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Cathy Corison Does a Reality Check



Good news for wine enthusiasts who collect cabernet sauvignons made by Napa Valley winemaker Cathy Corison, whose wines are released under her eponymous brand Corison Winery: They age beautifully. Wines of clarity, balance and finesse upon release, they become even more expressive at 12 to 15 years old, maintaining a bright core of distinctive cherry fruit on a frame more whippet than bulldog.

This conclusion is based on a tasting today of eight older vintages of Corison's cabernet sauvignons in the loft of the Victorian-style barn she and her husband, designer William Martin, built in 1999 on their 10-acre spread along the west side of Highway 29 just south of St. Helena. The barn houses her winery, and Corison invited a few media types over to see how her older wines were progressing. The upshot is that if you have vintages 1991 through 1995 in your cellar, dig them out and start to enjoy them. They'll live for several more years, but to this palate they're at their peak right now.

There are hundreds of cabernet sauvignons coming out of Napa Valley; why go all that way to focus on the releases of Cathy Corison? I'll be writing of Corison in The Sacramento Bee down the road, so for now I'll give just a few reasons why wine enthusiasts may want to consider picking up a bottle of her cabernet sauvignon next time they see one in a wine shop, even if currently available vintages generally sell for between \$60 and \$70.

For one, she's been making wine in Napa Valley for 31 years. She's gotten to know the growers and the land. She's kept her production small, customarily making only around 2,500 cases a year. And she's been focused on perfecting one consistent style of cabernet sauvignon since she founded her own brand in 1987, and she's stuck to it. She wants her wines to be aromatic, fitting for the table, and capable of continuing to develop in the bottle. Mostly, she wants them to strike a balance between power and elegance. While several cabernet-sauvignon specialists in Napa Valley have gone in for ever bigger interpretations of the varietal - riper fruit, higher alcohol, more oak - she has remained true to an ethos that emphasizes restraint and

finesse, but without sacrificing the character that makes Napa Valley and cabernet sauvignon such a marvelous match.