

the drunken cyclist



I have three passions: wine, cycling, travel, family, and math.



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Rediscovering Napa Valley: Crocker & Starr

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This past spring I was once again lured to Napa, this time by the wonderful people at Charles Communications Associates, who arranged three visits for me. The first was at Hourglass Vineyard, and later that day, I ventured to Crocker & Starr in St. Helena.

Winemaker, Pam Starr, and Charlie Crocker teamed up and in 1997 established the winery Crocker & Starr. The two equal partners produce roughly 3,000 cases annually (of which about 90% is sold direct to consumer), selling about 60-70% of the fruit grown on the estate to other winemakers.

2015 Crocker & Starr Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley:

Retail \$34 (750 ml). You do not see a ton of Sauvignon Blanc in Napa Valley any more for the simple fact that most has been replaced by its much more financially appealing offspring, Cabernet Sauvignon. Luckily, a few wineries like Crocker & Starr remain committed to the white variety and their wines do not require a second mortgage to purchase. Perhaps in "typical" Napa Sauvignon style, this wine oozes tropical notes of mango and guava with plenty of melon on the side. On the palate, luscious and rich which is cut by the tart acidity. There is also a roundness and vanilla aspect that no doubt comes from its fermentation which is 20% neutral barrel and 12% concrete egg (the rest in stainless). This is more of a throwback to "old-school" American Sauv Blanc, and it works. Well. **Outstanding. 90-92 Points.**

2014 Crocker & Starr Cabernet Franc, St. Helena:

Retail \$80. As I mentioned, Charlie Crocker was among the first to plant Cabernet Franc in Napa and Pam's CF is a benchmark for the increasingly popular variety. Spicy with dark berry fruit, this is a fabulous New World expression of what can be a rather austere wine when produced in the Old World. Big and full—this is pretty powerful for a CF. Certainly a big boy. But I like it. **Outstanding. 90-91 Points.**

2014 Crocker & Starr Casali 7 Saint Helena, Napa Valley:

Retail \$80. 92% Malbec, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot. Pam took a trip to Argentina and wanted to make an American Malbec blend. The wine is shy initially but hints of anise with bramble berry (is that a thing?), cassis, and tobacco, eventually poke out. Subtle fruit on the palate with a bit of earth and plenty of heft, I would pair this with some skirt steak fresh off the grill, a sharp cheese, or a humiliating Little League Baseball loss. You really can't go wrong here. Inky dark in the glass this is a delight to drink now, but could use some more time in the bottle. **Outstanding. 91-93 Points.**

2004 Crocker and Starr Stone Place Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Helena, Napa Valley:

90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot. Reserved with some tight red and black fruit. Amazingly, this is still a baby, with evident (although mellow) tannins on the back-end. **Wonderful and Outstanding. 92-94 Points.**

2008 Crocker and Starr Stone Place Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Helena, Napa Valley: 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Dark, yet alluring in the glass, there is much more fruit here (blackberry and a touch of anise) on both the nose and the palate. Rich and baroque, it is tough to choose between this more opulent style and the more reserved 2004, but today, I am opting for opulent. Slightly. **Outstanding (Plus?). 93-95 Points.**

2014 Crocker & Starr Cabernet Sauvignon Stone Place St. Helena, Napa Valley: Retail \$120. Dark, inky, and viscous in the glass with black currant, campfire smoke, and violets mostly coming through. Past the lips, this is incredible: voluptuous, silky, fruity, elegant, I could go on, but I won't because the finish is even better. Just the right amounts of tannin and acid with earth and fruit that last for minutes. OK. Whoa. **Outstanding. 93-95 Points.**

2013 Crocker & Starr 1 Post Cabernet Sauvignon: Retail \$200. Whoa. Dark and inky, with tangible viscosity, the wine clings to the side of the glass, suggesting that I had just woken it from a slumber that it desperately wanted to continue. Intense fruit—not in an overwhelming sense, but rather deep, layered, and nuanced. Liquid velvet on the tongue where the fruit dominates, but is girded by earth and spice. Whoa. This is but a pup, and needs some more time, but Whoa. **Outstanding Plus. 95-97 Points.**



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