

temperamental grape silky wines with style and strength, luscious ripeness, and great subtlety. This single-vineyard Pinot is perhaps the most extracted of her wines, offering a rich blend of blackberry fruit and liquorlike cassis. (\$48)

{ White }

CLIFF LEDE SAUVIGNON BLANC NAPA VALLEY 2005

Aged in French oak, stainless steel, and even concrete eggs (vessels popular in France that purportedly combine the richness of oak with the purity of stainless steel), this easy-drinking ensemble of grapefruit, peach, and honey flavors is sure to be a crowd-pleaser. (\$20)

D.R. STEPHENS CHARDONNAY HUDSON VINEYARD 2004

While other Napa Valley estates are shying away from buttery whites, D.R. Stephens embraces the effects of oak-barrel aging with this viscous, toasty, and creamy Carneros Chardonnay. (\$45)

Oenological Eccentrics

A taste for the strange and rare has always characterized the British—certainly the aristocrats. For instance, one 18th-century merman, Matthew Robinson, the second Baron Rokeby, felt an irresistible compulsion to be in water. He would float for hours off the shore of Kent or in the tank he built in his home, often until he had to be fished ashore. Another, the fifth Duke of Portland, after succeeding to his title in 1854, devoted the rest of his life to living underground, burrowed beneath his home, Welbeck Abbey. While none of these wines originates in the United Kingdom, each expresses a uniquely quirky personality. And any of these precious liquids will be equally at ease afloat (on one's yacht) or underground (in one's cellar).

{ Red }

CAMBRIA CLONE 667 2003

Perhaps the most complex of three single-clone Pinots produced at Cambria, 667's flavor and aromas blend together a sultry liquid smoke with tobacco, grilled bread, clove, grapefruit, pomegranate, and a hint of nutmeg and vanilla. (\$48)

CASA LAPOSTOLLE CLOS APALTA COLCHAGUA 2003

This single-vineyard blend has emerged as Chile's equivalent of a first-growth wine. A seductive medley of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Carmenère, it evokes extracted blackberry, creamy coffee, and sweet grilled sage. (\$65)

CELLERS FUENTES GRAN CLOS 2001

Sourced from 100-year-old vines in Priorat, the Grenache, Cariñena, and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes that compose this blood-red Spaniard impart equal portions of power and finesse in the bottle. (\$80)

COBOS 2003 MALBEC

Made in Mendoza, Argentina—one of the more exciting wine regions to gain international notice in the past several years—this intriguing Malbec offers dark, brooding notes of plum, blackberry, and smoke. (\$150)

JUSLYN VINEYARDS SPRING MOUNTAIN ESTATE

CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2002

This beautifully constructed Cabernet has the cool, composed profile that characterizes many of the mountain wines from this region in Napa Valley. The fruit is dark—cassis, blackberry—and lushly extracted, with silky texture and tannins, while the long finish closes with a peppery kick. (\$90)

MARSTON FAMILY VINEYARD SPRING MOUNTAIN

CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2002

Another Cabernet from the Spring Mountain region, this wine, while elegant, is not afraid to flex its tannins. The deliciously ripe black cherry and blackberry combine with soft mocha and mushroom, rounding out this dynamic red. (\$80)

PRATS & SYMINGTON CHRYSIA DOURO 2003

A joint venture between two great winemaking families—the Prats of Cos d'Estournel in Bordeaux and the Symingtons of Portugal—this alluringly dark wine layers black plum, bittersweet chocolate, and delicate spice atop sturdy tannins. (\$50)

{ White }

BRANDER CUVÉE NICOLAS SANTA YNEZ 2005

This engaging blend of 75 percent Sauvignon Blanc and 25 percent Sémillon tastes of nectarine, lemongrass, and candied citrus tied together with a wispy strain of cedar. (\$25)

DARIOUSH SIGNATURE VIOGNIER 2005

Thick with heady scents of jasmine, citrus blossom, and honeysuckle, this wine produces an intense, lush melon flavor on the palate before evaporating into a delicate finish. (\$34)