

# 11 Exceptional California Syrahs

## New reviews of impressive reds from across the Golden State

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This week we look at some Syrah reviews from our recent tastings, including examples from all over the Golden State: Sonoma, Napa, Paso Robles, Monterey, Santa Cruz, Santa Ynez Valley and Suisun Valley, a region just east of Napa that's been supplying grapes to vintners in Napa and Sonoma for a long time.

At the top of the list is Derenoncourt, from respected Bordeaux-based winemaker Stéphane Derenoncourt, who consults for nearly 70 wineries in 10 countries. His new venture in California has been impressive, the wines being universally dark and rich. Also relatively new on our radar screen is the eponymous label Brian Benson. Owner and winemaker Brian Benson learned about wine from his family's Dark Star Cellars in Paso Robles.

Also worth noting is the Four Vines Amador County Bailey Vineyard, one of the winery's three different 2008 Syrah bottlings made, and our favorite. The MacRostie Syrah comes from the winery's own Wildcat Mountain Vineyard, a 4-acre site in the Sonoma Coast. And we're a fan of Big Basin Vineyards and proprietor Bradley Brown, who makes wines from his own Santa Cruz Mountain vineyard, as well as with grapes from Monterey and Santa Lucia.

### **DERENONCOURT Syrah Napa Valley Coombsville 2007 Score: 93 | \$80**

Shows Syrah's beefy, herbal side, with a Northern Rhône rusticity. Full-bodied, intense and concentrated, this is tannic and drying, with dried dark berry, mineral, sage and cedary graphite flavors. Drink now through 2019. 78 cases made. —J.L.

### **FOUR VINES Syrah Amador County Bailey Vineyard 2008 Score: 92 | \$35**

Firm and rustic, showing vivid, taut, juicy plum, blackberry and wild berry fruit, with floral aromas and touches of mineral and sage. Full-bodied, with a pleasant touch of espresso and crushed rock on the finish. Drink now through 2020. 300 cases made. —J.L.

### **MACROSTIE Syrah Sonoma Coast Wildcat Mountain Vineyard 2006 Score: 92 | \$34**

Offers both depth and easy-drinking allure, this serves up a complex range of flavors, built around roasted coffee, hot brick, fleshy plum, pepper, game meat, spice and cumin. Well-focused and balanced, firming on the finish. Drink now through 2020. 825 cases made. —J.L.

### **ROCCA Syrah Yountville Grigsby Vineyard 2007 Score: 92 | \$45**

Combines both complex roasted coffee, mocha, ripe wild berry and spicy, peppery scents that are full-bodied and supple on the palate and long and layered on the finish. Delicate and balanced for its size and strength. Drink now through 2019. 349 cases made. —J.L.

### **BRIAN BENSON Syrah Paso Robles Denner Vineyard 2007 Score: 91 | \$35**

Complex and generous, offering a mix of ripe plum, blackberry, spice, mineral and cedar flavors, with touches of black licorice and pepper. Full-bodied and supple, ending with a lingering, persistent finish. Drink now through 2017. 237 cases made. —J.L.

### **BIG BASIN Syrah Monterey Coastview Vineyard 2007 Score: 91 | \$48**

Combines intensity with grace and balance, with spicy berry, plum, black cherry, cedar, black licorice and peppery scents. Full-bodied and layered, firming on the finish where this shows its spicy attributes. Best from 2011 through 2018. 185 cases made. —J.L.

### **FOXEN Syrah Santa Ynez Valley Toasted Rope 2008 Score: 91 | \$44**

Complex, firm and spicy, with ripe plum, cedar, tobacco, sage and mineral folding together. Full-bodied, with the sum being greater than the parts. Drink now through 2020. 430 cases made. —J.L.

### **NOVY Syrah Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2008 Score: 91 | \$33**

Firm, intense and chewy, with a mix of ripe plum, spice, mineral and graphite flavors. Full-bodied and slow to unfold, this builds momentum and complexity, retaining its intensity on the finish. Best from 2012 through 2020. 287 cases made. —J.L.

### **BIG BASIN Syrah California Mandala 2008 Score: 90 | \$45**

Intense, with spicy, beefy plum, blackberry and black cherry fruit that's shaded by a touch of cedary oak. Full-bodied, turning plush midpalate before firming on the finish. Drink now through 2017. 190 cases made. —*J.L.*

**OLABISI Syrah Suisun Valley King Vineyard Rasta Red 2006 Score: 90 | \$34**

Rich, intense and vibrant, this full-bodied red shows cola, dried currant and berry, mineral, sassafras and floral scents, ending with dense, chewy tannins and good length. Drink now through 2017. 345 cases made. —*J.L.*

**BARREL 27 Syrah Central Coast Right Hand Man 2007 Score: 89 | \$18**

Complex aromas of ripe cherry and plum jam are rich and layered on the palate without being heavy. This is spicy, with a cedary edge, and full-bodied, ending with a pepper jelly-like aftertaste that's quite intriguing. Drink now through 2016. 3,500 cases made. —*J.L.*