in one-fourth new French oak barrels on its fermentations lees. Made in a Bordeaux-like yet reassuringly California style, it offers up notions of Thai lemon grass, white peaches, honeyed citrus, pineapples and figs. Medium-bodied with layers of flavor as well as huge perfume, it is a super, dry Sauvignon to enjoy over the next several years.

The **2008 Firebelle** (55% Merlot, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon and 18% Malbec; 1,050 cases produced) exhibits a dense opaque purple color as well as a sweet bouquet of *crème de cassis*, white chocolate and cocoa, great fruit, purity and intensity, a full-bodied, layered mouthfeel and elegance and finesse. Already evolved, complex and delicious, it should continue to drink well for a decade or more. This is an estate where the 2008 may actually eclipse the 2007. The **2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** (89% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc and 5% Petit Verdot aged 20 months in 60% new French oak) reveals a Médoc-like nose of cedarwood, damp earth, black currants and hints of bay leaf and unsmoked cigar tobacco. Opulence, purity and density combined with a thick, full-bodied mouthfeel and superb finish all suggest a wine that can be drunk now or cellared for two decades. The **2008 LMV Salon** is composed of 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Cabernet Franc, 9% Merlot, 9% Malbec and 9% Petit Verdot and is aged in a slightly higher percentage of new French oak (75%). It is the most restrained and austere wine in this portfolio, but it remains an elegant effort displaying hints of smoke, damp earth and tobacco leaf, moderate tannins and a pure style. It can be drunk now or cellared for

15+ years. Made from 92% Cabernet Sauvignon and 8% Petit Verdot (550 cases), the prodigious **2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve** is an opaque purple-colored, multidimensional wine displaying silky sweet tannin along with copious quantities of blackberry, *crème de cassis*, crushed rock, licorice and camphor characteristics. Powerful yet elegant with layers of depth, this is a wine of great nuance, complexity and nobility. A dead-ringer for the compelling 2007, the 2008 should drink well for 20-25 years or more

The Larkmead Vineyard (just over 120 acres) has again achieved remarkable success in 2009. These offerings are among the stars of the 2009 vintage. If the 2008s and 2007s were versions of Napa Valley meeting Pauillac, the 2009s might be considered Napa Valley wines meeting both Pomerol and Pauillac. They all possess silky tannins, deep, concentrated fruit, full body and upfront personalities that will make them even more charming than the brilliant 2007s and 2008s. There is lots of depth as well as perfumed characters in the 2009s. In fact, their aromatics may turn out to be even more intense and expansive than in either 2008 or 2007. The **2009 Cabernet Sauvignon The Lark** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) comes from one block of their vineyard. It offers loads of *crème de cassis* intermixed with a scorched earth, gravelly character reminiscent of a great vintage of La Mission Haut Brion, only richer and fuller-bodied. It is a very dense effort, especially for a 2009. As one might expect, the **2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) exhibits a mid-ninety point potential. The blends are only slightly different from their 2008 counterparts. The **2009 Firebelle** is composed of 53% Merlot, 29% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Petit Verdot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc. The **2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** is 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Petit Verdot and 8% Cabernet Franc. The **2009 LMV Salon** is 63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Cabernet Franc, 16% Malbec and 5% Merlot.

In case you missed them, although I think they are completely sold out, the scores awarded to the 2007s last year are: 2007 LMV Salon (97), 2007 Firebelle (93), 2007 Solari Reserve (96+), 2007 The Lark (96+) and 2007 Estate (94+). Tel. (707) 942-0167; Fax (707) 942-6934.