

**HEITZ WINE CELLARS- CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS
OF NAPA VALLEY EXCELLENCE**



In 2011 Heitz Wine Cellars, founded by Napa Valley wine pioneers, Joe and Alice Heitz in 1961, will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. While the Heitz family has produced an impressive history of great wines made from nearly every major varietal planted in California wine country, this has always been first and foremost, a cabernet sauvignon house, with the Heitz cabernets amongst the very finest to be found in the state since the first vintage was released with the 1962. Since the very earliest days of the winery, Joe Heitz was recognized as one of the finest winemakers in California and particularly skilled in producing long-lived and stunning cabernet sauvignons. In fact, fifty years later, there are probably no top vintages of Heitz cabernets that have gone over the hill and the incredible legacy of cabernet sauvignon at this venerable Napa winery remains very much a “living history”, with many of the cabernets from the decades of the 1960s and 1970s still very much at their apogees of peak drinkability. In any theoretical cabernet ranking of First Growths in California, Heitz Wine Cellars would certainly have to be included amongst the three or four greatest cabernet producers in the history of California wine.

Joe Heitz and his wife Alice had arrived in Napa Valley a full decade before they started Heitz Cellars, and wine was to be their focal point even before their arrival in the

valley in 1951. During World War II, the army had stationed Joe in the city of Fresno, California (he was originally from a farming community in Illinois) and he had done a little work part-time at Italian Swiss Colony during the war to augment his army salary. When the war ended, he attended the University of California at Davis, studying horticulture, as the school did not yet offer a degree in enology, and after graduating, he was back in the Central Valley, running the quality control lab at Gallo in Modesto. In this era, Napa was still a relative wine backwater, and most of the wineries in California were focused on the jug wine trade and based in the Central Valley. In 1951, Joe and Alice saw the future and moved up north to Napa Valley, where Joe began working with André Tchelistcheff in the cellars at Beaulieu Vineyards. Joe spent several years as André Tchelistcheff's primary assistant at BV (as André's "right hand man" his daughter Kathleen Heitz Myers likes to recall), and then he and Alice briefly returned to the Central Valley in 1958 as Joe was pegged to create and head the Department of Enology at Fresno State University. After four years in academia in Fresno (during which Joe also earned his Master's Degree- from the University of California at Davis in 1959), Joe and Alice Heitz returned to Napa in 1961, buying a very small winery and eight acres of vineyard land along Highway 29 in St. Helena from Leon Brendel and launched Heitz Wine Cellars. The Heitz family borrowed \$5,000 from an old friend for the down payment on the property (the banks were of course not particularly interested in financing a new wine project in the Napa Valley in those early days) and were off and running. The location of the old winery would eventually become their tasting room and visitor's center when they moved their base of operations a couple years later, and today the well-known Heitz Tasting Room still sits on the site of that original old winery right on Highway 29.

Napa Valley in the early 1960s had a very collegial feel to it amongst the few pioneers bent on producing high quality wines. Hans Kornell had told Joe and Alice about the property on Route 29 in St. Helena in 1961, and Joe bought a few old American oak "foudres" from Lee Stewart at Souverain Cellars to outfit the new winery once the sale had finalized. The eight acres was planted entirely to grignolino, so he purchased both chardonnay and pinot noir from Hanzell Winery over in Sonoma to help flesh out the original lineup, and was offering wine under the Heitz Cellars label for sale by 1962. While at Beaulieu, Joe had worked primarily with American oak barrels, but Hanzell liked to use French oak for their chardonnays and pinots, so Joe bought some old French barrels from Hanzell to age his cabernets in as well, and this original combination of large American oak foudres and French oak barrels has remained the cellaring practices at Heitz since those very early days. The cabernets spend their first year of life after fermentation in very large (1,000 liter and larger), old American oak foudres, and then are racked into a collection of smaller French oak barrels, to complete their elevage. From the start, Joe wanted to age the cabernets for several years before they were bottled and released, so during the first couple of years at Heitz Cellars the cash flow was fairly modest and most of the first Heitz wines to be sold were from the purchased wines made at Hanzell and a few other top wineries who had excess production to sell. The one exception was the Heitz grignolino, as the Italian variety was also planted in the original eight acres of vineyards and this lighter, fruit-forward red was soon a staple in

the region, with locals often pulling up with their empty bottles in hand and buying the grignolino right out of the barrel in the tradition of the grape's native country.

In 1964 the couple was able to buy the current winery location and surrounding land, as Joe and Alice found a beautiful property just off the Silverado Trail at the end of the then unpaved Taplin Road in St. Helena, just out past where the Joseph Phelps winery was to be built a little less than a decade down the road. This was an old vineyard and winery from the nineteenth century, complete with a beautiful stone facility built into the hillside that housed the original winemaking premises and which continues to be used as one of the primary winery buildings by Heitz Cellars to this day. This 160 acre ranch is in the foothills of eastern St. Helena in an area which was then known as Spring Valley. The founder of the property was a gentleman named Rossi, who cleared much of the land here and planted vines after his purchase of the property in 1881, and who made wine here up until the start of Prohibition. During Prohibition, the property fell into disrepair (like so many of the original California vineyards and wineries during this dark chapter in American history) and was eventually purchased and restored by a San Francisco restaurateur named Fred Holt in 1940, but to be used as a cattle and produce ranch, rather than as a vineyard and winery. In 1964, Joe and Alice were out driving around the Napa Valley scouting out potential vineyard land, as the cramped quarters at the original winery were obviously not going to be sufficient for their future needs. They had seen this old stone winery out to the end of Taplin Road back in their Beaulieu days, and initially hoped to rent the winery building from the current owner, who was primarily using it as a barn for storage. Their timing was perfect, as a family issue had indeed just led Mr. Holt to consider selling, and a short time later Heitz Cellar had a new and absolutely ideal home. Fred Holt and his wife had no children, and the Holts very graciously offered to give the first right to the property to the Heitz family, as Fred Holt had been aware of the Heitz winery over on Highway 29 and the good work that they were doing from their small facilities.

It was very fortuitous timing for Joe and Alice, as the property had not yet been offered out through any realtors and the Holts were very patient about letting the young couple put together their financing, which took a month or two to come together. Fred Holt was quoted as saying at the time that several people had helped them when they were young and just starting out, and they would like to do the same thing for the Heitz family. Joe and Alice scraped together \$45,000 from their savings and a few investors to make the down payment on the property, which cost a total of \$150,000, and Heitz Cellars as we know it today was off and running. None of the ranch was planted to vines by this point in time, as the old vines from the pre-prohibition days had all been overgrown on the ranch, but much of the land was ideal for vineyards and was sufficiently large enough that Joe could envision having enough volume to make a living. The Heitz winery has occupied this location since 1964, with winemaking and storage facilities on the property expanded as opportunity allowed over the coming years, and with Joe and Alice moving to the homestead on the ranch to live and raise their three children, Kathleen, David and Rollie Heitz. About fifty acres or so of the surrounding ranch was cleared and planted to vines over the next several years, with the grapes from the estate slowly finding their way into the Heitz wines in the vintages of the late 1960s

and 1970s. The original winery down on Highway 29 was kept up as a tasting room, allowing the family some privacy up at the family home and winery on Taplin Road from the growing number of visitors who were attracted to the Napa Valley and its wines in the late 1960s and 1970s.

A short time later, the Heitz family was able to add some additional vineyard land up on Spring Mountain and strike a deal to buy grapes as well with friends of theirs, Tom and Martha May, who happened to own a newly planted cabernet vineyard in the western section of Oakville, in the foothills of the Mayacamas range. The Mays had purchased their home and the accompanying, newly-planted vineyard in 1963 and they had high hopes that their young cabernet sauvignon might indeed be something special (the vineyard had been cleared and planted two years earlier in 1961). The couple was quite pleased in 1964 to have Joe Heitz agree to purchase the fruit from their new vineyard for blending into his Napa Valley bottling of cabernet, as they had been impressed with the quality of a couple of bottles of Heitz Wine Cellar “Champagne” that had been left in their new home after the closing. The Mays’ vineyard in Oakville was soon to become one of California’s iconic cabernets, the Heitz Cellars’ “Martha’s Vineyard” bottling. The first harvest by Joe and Alice Heitz of the Mays’ vineyard in Oakville was the following year, 1965, and Joe was extremely impressed with the quality of the fruit from the young vines in this vineyard that he blended into his cabernet bottling. He and Tom May agreed that starting with the next vintage, they would reserve the Mays’ fruit for a single vineyard bottling, and one year later, the first vintage of Heitz Wine Cellars “Martha’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon was produced. The 1966 Martha’s Vineyard was the first single vineyard-designated bottling of cabernet sauvignon to be produced in California, signaling that both Joe Heitz and Tom May were well ahead of their time in recognizing the importance of terroir in California wine country and anticipating a trend that would prove to be defining in the realm of high quality Napa wines.

This was still very early days in the Napa Valley wine business, and fine wine was still really a cottage industry in the mid-1960s. There were a few pioneers that had remained from the first great wave of California quality wine in the latter half of the 1800s- Beaulieu Vineyards and Inglenook in Rutherford, as well as Christian Brothers and Beringer, and then there were the winemakers who had arrived back in the area shortly after the end of prohibition, such as Martin Ray up in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Louis Martini, and the Mondavi family who had moved up from the Central Valley into Napa Valley when they purchased first the Sunny St. Helena winery and then the Charles Krug winery in 1943. There was also Lee Stewart up on Howell Mountain, who had been turning out terrific wines at Souverain Cellars since the late 1940s, and the Taylors up on Mount Veeder at Mayacamas Vineyards. Other newcomers to the 1960s “quality tier” included Paul Draper and his partners at Ridge Vineyards down in the Santa Cruz Mountains and Dick Graff in his even more isolated mountain retreat at Chalone Vineyards. But this was still a very small and fairly close knit group of producers, and certainly Joe Heitz, with his depth of experience in the Central Valley and a solid eight years under his belt at Beaulieu Vineyards, was certainly recognized as one of the most accomplished of these post-war émigrés into the Napa Valley.

Throughout the remainder of the 1960s, while Heitz Cellars' wines were becoming numbered amongst the small handful of the very best wines in Napa Valley, it was still a struggle for high quality producers in Napa to find customers. Prices were low, with many wines selling for a couple of dollars and even Joe Heitz top bottling of Martha's Vineyard selling for under five dollars per bottle, as the market for top tier Napa wines was still very, very small. It was during this era that one used to see some of the special "lot numbered" bottlings of cabernet sauvignon appearing on the market from Heitz Cellars, as Joe had decided on a program of aging his Martha's Vineyard bottling for four years prior to bottling, and often the winery would begin to run out of its "Napa" cabernet bottling before the new vintage had been bottled and well before the same vintage of Martha's was ready for release. So Joe Heitz would raid a few of the barrels of the Martha's Vineyard cabernet and blend it with what he still had on hand of his basic cabernet, to create some more wine to sell to customers between vintages and the release of the Martha's bottling. Hence, one finds wines such as the 1969 Lot C-91 cabernet sauvignon, which was certainly more than half Martha's Vineyard, but which was bottled up and sold under the lot number to bridge the gap between vintages. There are also a few older lot numbered chardonnay bottlings from this era as well. And of course, while the newly planted vineyards on the family ranch at Taplin Road were now coming on line, there was still not enough production to feed the growing needs of the winery, so some grapes continued to be purchased during the entire decade of the 1960s.

While the first official vintage release from Heitz Wine Cellar were from the 1962 vintage, produced from purchased wine and the family's plot of grignolino down in their vineyard on Highway 29, there have indeed been some vintages from the 1950s that have also been sold under the Heitz label. These were wines that had been originally produced at Hanzell Vineyards, and when the winery's founder, James Zellarbach passed away in the early 1960s, the family decided to auction off barrels and bottles of wine that remained in the family winery's cellars. Joe had been a great admirer of the Hanzell wines, and after tasting through what was left in the cellar, he very happily bought the lion's share of the left over Hanzell stocks to market under his own label. This was still prior to the purchase of the property up on Taplin Road, so Joe did not have sufficient storage for all the barrels from Hanzell at the little winery on Highway 29, but Fred McCrea at Stony Hill Vineyards offered to rent some space for the barrels and bottling of the wines at his winery. So there are several older vintages of Heitz pinot noir in particular from the decade of the 1950s that hail from these old Hanzell stocks. During these early years, Joe Heitz often used to like to print on his labels of wines that included purchased production that the wine had been "Bottled and Perfected at Heitz Wine Cellars", as Joe had a fine palate and was a master blender whose "négociant" bottlings from these early years were often exceptional in quality and many of which have aged every bit as beautifully as the wines that were produced exclusively from estate grown fruit. In fact, though I have no tasting notes on any of these old pinot noirs from the 1950s, I have friends who have tasted them recently and report that they continue to drink amazingly well for their respective ages.

One really has to understand how Heitz Cellars was a labor of love for Joe and Alice Heitz in these early days, with expansion having to move along at a slow and steady

pace, as cash flow would allow, so vineyards were planted a few blocks at a time, winery buildings had to be constructed as production climbed, and things like harvesting and bottling required very long hours for both Joe and Alice. The early vintages were bottled and labeled entirely by hand, and cash was always short, as the demands of the winery and the vineyards had to take precedence. But all of this early sacrifice by Joe and Alice would pay dividends down the road, as the couple's vision of Napa's future potential has certainly been proven true in the fifty years since the winery first opened its doors in 1961. While the winery today owns 375 acres of prime vineyards in Napa Valley (as well as another 625 acres that remain unplanted) and employs a full-time staff, it remains very much still the family business that Joe and Alice launched fifty years ago. Their daughter, Kathleen Heitz Myers is the president of the winery and runs the business side of the estate, while her brother, David Heitz has been the winemaker here since the 1974 vintage. As David recalls, he had just finished up his studies and received his degree in enology from Fresno State University, and upon returning back to the family homestead, found that his father Joe had severely injured his back and was not going to be capable of making the 1974 vintage. So while Joe Heitz was laid up in traction, David plunged ahead with the 1974s, and as he likes to joke, "my father soon saw how the '74s were turning out and decided that he would have no problems leaving the duties at crush to me and heading out to the beach each year at harvest time." Given the fact that the 1974 vintage of Heitz Martha's Vineyard is the most famous and sought after wine in the long and illustrious history of the winery, it is hard not to concur with Joe Heitz's assessment that David had a firm handle on the winemaking right from the outset.

Heitz Wine Cellars has made a full roster of different varietals since very early on in their history. The winery has produced chardonnay, riesling, pinot blanc, cabernet sauvignon, grignolino, zinfandel, pinot noir, port and now, sauvignon blanc. In fact, some of their contemporaries have taken note of how good this new bottling of sauvignon blanc is from the Heitz family (they have only been making this varietal for a few vintages at this point), as during a recent vintage to Ridge Vineyards, the staff all commented just how good that wine is and what a superb new addition it is to the Heitz Cellars' lineup. The chardonnay, grignolino, zinfandel, sauvignon blanc and cabernet sauvignon primarily come from their own vineyards, with the exception of course of the famous single vineyard bottlings of cabernet sauvignon such as the Bella Oaks Vineyard and the Martha's Vineyard, which have come from long term agreements with vineyards' owners, and in the early days, the winery of course bought grapes as they needed them to accommodate demand that could not be met by the still recently-planted Heitz family acreage. So for example, in addition to the bottlings of chardonnay and pinot noir sourced from Hanzell that comprised the very first offerings from Heitz Cellars in 1962, the winery has often added purchased lots of cabernet sauvignon grapes to the production from their own vineyard holdings to allow production to keep up with clients' orders as the fame of the winery grew through the second half of the decade of the 1960s and the 1970s. As David Heitz recalls, "for many years we continued to purchase grapes to add to our own so that we would have enough wine for our customers, but it has now been many years since we have had to purchase any grapes, beyond of course, those for the single vineyard cabernet bottlings." Joe Heitz early on purchased grapes from several of the top producers in Napa Valley, so for instance, there was a Heitz Wine

Cellar's bottling of pinot blanc from the 1960s that states on the label that the grapes came from Stony Hill Vineyards!

But the days when Joe and David Heitz had to go afield to purchase grapes to augment their own vineyard production are now well in the past, as the Heitz family today is one of the larger vineyard owners in Napa Valley and these days they are an important seller of grapes onto the open market, as their vineyard production now outstrips their needs at the winery. One of the big reasons for this is the Ink Grade Vineyard that the family purchased in 1989, which lies just to the east of Howell Mountain, looking out at the Pope Valley on the eastern edge of Napa Valley. Ink Grade is the historical name for this section of Napa, as it was originally settled by Theron Ink in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This is a beautifully sweeping landscape of terraced vineyards interspersed with wild chaparral, as the Heitz family has left much of this 725 acre ranch in its natural habitat, rather than planting it all to vines. The 217 acres of vineyard land descends from the Howell Mountain AVA at 2400 feet above sea level and winds its way down to an elevation of between 600 and 800 feet above sea level, overlooking Pope Valley below. The planted section of this beautiful property includes forty-five acres of sauvignon blanc that was planted in 1996 at the lower elevations, one hundred and sixty acres of cabernet sauvignon, as well as ten acres each of zinfandel and merlot. There is room for more expansion here if it is ever needed, but for the present time, the winery is very content to leave most of the property as chaparral. The Heitz family is quite active with the Napa Valley Land Trust and are strong supporters of maintaining much of the surrounding wilderness in Napa, so the likelihood is that most of this ranch will remain in its natural habitat.

The winery also has another new vineyard addition, which is the Linda Falls Vineyard located on Howell Mountain proper. This is a small, ten acre vineyard that has been planted entirely to cabernet sauvignon and which was purchased by the Heitz family in 2000. The two new vineyard additions to the domaine's portfolio are important for another reason beyond augmenting the sources from which the winemaking team can source grapes, as since the 2006 vintage, the winery is now thinking about adding another single vineyard cabernet sauvignon bottling to their roster, as one of their old stalwarts, the Bella Oaks Vineyard, is no longer going to be produced by the winery. Following the creation of the Martha's Vineyard in the 1966 vintage, the winery added a second single vineyard cabernet bottling in 1976 from the Valley floor vineyard of Bella Oaks, owned by Belle and Barney Rhodes. For much of the winery's history in the 1970s and 1980s, these were the only two single vineyard bottlings from the estate, but in 1989, the Heitz family added a third special bottling of cabernet, from the Trailside Vineyard located just north of Domaine Mumm on the Silverado Trail. With the sale of the Bella Oaks Vineyard and the cessation of that bottling with the 2006 vintage, I asked Kathleen Heitz Myers if there were any plans afoot to add a replacement single vineyard bottling for the Bella Oaks, and she replied that "for several vintages now we have been bottling certain lots from different vineyards and following their evolutions in the cellars, with perhaps an eye towards adding another bottling, but we first have to be convinced that the wine is indeed special enough to warrant a single vineyard designation." I pointed out that the Linda Falls vineyard would be a perfect candidate if the quality of the wine

on its own pans out, as it would continue the history of having the Heitz single vineyard bottlings all named for women!



One of the upper sections of the Ink Grade Vineyard, looking out towards the Pope Valley.

After now having spent much of the last six or seven months working my way through both young and older vintages of Heitz Cellars wines in preparation for this article, it is very clear that this estate remains one of the absolute superstars of traditional California wine. Happily, the style of the Heitz wines remains very much along the lines as they have always been since their first days in the early 1960s, with no real shifts in style here to garner greater favor with critics in love with the over the top Napa style of today. The reds now are routinely in the 14.5 percent alcohol range these days- perhaps a bow to the pressures of global warming in the Napa Valley- but David Heitz is quick to point out that his father Joe was always one of the latest harvesters back in the old days, and when many California cabernets would routinely top out around 12.5 percent in alcohol, the Heitz wines even back in the seventies were typically labeled at 13 or 13.5 percent. So the move up to 14.5 percent in alcohol is not so keenly felt here, and almost all of the reds that I tasted on this visit showed no perceptible signs of heat on the backend and I have little doubt that they will age long and gracefully. David pointed out during my recent visit to the winery in January, the alcohol levels were probably a bit higher back in the '70s and '80s than was reported on the label in any case, because they did not measure alcohol in the wines back in the old days in the same manner as they do today, and he feels that certainly today's readings for the wines are much more accurate

than was the case thirty years ago. Additionally, Joe Heitz was happy to just leave the labels as they had been the year previously and saw little need to change the alcohol content in the fine print each and every year. In any event, there is most assuredly no desire amongst the Heitz family to change anything in their winemaking style to try and attract more critical praise from wine critics who these days seem most enamored of the over the top style of high octane cabernet. This is simply not the Heitz family way, as there is a very healthy respect for the pioneering work that Joe accomplished during his days at the head of the family winery and for the historical place of distinction that his wines earned for Heitz Wine Cellar during the course of his career.

In addition to his long winemaking career, Joe Heitz was also involved in many organizations in the wine industry that served to broaden and deepen the American wine market. He was a founding member of American Society of Enologists in the early 1960s and its Chairman in 1965 and 1966. He was also President of the Napa Valley Vintners Association in 1970 and 1971 and Chairman of the Wine Institute in 1980 and 1981. Today, his daughter, Kathleen Heitz Myers is the current President of the Napa Valley Vintners Association, so the family participation in the organization has come full circle. Joe and his wife Alice also made several promotional trips for both wine and general California agricultural products to the Far East during his career, and he served in a variety of capacities in the agricultural sphere in California during his career. As he used to like to say, “someone has got to do the day to day work for all of these organizations before anything can get done,” and so his tenure directing several of these associations was of course predicated on years of participation at lower rungs on the ladder seeing that the day to day work indeed got done. Joe and his wife Alice visited Europe on several occasions during their careers, and so they were able to make trips to some of the finest estates in the Bordeaux and Burgundy regions of France, as well as wine country in Germany, Austria, Spain and Portugal. Trips to both Australia and New Zealand were also carried out to visit their vineyards and wineries, and Joe even made a trip once to China to see newly planted vineyards there towards the end of his career.

Joe Heitz eventually passed away in December of 2000, but not before setting up a very orderly transition for the family business. David Heitz had of course already been the winemaker here for many, many years, and his sister, Kathleen Heitz Myers had worked at the winery since 1978. Kathleen was named company president in 1998, so that there was plenty of time for a seamless transition at the head of the winery before Joe passed away, and of course, his wife Alice remains involved in the family winery. During his long and illustrious career, Joe Heitz was famous for talking about winemaking and vineyard work as simple farming, and he was never reported to be one who romanticized the work involved. One has little doubt that he would have had a hearty chuckle at a certain side of today’s Napa world, where “superstar” consulting winemakers and viticulturists have built up mega businesses and command huge fees from new winery owners looking to find a shortcut to fame, fortune and high scores from critics, as Joe was certainly an old school, man of the soil whose world view was very much based in an earlier age of Napa wines. There is a wonderful anecdote in James Conway’s book, Napa, about Joe Heitz bemusedly drinking a bottle of his Martha’s Vineyard cabernet while sitting on the back of his pickup truck sometime back in the

1970s, after the wine had gotten so popular as to start selling for what Joe viewed at that time as the ridiculously high price of twelve dollars a bottle! This is not to say that Joe Heitz was not passionate about making great wine and loved his career, which he had fallen into from those early days working part-time way back when at Italian Swiss Colony, but he was certainly not one to put on airs of pretension, even when his wines became some of the most highly sought after in all of California. Joe had originally wanted to be a veterinarian, but had discovered from his early “stage” at Italian Swiss Colony, that he really liked making wine and it turned out to be something that he was very, very good at during the course of his career.

I should talk a bit about Joe and David Heitz’s winemaking practices, for they are a bit unconventional in comparison to many of their contemporaries (both back then and today). One of the surprising things that I learned about Heitz Cellars over the course of my research for this article, is that neither Joe nor David puts their cabernet sauvignons through malolactic fermentation. The only wine currently produced by the winery that goes through malo is their zinfandel, but all of the other wines do not have a malolactic fermentation. When I asked David about this, he simply said that “this was how my father made his cabernets, and given how well they had turned out over the years, I could see no good reason for changing this.” The cabs go through alcoholic fermentation in stainless steel tanks and then are racked into the large, old American oak foudres for their first year of elevage. I asked David how he prevents the wines from going through malo at this time and he said “we simply do not inoculate for malo, and the wines have no difficulties not going through ML in those big, old wood casks.” After their year in these large old foudres, the wines are racked into conventionally-sized, French oak barrels (of which a fairly high percentage are new) for additional elevage before bottling. The length of this period of barrel aging is different for various bottlings of their cabernets, with the lots destined for the Martha’s Vineyard, the old Bella Oaks or Trailside Vineyard bottlings generally seeing two and a half to three more years of aging, while the lots destined for the Napa bottling will usually spend two more years in the French barrels before bottling. Of course, these are rough guidelines and the characteristics of the vintage will often influence when the wines will be bottled. As David Heitz observed, “the wine will usually tell you when it is ready for bottling.” Not all of the production from the single vineyard blocks is put into their respective bottlings, as David and his assistant winemaker, Joe Norman, will taste through the various lots and make a selection of which are appropriate to be included in the single vineyard cuvées, with the lots (usually from the younger vines in each vineyard) that do not make the cut being blended in to the Napa cabernet bottling.

The percentage of new oak is also up here just a bit for the cabernets in the last couple of decades from what it was in the 1970s and early 1980s, with the Bella Oaks having been raised in about sixty percent new wood, the Martha’s Vineyard around seventy to eighty percent and the Trailside bottling of cabernet typically raised in one hundred percent new oak. But in the context of today’s Napa cabernets, these still come across as fairly moderate in their percentage of new wood, and I asked David Heitz why this is so, given that they have used a pretty generous percentage of new wood for the cabs for many years now. He pointed out that “not all oak is created equal, and we try to

use a fairly discreet type of new oak- Tronçais- for our French barrels, so that they do not mark the wine too much with the wood.” I enquired of David if the percentage of new oak is higher today than was the case, for instance, in the decade of the 1970s, and he said that “we probably use a little bit more new wood today than was the case in my first few vintages, but we probably started using about these same percentages for the single vineyard bottlings by at least the 1987 vintage, so I would not say that the change has been particularly recent, but honestly, I cannot really recall what the exact percentage of new French barrels we used for the 1974 Martha’s, as that was really a long time ago now.” While of course, I would not complain if the cabernets were aged in a bit less new oak- just on general principal- there is certainly no issue with over-oaking here and the wines generally are beautifully balanced once they have had a few years of bottle age to fully integrate all of their components.

Both the Bella Oaks and Martha’s Vineyard were replanted beginning in the late 1980s- Bella Oaks because of Pierce’s Disease and Martha’s because of phylloxera, so the 1996 Martha’s Vineyard was the first bottling to be produced and bottled on its own again from the completely replanted vineyard. With the cessation of the Bella Oaks Vineyard bottling after the 2006 vintage, the other single vineyard cabernet bottling made at Heitz these days is their Trailside Vineyard, which was purchased in the late 1980s and which was first released on its own in the 1989 vintage. The winery has now been producing a Sauvignon Blanc since the 2007 vintage, and if the 2009 and 2010 are any indication of the success that Heitz will have with this varietal, then this is a very welcome new addition to their lineup. The Chardonnay continues to be produced in the old school style that Joe Heitz always preferred, with no malolactic and the ability to age for an extended period of time. However, when I talked with David about their chardonnays, he observed that “for a few vintages we did play around a bit with partial malolactic for some of the lots of the chardonnay, and then blending those lots in with others which had no ML, but we were not entirely satisfied with those results and eventually went back to completely avoiding malolactic for our chardonnays.” I would love to one day taste a vertical of the Heitz Chardonnays, as I am sure that there are plenty of vintages that have been able to age gracefully for fifteen or twenty years. I mentioned this to David Heitz and I may be able to report on some old Heitz chardonnays after my next visit to the winery.

I should talk a bit about how important bottle age has always been for the Heitz wines of both colors (excepting of course the sauvignon blanc and the rosé), and I feel this is particularly important for their cabernet sauvignon bottlings. The Heitz cabernets are produced in a decidedly “old school” style of Napa winemaking and the wines are built to age, with substantial, ripe tannins, good acids and the need for at least a handful of years of bottle age to round out the rough corners and for the complexity that is inherent in the wines to emerge. These are certainly cabernets that are not “engineered” to show at their best right out of the blocks, and to drink them on the early side really makes little sense. But tuck them away in the cellar like one used to do with all serious cabernets in the golden age of California winemaking, and a decade down the road one has some pretty stunning bottles on one’s hands. The chardonnay from Heitz Cellars is also clearly a wine that will benefit from extended bottle age, as its no malo style gives

the wine a very good chassis of acidity to age upon. I asked David about his and his father's philosophies about acidulation, and he said that "both my father and I believed that there was no problem in adding acid to a wine if it needed it- acidity is very, very important for a wine's ability to age properly- but one has to make sure to do it very early on, so that the acids are properly integrated into the body of the wine." As he pointed out, "the 1974 Martha's was probably one of the lowest acid wines we ever produced, and if we had not acidulated it, there is no way it would still be around today and drinking as beautifully as it does." He concluded, "so if a wine needs a bit more acidity, there is no reason not to give it to it, as long as one is careful to get the amount correct." This is probably another reason that the very old vintages of Heitz cabernets retain such lovely freshness, as they start out life with a bit more acidity from having not gone through malo, and then both Joe and David Heitz have been quite adroit at tweaking the acidity judiciously if need be.



Kathleen Heitz Myers and Heitz Cellar's long-time vineyard manager, Mark Neal of Jack Neal and Son.

While much of this history of Heitz Wine Cellars recounts the firm footing the winery continues to enjoy in the traditions of Napa Valley, with its winemaking style and commitment to producing long-lived and cellar-worthy wines reaching back to Joe Heitz's earliest days, this is not to say that the winery remains entrenched in the past and living on its past glories. Today, Heitz Wine Cellars remains at the top of its game, with the quality of its wines across the board every bit as high as has been the case in its peaks of popularity, and they continue to be a leader in many facets of viticultural life in

the Napa Valley. This is evident in the winery's move many years ago to organic viticulture for all of their own vineyards, as well as at the May family's Martha's Vineyard, which Tom May and his family continue to farm with the same passion that they have since the 1960s. The winery began converting their own vineyards to organic farming back in the mid-1980s, again anticipating a trend by decades that has been gaining traction in the Napa Valley in recent years, and today, eighty-seven percent of the Heitz vineyards are certified organic. Much of the credit for this has to be given to Mark Neal, whose family firm has managed the Heitz Cellars' vineyards for decades. Mark is an extremely talented viticulturist who has overseen the transition of the Heitz vineyards to organic farming, as well as managing the lay out of the new vineyards planted in the Ink Grade Vineyard and Linda Falls Vineyard in the last several years.

I have read elsewhere that Heitz Wine Cellars has already had its golden age and that the winery simply does not make wines today that can compete with its extraordinary legacy of great wines produced in the past. Of course, I read exactly the same thing for many years about Mayacamas Vineyards, before I took the time to actually visit and taste the wines there and found out that reports of the winery's demise were completely inaccurate. After having now spent nearly a year working on this historical piece on Heitz Wine Cellars, I can unequivocally say that reports of a slump at Heitz are pure fantasy and that the new releases from the winery are every bit as fine as they have ever been in the long and illustrious history of this great estate. Across the board Heitz Wine Cellars continues to produce wines that are at the very pinnacle of quality in the Napa Valley, and in fact, many of their varietal bottlings are far, far superior to those produced by some of the slickly made, "Cult Wine" producers that are currently the darlings of the uninformed wing of wine journalism. This is particularly true of the Heitz Wine Cellars' cabernet bottlings, which continue to be amongst the most profound made in Napa. I would never trade any of my bottles of Heitz cabernets resting comfortably in my cellar for some of the over the top, formulaic Napa cabernets that garner such high scores in other circles, as I am absolutely certain that my Heitz cabernets are going to blossom into exceptional wines with sufficient bottle age, and most of these flash in the pan, high octane Napa cabernets from the other school are going to have crashed and burned by their fifteenth birthdays.

My gut instincts tell me that the same phenomenon that marginalized the wines of Mayacamas Vineyards in the minds of most contemporary wine critics in the last couple of decades has also been at play with the reputation of Heitz Wine Cellars over the same period of time. This, of course, is the fact that the wines at Heitz are aged for quite a bit longer in the cellars prior to bottling than is now customary at most of the trendy hot spots in Napa, so that the current releases of cabernet and the like from Heitz Wine Cellars are usually a vintage or two behind those of their neighbors. Since wine journalists like to put things in boxes, writing articles about the 2007 vintage of Napa cabernet sauvignon for instance, the fact that the Heitz family are just releasing their 2005 regular bottling of cabernet (with the Martha's Vineyard still facing at least another year in the cellars) when most folks are hitting the market with their 2007s puts the winery "out of step" with their neighbors and most wine critics simply choose to focus on the new releases from 2007 and do not report on the new Heitz wines from

earlier vintages. This makes it hard on the winery's marketing team, but gives wine lovers a beautiful opportunity to secure some of the very best wines made in Napa Valley these days without having to fight the herd of folks chasing the highest scoring wines, and often this also translates into buying wines from Heitz Wine Cellars that are very, very fairly priced in the context of today's Napa pricing structures.

So there you have it- the history of the trailblazing Heitz Wine Cellars as it reaches the venerable age of fifty this year (a mark I hit last year without quite the same dignity as the winery). The wines today are every bit as good as they have ever been, with the cabernet sauvignons clearly still amongst the finest handful produced in all of California. In fact, now that Joseph Phelps has fallen from the old school camp into the realm of over the top, jam juice producer, my three remaining First Growths for California cabernet sauvignon are Heitz Wine Cellars, Mayacamas Vineyards and Ridge Vineyards. There are a few wineries that still could merit inclusion in this very exclusive club, such as Diamond Creek or Dunn Vineyards, but I am simply not "au courant" on what is currently happening at those estates these days, and of course there are folks like Phillip Togni still out there making great, old school cabernets as well, but for the present time, my First Growth club only includes these three iconic cabernet producers. While others will no doubt take issue with my temerity in not including any of the current darlings of the Cult Cabernet Club in my First Growths, none of those wineries has a substantial track record for graceful evolution in the cellar, and in fact, I have little doubt that most of these "hot" cabernet producers of today will ultimately prove to be flash in the pans and that their wines will in the end not age well at all. But, this is emphatically not the case with Heitz Wine Cellars, who now has an unmatched track record of fifty years of excellence and who continues to make wines today in the mold of their iconic wines of yesteryear and with the same unwavering commitment to excellence.

The vast, vast majority of the following notes have been gleaned over the last year, during three trips to the winery, as well as at several tastings conducted here in New York. Kathleen Heitz Myers was very kind to invite me to an amazingly in-depth historical tasting of the winery's cabernet sauvignons that was held over two days in Germany at the end of March, but unfortunately, I was not able to attend the event- despite being in Germany at the very same time that the tasting was being held. I would have loved to have been able to join the tasting, as it included every single vintage of Martha's Vineyard ever produced, but I was in the country to taste the 2010ers at my favorite estates in German wine country and my itinerary was simply too packed, with the 2010 Bordeaux En Primeur week already booked to follow my week in Germany to allow any deviation from the schedule. Consequently, a few of the notes on older bottles of Heitz wines are from bottles I had purchased over the years from auction, and have not always been absolutely pristine examples. If this is the case with a particular wine, this is commented on in the tasting note. I should also thank subscriber Andy Hobson, who is a great collector of Heitz cabernets, for rounding out my roster of tasting notes. When I told Andy that I was working on this piece, he generously offered to canvas his cellar for vintages of Martha's Vineyard and Bella Oaks that I did not yet have notes on and we organized a tasting here in New York to celebrate the great quality of Heitz cabernets and fill in a few missing holes in my tasting notes. After having spent so much of the last

year tasting as many Heitz wines as I could in preparation for this article, I cannot emphasize enough how great the wines of Heitz Wine Cellars remain and I cannot recommend these wines highly enough.

Sauvignon Blanc

2010 Sauvignon Blanc- Heitz Wine Cellars

The newly released 2010 Heitz sauvignon blanc is another excellent example of this underrated varietal. The vibrant nose offers up a very stylish mélange of gooseberry, lime peel, fresh-cut grass, tart orange and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with good mid-palate depth, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and tangy finish. Just a classic example of sauvignon blanc. 2011-2016. **90+**.

2009 Sauvignon Blanc- Heitz Wine Cellars

The new varietal on the block at Heitz is just lovely in 2009, as it weighs in at 13.5 percent in alcohol and offers up lovely cut and zest in a format that shows no signs of excessive ripeness. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classic in its profile of green apple, grapefruit, cut grass, citrus peel and an incipient note of petrol. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully complex, with bright acids, good mid-palate depth and lovely length and cut on the focused and vibrant finish. Good juice and one of the tastiest California sauvignon blancs I have tasted in quite some time. 2010-2014. **90**.

Chardonnay

2008 Chardonnay- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2008 Heitz chardonnay is a lovely, non-malo chardonnay that offers up lovely freshness and good soil signature, but at fourteen percent alcohol, there is just a touch of heat poking out on the finish. The bouquet is deep, complex and nicely reserved, as it offers up scents of ripe apple, grapefruit, dusty soil tones, orange peel and just a touch of grassiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely reserved, with a fine core of fruit, good acids and just a whisper of heat sticking out uncovered on the long finish. Having not gone through malolactic fermentation, this wine should age quite nicely, but with that touch of alcohol on the backend, I might be inclined to drink it up a bit younger than I would if it weighed in at 13.2 percent or the like. But a good bottle. 2011-2020+? **89**.

2007 Chardonnay- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2007 Heitz chardonnay was tasted here in New York last October, and it showed quite similarly to the 2008 at the winery, with lovely complexity and structural integrity, but with just a trace of heat on the finish. The nose offers up a fresh and vibrant mélange of apple, a touch of limepeel, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with good acids, fine focus and just a touch of heat poking out on the backend. A good, solid wine that would be really good with half a percentage point less alcohol. 2010-2013. **88**.

2005 Chardonnay- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2005 chardonnay from Heitz Wine Cellars is drinking beautifully at age six and shows every sign of cruising along nicely for at least another eight to ten years, and perhaps even further. The classy nose offers up a mix of apple, a touch of pineapple, pretty soil tones, a deft framing of vanillin oak and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate

the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with lovely focus and balance, bright acids and fine length and grip on the zesty finish. Just a lovely, non-malo chardonnay that is now into its apogee, but has plenty of good years ahead of it as well. 2011-2020+. **92.**

Grignolino Rosé and Grignolino

2009 Grignolino Rosé- Heitz Wine Cellars

This has long been one of the signature wines at Heitz, and I am sure that Joe Heitz was producing a Grignolino Rosé since the very early days of the winery in the decade of the 1960s. The planting of this grape in Napa hails back to the days when Italian immigrants in the area played such an important role in getting wine production started in Napa and Sonoma, and it is very nice to see that the wine continues to be produced at Heitz Cellars. The 2009 Grignolino Rosé is a very pretty wine that offers up a juicy bouquet of cherries, a touch of pomegranate, grapefruit, spice and a touch of Napa soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with sound acids, good grip and a nice closing note of spice on the sneaky long finish. Just a lovely bottle of dry Rosé. 2010-2013. **88.**

2008 Grignolino- Heitz Wine Cellars

One of the original wines offered by Joe Heitz way back in the early 1960s, it is wonderful to see that the Heitz family continues to make and sell Grignolino in this day and age, where it is hardly one of the most sought after varieties in the market. The 2008 was the first example of grignolino that I had tasted from the winery in decades and the wine is really delicious! The light ruby color suggest a wine that is light on its feet and that is absolutely what one finds here, as the nose offers up a vibrant mélange of strawberries, cherries, orange peel, a bit of woodsmoke and a nice base of spicy soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and round, with tangy acids, very modest tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and bouncy finish. A lovely wine. 2011-2015. **89.**

Zinfandel

2007 Zinfandel- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2007 Heitz Cellars zinfandel is a very good example of the vintage and the varietal, with its 14.5 percent alcohol mostly felt in a slight “blurriness” on the palate, rather than any signs of uncovered alcohol. The nose is a ripe and stylish blend of black cherries, dark berries, chocolate, spice tones, a bit of bonfire and toffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tasty, with a good core of fruit, fine balance, modest tannins and just a slight lack of focus showing up on the backend from the ripe fruit. This is a very good bottle of zinfandel for drinking over the near-term, but I suspect five or six years will be the extent of its longevity. 2011-2016+? **88.**

2006 Zinfandel- Heitz Wine Cellars

I was really excited to see a zinfandel at “only” 14.5 percent alcohol, but based on the bit of raisiny pruniness on the backend of the palate, I have a feeling that this wine may have been “watered back” a bit to get to the desired alcohol level (I have no idea if this practice is used at Heitz Wine Cellars, but it certainly is quite common at a great many Napa wineries these days). The nose offers up some old school, brambly zinfandel notes, to go along with raspberry, chocolate, a bit of spice and some raisins. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and pretty long, but with enough overt raisiny ripeness on the

finish to strongly suggest that a bit of water was introduced to the tanks here before the fermentation kicked off. 2010-2018. **86.**

“Napa” Cabernet Sauvignon

While much of this article focuses on the long-lived, single vineyard bottlings of cabernet sauvignon from Heitz Wine Cellars, the regular “Napa” bottling is also a very ageworthy cabernet that shares many of the same attributes of superb balance, ripe tannins and fine depth for cellaring with the more famous bottlings from the winery and should not be overlooked by savvy wine lovers looking for a classic Napa cabernet that will improve with extended bottle age. The wine does not spend quite as long in barrel prior to bottling as the single vineyards, but it still is not bottled until fully three years after the vintage, which also makes it a wine that falls out of step with much of the critical reviews of specific vintages in California, so that the Heitz Napa cabernet is another “under the radar” wine that routinely offers up pretty astounding value. I had hoped to have a much more complete roster of tasting notes on older vintages of the Napa bottling for this article, as a fine selection of these wines from the decades of the 1980s and 1970s was available several months ago at one of the auction houses, but my bids were not sufficiently robust enough to secure any of the lots, so my single old vintage note on a Napa bottling is from my last bottle of the 1973 that I already had in the cellar. But the fact that the older Napa bottlings that I did not secure at auction sold for quite close to what one would expect to pay for many of the older vintages of the single vineyard wines is probably a pretty good indication that there are plenty of experienced cabernet sauvignon drinkers out there who are fully aware of just how well the Heitz Napa cabernet ages and what a good value it represents in this day and age.

Perhaps no bottling at Heitz Wine Cellars better shows off how fine a blender and winemaker Joe Heitz was in his day than the Napa cabernet sauvignon, as for much of the winery’s history, this wine was made primarily from purchased grapes. In an oral history conducted by researchers at the University of California in 1985, Joe Heitz talked at length about his long and varied career and one of the most interesting aspects of this conversation is the fact that as late as 1985, none of the grapes in the Napa bottling were grown from the family’s own vineyards. He relates in his oral history that the winery had just started aging some cabernet sauvignon from their own production, and it would still be a few years before the Napa bottling with estate grown fruit included in the blend would be released. Today, of course, the wine is made entirely from cabernet sauvignon grapes that are grown in the Heitz vineyards, but as recently as the first half of the 1980s, this was still primarily a wine made from purchased grapes. And of course, throughout the long history of the winery, the Napa bottlings have always included more than a sprinkling of younger vine fruit from the single vineyard cabernets. It remains one of the best values to be found in all of Napa Valley for cellar-worthy cabernet sauvignon.

The new vintages of Napa cabernet that I have tasted show outstanding potential, and these wines come with a very strong recommendation to be tucked away in the cellar for a good decade and then drunk over the ensuing twenty to thirty years. Like the single vineyard bottlings, the alcohol levels of the Napa bottling have crept up just a tad in the last decade or so and now routinely hit the 14.5 percent range. It has been my distinct

impression that this is a very manageable range for the wines and that there are no signs of overt overripeness to be found in any of the Heitz cabernets at this octane level. Given that this has been the standard level for virtually all of the Heitz cabernet sauvignon cuvées since at least the late 1990s (and perhaps even earlier), and with so many of the wines I have tasted from that era forward now simply stunning, I see no reason to believe that any of these cabernet-based bottlings will meet with any less success in the cellar than their predecessors from the decades of the 1970s or 1980s. As the notes below will attest, the track record of Heitz Wine Cellars' cabernets to age long and very gracefully is as fine as any in California. With a few of the new releases of cabernet, I do sense just a whisper of backend heat when the wine is still in its most formative stage, but this characteristic seems to have completely disappeared once the wine has had a few years to integrate completely, and vintages at the same 14.5 percent alcohol at ages eight or nine show no backend heat whatsoever at their current stage of evolution. Based on how beautifully wines from the 2002, 2001 or 1999 vintages are showing today, I am strongly convinced that any of these younger vintages of Heitz cabernet that show just a touch of alcohol right out of the blocks simply need a bit more bottle age to fully integrated this element more seamlessly.

2006 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The new release of the Heitz Wine Cellars' Napa cabernet, from the 2006 vintage, is a beautiful bottle in the making. It is a fully ripe wine at 14.5 percent alcohol, but it is beautifully pure, focused and balanced on both the nose and palate. The absolutely classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a nascently complex blend of red and black cherries, mint, tobacco leaf, spice, Rutherford soil tones and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a sappy core of fruit, a lovely signature of soil, ripe tannins, good acidity and just a touch of youthful, backend heat still poking out a bit on the very long finish. I would simply tuck this wine away in the cellar for another four or five years to allow it to fully harmonize, as well as unlock its secondary layers of complexity, and then drink it with great enjoyment over the ensuing twenty-five years or more. It is a lovely vintage of Heitz Napa cabernet and a terrific value in the market. 2015-2040+. **90+**.

2005 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa”- Heitz Wine Cellars

I have always found the Heitz Napa bottling of cabernet sauvignon consistently excellent and offering superb value, and there is nothing about the 2005 vintage that dissuades me from this perception. As I mentioned in the introduction, the alcohol levels of all of the cabs at Heitz have crept up to 14.5 percent in the last several years, but otherwise this is essentially the same fine wine that was sold in the '84 or '74 vintages. The nose is quite lovely, as it offers up scents of red cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, Rutherford Dust, some oriental spice tones and a very discreet touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with good mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the finish. The higher alcohol level here (in comparison to the days of yore) is nicely integrated into the wine and causes no signs of heat on the finish, but perhaps the ripeness makes its presence felt with just a touch of blurriness on the backend, rather than absolutely pristine focus. But this is still a lovely wine. 2010-2030. **90**.

1973 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The Napa bottling of Heitz cabernet sauvignon is also very ageworthy, and while the cork on this recently tasted bottle of the 1973 was very crumbly and probably not a perfect seal for the wine, it still drank surprisingly well. The nose is deep, complex and tertiary in its mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of petroleum jelly, cigar smoke, lovely, dusty soil tones, a bit of chipotle pepper, orange peel and spice tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, silky and a tad delicate (probably from the poor cork), but with good mid-palate depth, little remaining tannin and a nice tang still giving lift and bounce on the complex finish. I have little doubt that better corks would deliver an even more vigorous example, but this bottle really was a delight to drink and showed no signs of fading over the course of the couple of hours that we drank it. 2011-2020+? **88.**

1969 Cabernet Sauvignon “Lot C-91”- Heitz Wine Cellars

Inquiries with the Heitz family revealed that the “Lot C-91” bottling may well be the best-kept secret for great old Napa cabernet from these early years at the winery. Back at this time, when the winery was still small and just getting established, the Heitz family would sell their new release of the “Napa” bottling of cabernet while the Martha’s Vineyard bottling still had many more months (or even years) of barrel aging still to go. Occasionally, the winery would begin to run out of the Napa bottling while the Martha’s Vineyard was still in cask, and with no older stocks to fall back upon, some of the barrels of Martha’s would find their way into an earlier bottling in combination with any remaining Napa, and which would be designated as “Lot C-91”. Based on the brilliant showing of this wine in 1969, I have to assume that the vast majority of the blend was made up of Martha’s Vineyard juice. The 1969 is a beautiful bottle of wine, as it soars from the glass in a classic and vibrant mélange of cherries, eucalyptus, cocoa, woodsmoke, earth and a nice touch of game that adds further complexity to the wine. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very pure, with a great core of fruit, melting tannins, great focus and a very, very long, tangy and impeccably balanced finish. A great bottle of Napa cabernet at its zenith and with years of great drinking still ahead of it. 2007-2025+. **93.**

Cabernet Sauvignon “Lot MZ-1”- Heitz Wine Cellars

This is another of those blended bottlings that included a substantial percentage of Martha’s Vineyard in the cuvée. The Lot MZ-1 was bottled in 1975, making it most likely a blend of either 1972 or 1973 cabernet sauvignon, along with the casks of Martha’s Vineyard from the 1971 vintage, as there was no Martha’s bottled on its own from this year. I have been fortunate enough to taste this very rare wine on two occasions in the last few months, with one a bit more fragile from a crumbly cork, but the pristine bottle showing beautifully. The note which follows of course comes from the better bottle. The Lot MZ-1 is currently drinking splendidly, as it soars from the glass in a refined mélange of cherries, eucalyptus, tobacco leaf, Rutherford dust and a nice touch of nutskins in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, just a whisper of tannin, lovely focus and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. There is just a touch of volatile acidity in this particular bottle, but it is a very minor distraction from what is otherwise an absolutely delicious bottle at its apogee. The Martha’s Vineyard contribution here is very much in evidence. 2011-2030. **93.**

Bella Oaks Vineyard

The Bella Oaks Vineyard bottling from Heitz Wine Cellars will no longer be produced, as the vineyard has been sold upon the recent passing of Belle and Barney Rhodes. As long-time fans of the Napa Valley will already know, Belle and Barney Rhodes were regular fixtures at many events in Napa since the earliest days of the fine wine business in Napa, and their names figure prominently in any history of the region. In addition to growing grapes on their eighteen acre Bella Oaks Vineyard in Rutherford, the Rhodes also were the ones who originally planted the first block of Martha's Vineyard, which was soon sold thereafter to Tom and Martha May. The Rhodes' had one son, who sadly passed away before either Belle or Barney, and so the vineyard was sold after they had both passed away. The last vintage of Bella Oaks Vineyard cabernet sauvignon that was produced by the Heitz winery was the 2006, as the vineyard was sold after the vintage to the Booth family, who live in southern California. The Booths have decided to have their wine produced by the folks at Staglin Vineyards. Bella Oaks is a vineyard located on the western valley floor in Rutherford and is probably a slightly warmer site than Martha's Vineyard, which gets a little benefit from its location on the knees of the Mayacamas range. Since the release of the inaugural vintage in 1976, this has always been a very traditionally fine Napa Valley bottling, without the exotic signature of mintiness found in the Martha's Vineyard bottling and its towering eucalyptus trees that surround the vineyard, but the Bella Oaks has always had a very fine track record for graceful aging, being of course a Heitz cabernet sauvignon. Joe Heitz used to like to say that the two were quite close in quality, with the Bella Oaks perhaps a bit more elegant in style and the Martha's Vineyard the slightly more powerful wine. In one vintage in fact, the 1977, the winery priced the Martha's Vineyard and the Bella Oaks Vineyard bottlings exactly the same upon release, as this was considered one of the greatest early vintages of Bella Oaks cabernet.

2002 Cabernet Sauvignon "Bella Oaks Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2002 Bella Oaks bottling is a very promising bottle in the making, but it needs a few more years in the cellar to fully integrate percentage of new wood that it has to carry these days. The nose is deep, complex and quite classic in its aromatic profile, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, camphor, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, a touch of Asian spices and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, firm tannins and a very long, chewy finish that has not yet integrated its oak component completely. There is certainly adequate stuffing here to eventually carry the new wood effortlessly, but today the wood is not yet woven into the tapestry of the wine and pinches the backend a bit. So give this a few years in the cellar. 2015-2040. **92+**.

1985 Cabernet Sauvignon "Bella Oaks Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

Remarkably, the 1985 Heitz Bella Oaks cabernet is still a fairly young wine and in need of a bit more cellaring to really blossom. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, as it offers up scents of black cherries, tobacco smoke, a touch of chipotle pepper, Rutherford dust, a bit of nuttiness and a nice framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, good focus and a long, chewy and slightly rigid finish. This needs at least another four or five years of cellaring to fully soften, but there is a slight possibility that the rigidity that the wine

currently shows on the backend may always be part of its profile. A very good wine in need of a few more years of bottle age. The '85 Bella Oaks should prove to be one of the longest-lived wines of the vintage. 2015-240+. **90+**.

1984 Cabernet Sauvignon “Bella Oaks Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

Given how beautiful the Martha’s Vineyard bottling is in this vintage, I had hoped for a bit more fireworks from the '84 Bella Oaks, but perhaps this is simply reflective of a less than pristine bottle. The wine was sourced at retail in California only a few weeks before this article was completed, so perhaps our bottle was simply not in perfect shape. In any event, the bottle offered up an oddly “green” aromatic profile of bell pepper, red and black cherries, soil tones, smoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit weedy, with a dip in the mid-palate, modest tannins and a long, slightly four-square finish. Is this really representative of the '84 Bella Oaks? ???

1980 Cabernet Sauvignon “Bella Oaks Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1980 Bella Oaks cabernet is a very good bottle, but even at age thirty-three, it has retained just a touch of a dry edge from its new wood component. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, allspice, incipient notes of chipotle pepper, soil tones and still a fair bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit tannic, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and very good length and grip on the fine finish. The new oak here has given this wine a certain sense of rigidity on the palate that may never go completely away, and it is the only detracting element in what is otherwise a really lovely and still quite youthful example of the fine 1980 vintage. Give it a good hour in decanter to blossom if you choose to drink it in the next few years. 2011-2035+. **90**.

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon “Bella Oaks Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1978 Bella Oaks from Heitz is another very young and vibrant example of the vintage, and the wine really demands at least an hour of decanting time to blossom if it is to be drunk today. The wine is not overtly structured like the '78 Burgess Vintage Select, but when first opened it shows an odd lactic or cheesy note that is not necessarily inviting. However, one hour on this characteristic is subsumed in beautiful fruit tones, and the wine begins to drink splendidly. Once blossomed, the nose is a superb blend of red cherries, orange, woodsmoke, a hint of mint, walnuts, a gentle bass note of bell pepper, chipotles, soil tones and a lovely high end of Rutherford spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very fresh, with a fine core of cherry fruit, lovely soil tones, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip. A fine bottle of '78 that is now nearing its apogee, but which will continue to drink beautifully for a very long time. 2009-2030. **91**.

Trailside Vineyard

The Trailside Vineyard was purchased by Heitz Cellars in 1984. This is a hundred acre ranch that lies along the Silverado Trail in Rutherford, right next door to Domaine Mumm’s winery. In fact, the vineyard that lies alongside of the parking lot for Domaine Mumm is the start of the Trailside Vineyard. I had been a bit reserved about the amount of new wood that the 2005 was showing at the time of my September 2010 visit out to the winery, and so David Heitz thought it would be interesting to see how the first five vintages of Trailside had evolved, and had these lovely wines ready to go for my visit this past January to the winery. The first vintage made of the Trailside was the 1989, so we

tasted the vintages from 1994 back to 1989 to see how the bottling evolves with time and how the new wood eventually integrates. Not surprisingly, the new oak gets absorbed into the body of the wine fully and seamlessly with sufficient bottle age (all of the Trailside bottlings have been aged in one hundred percent new oak for their three years of aging in small French barrels), and my concerns about the bit of wood tannin still showing in the 2005 Trailside at this point in time certainly seem to be unwarranted. This is a truly outstanding (relatively) new addition to the Heitz lineup of cabernet sauvignon, and I am sure that having the Trailside bottling helped ease the loss of the Bella Oaks Vineyard after the 2007 vintage. It will be interesting to see if in the future the Heitz family decides to add a third single vineyard cabernet bottling to their lineup to replace the Bella Oaks. In the interim, no one will be disappointed with the exceptional quality of the Trailside cabernet sauvignon.

2005 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The folks at Heitz are very bullish about the quality of the Trailside bottling, and given the quality of the fruit here, I can see why this is the case. But this wine has a bit of work to do carrying one hundred percent new oak, and at this young age it is still rather marked by its oak component on both the nose and (to a lesser degree) the palate. To be fair to this wine, it is three years younger than the '02 Bella Oaks that was tasted alongside of it, and consequently it has had nowhere near the same amount of time to integrate its wood. In any case, underneath the bit of prominent new wood is a very, very classy wine which offers up scents of red and black cherries, exotic spices, lovely soil tones, smoke, Rutherford Dust and spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with ripe tannins, impressively integrated wood on the backend (despite its prominence on the nose at this stage in its development) and impressive length and grip on the complex and chewy finish. I would love to see this bottling with half as much new wood, as the underlying raw materials are really impressive, but I have little doubt that it will blossom just fine with several more years bottle age. 2016-2040+? **92+**.

1994 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1994 Trailside is aging beautifully and is still a handful of years away from its period of peak drinkability. The deep and complex nose offers up a superb mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of chocolate, cigar smoke, lovely soil tones, coffee and a deft touch of spicy new oak (now flawlessly integrated). On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and rock solid at the core, with a very classy profile, impeccable depth and focus and a very long, moderately tannic and complex finish. While it is not a crime to drink this wine today, I would not hesitate to hold off on bottles in the cellar for another five or six years, as there is clearly a lot more to come. A fine, fine bottle. 2016-2040. **92**.

1993 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1993 Trailside seems destined to be one of the very top vintages of this bottling from the first decade of its existence. The bouquet is deep and absolutely stunning, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, a bit of Bonnes-Mares-like heather tones, lovely soil nuances, new leather and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already beautifully complex, with a great core of pure fruit, impeccable balance, tangy acids and great length and grip on the perfectly focused and ripely tannic finish. A dynamite bottle

of cabernet in the making- again, give this another five or six years to really let it reach its apogee. It should drink beautifully for many decades. 2016-2040+. **93+**.

1992 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1992 Trailside Vineyard bottling from Heitz Cellars is not quite as deep or exuberant as the 1993 version, but it too is a lovely bottle of wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and classic Rutherford in its mélange of red and black cherries, leather, a touch of cigar smoke, lovely, spicy, dusty soil tones, incipient notes of chipotle peppers and a fine framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and blossoming beautifully on the attack, with good mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the nuanced finish. A fine bottle. 2014-2040. **92**.

1991 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

Along with the brilliant 1993 vintage, the 1991 Trailside is my favorite example of this bottling that I have yet tasted from Heitz Wine Cellars. The nose on the '91 is stunning, as it offers up a wonderfully complex mix of red and black cherries, blood orange, a nice touch of Asian spices, new leather, cigar smoke, laurel, complex soil tones and spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with excellent focus and balance, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins, lovely purity and excellent length and grip on the tangy and multi-layered finish. This is a great bottle of Napa cabernet in the making and I would love to see how this stacks up alongside of the Martha's Vineyard and Bella Oaks bottlings from 1991. Clearly this would have placed up near the very top of my horizontal tasting of the 1991 cabernets that I reported on last year. I would try to give it close to a decade more bottle age, as it is still decidedly more primary in its profile than the outstanding 1993 and really deserves more cellaring. 2020-2060+. **93+**.

1990 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1990 Trailside is now into its apogee of maturity and is drinking very well indeed. The nose offers up a complex and very classy blend of black cherries, a touch of mint, cocoa powder, chipotle peppers, cigar wrappers, lovely spice tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now quite broad on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, lovely balance, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and meltingly tannic finish. This is drinking beautifully today, but will have no difficulties aging another twenty-five to thirty years. A classic example. 2011-2040+. **92**.

1989 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The very first vintage of the Trailside Vineyard bottling at Heitz Wine Cellars is now fully mature and drinking very well, but it does not seem to show quite the same thread of personality that runs through all of the other vintages that I tasted of this bottling. The nose on the '89 Trailside is decidedly more black fruity than most vintages of this wine, as it offers up a very complex and maturing mélange of black cherries, leather, an exotic touch of meatiness, lovely soil tones, a bit of petroleum jelly, hints of eucalyptus, a streak of tariness and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core of fruit, still a fair bit of tannin and excellent length and grip on the complex and chewy finish. This is a very good bottle of cabernet, but subsequent vintages of the Trailside have perhaps just a touch more class. 2011-2040. **91**.

Fay Vineyard

Heitz Wine Cellars' "Fay Vineyard" bottlings of cabernet sauvignon from the mid-1970s are clearly amongst the finest wines produced at the winery during this fabulous decade for the estate. Joe and David Heitz only made four vintages of cabernet sauvignon (1975 to 1978) from this fine vineyard located right next door to Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and owned at that time by Nathan Fay. For many years, the Fay Vineyard had been recognized as one of the best for cabernet sauvignon in all of Napa Valley, and prior to Joe Heitz purchasing the production from this parcel, the Mondavi family at Charles Krug had purchased the grapes. In 1979 the Fay Vineyard would be bought outright by Warren Winiarski for his Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, so that the legacy of the vineyard would continue on for many years, but we only had that brief, four vintage window, to see what the combination of the outstanding fruit and terroir of the Fay Vineyard could do in the seasoned hands of Joe and David Heitz. Having now tasted all four vintages of the Fay bottling produced by Heitz Cellars during the brief period that the winery bought the production from Nathan Fay, I have been really struck by the consistent excellence of this wine, which were clearly amongst the cabernet stars of the decade of the 1970s. While the Martha's Vineyard bottling often receives most of the accolades for this period in the history at Heitz Wine Cellars, the Fay Vineyard bottlings are clearly at (or very near) the same level as the Martha's Vineyard cabernets from this era, and should most emphatically be on the radar of those that love this period of ageworthy and unmanipulated California cabernet sauvignon.

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Fay Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

I have now had the pleasure to drink the 1978 Heitz Cellars' Fay Vineyard bottling on three occasions in the last couple of years, and it is a beautiful example of this top notch vintage. The bouquet soars from the glass in a very pure and *à point* mélange of black cherries, chipotle peppers, eucalyptus, tobacco, a nice touch of chocolate, Rutherford spice tones, woodsmoke and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the attack, with a great core of ripe fruit, lovely soil tones, impeccable focus and balance, melting tannins and a very long, tangy and vibrant finish. Like so many of the very best examples of the 1978 cabernets, the Fay Vineyard bottling is at its apogee, but shows absolutely no signs of slowing down anytime in the next several decades. This was a very fitting close to this brief, but glorious chapter in the Heitz Cellars' single vineyard cab bottlings. 2010-2035. **94.**

1977 Cabernet Sauvignon "Fay Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1977 Heitz Fay Vineyard bottling is a superb example of the vintage that possesses plenty of potential longevity, despite its drinking beautifully at the present time. Like the 1978 Heitz wines, this really still needs some extended aeration before drinking, to allow all of its elements to unlock on the both the nose and palate. After a good thirty or forty minutes of air the wine offers up a lovely, red fruity nose of cherries, quince, blood orange, woodsmoke, a touch of curry, lovely soil tones, mustard seed, and a gentle topnote of the chipotles to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with impressively tangy acidity adding further vibrancy to the wine. The finish is very long, still a touch tannic and delivers outstanding length and grip. A very high class bottle of Napa cabernet at its zenith, the

1977 Fay Vineyard bottling is one of the most beautifully balanced examples that I have tasted from this drought vintage. 2009-2030. **93.**

1976 Cabernet Sauvignon “Fay Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

David Heitz graciously opened up a bottle of the 1976 Fay Vineyard during my most recent visit to the winery, as this was the one vintage I had not tasted of this bottling from the brief era when it was produced at Heitz Cellars. As David noted, the drought conditions in 1976 were very, very difficult for the vines, and this vintage was probably one of the worst of this fantastic decade for Napa cabernet. Nevertheless, the 1976 Fay bottling is really lovely, as it offers up a complex and fully mature bouquet of cherries, quince, chipotle peppers, cigar smoke, lovely spice tones, a nice base of soil, orange peel and Asian spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, suave and *à point*, with lovely focus and complexity and a long, mature finish that still sports excellent grip and balance. Classy juice. 2011-2035. **92.**

1975 Cabernet Sauvignon “Fay Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

I have had a couple of bottles of the '75 Heitz Fay Vineyard bottling in the last year or two, but this most recent bottle was the finest I have had yet and certainly ranks right up there with the most memorable bottles I have tasted from this superb winery. The bouquet is deep and flat out stunning, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, dark chocolate, just a touch of petroleum jelly, cigar box, lovely soil tones, coffee and Rutherford dust in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core of pure fruit, modestly tannic and very long and intensely flavored on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. The '75 Fay is still a fairly young wine, and while it is a great drink today with half an hour in decanter, it still has many, many years ahead of it and may yet improve with further bottle age. 2009-2030+. **94+.**

Martha’s Vineyard

The famed Martha’s Vineyard of Tom and Martha May is a thirty-four acre parcel of vines on the western side of Napa Valley, just south of the town of Oakville. The vineyard is gently sloping, as it sits up a bit from the valley floor in the foothills of the Mayacamas range. As noted above, it was originally cleared and planted to cabernet sauvignon in 1961, just a couple of years before the Mays’ purchased it, and the 1965 vintage was the first that they sold fruit from the parcel. It may well have been fate that led the Mays to search out Joe Heitz as the purchaser of their grapes, as the realtor had left the couple two bottles of Heitz Cellar’s Champagne at the house as a welcome present when they first moved into their home in 1963, and both Tom and Martha were very impressed with the quality of the Heitz wines that had been left to them. This prompted a visit to Heitz Wine Cellars a short time later, and the two couples struck up a close friendship that would eventually lead to the creation of one of the most well-loved wines in all of California. Joe and Tom sealed their agreement for Heitz Wine Cellars to buy the grapes from Martha’s Vineyard with a handshake in late 1964, and from that day forward, the family name of Heitz has been indelibly linked with Martha’s Vineyard. The first vintage that Heitz Cellars made wine from the Mays’ grapes was in 1965, with the production blended into the Napa Valley cabernet bottling, as at this time, there were no single vineyard designated bottlings in California. However, Tom May had asked Joe if

he could have a barrel of his wine bottled up on his own as part of the payment for the grapes, so the production from the vineyard was vinified separately in 1965.

Joe was very impressed with the quality of the grapes hailing from Martha's Vineyard, as well as the subsequent character of the wine in barrel, and he and Tom quickly agreed that the production from this vineyard would be bottled on its own in the following vintage. Thus, California's first single vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon was created in the 1966 vintage, with the release of the Heitz Wine Cellars' "Martha's Vineyard" cabernet sauvignon. Of course the wine would not be released until 1970, as it had to be aged for the requisite four years prior to being made available to customers. For most of the vineyard's life prior to its being attacked by phylloxera in the late 1980s and eventually being replanted after the 1992 vintage, Tom May has overseen the management of the vineyard. The Mays' family home lies right alongside the vineyard, amongst the vines that swell up on three sides as they climb gently up towards the Mayacamas range behind the house, and despite Tom having gone to school at Williams College back east and having been a teacher prior to he and Martha buying the home and vineyard in 1963, he took readily to viticulture and was quite content to have found a change in career as a grape grower in the early years of Napa Valley's wine boom. He and Martha have happily taken a barrel of their own wine every year since 1965 as part of their compensation for the grapes, and it is hard to imagine anyone with more experience drinking the Martha's Vineyard bottling (other than members of the Heitz family themselves) than Tom and Martha May.



Tom and Martha May at their home in Oakville, with Martha's Vineyard behind them.

Martha's Vineyard is a very classic Napa terroir, with its soils comprised of alluvial silts and gravels from the valley floor, gently mixed with a bit of debris that has eroded down over the millennia from the nearby Mayacamas range. The vineyard is surrounded by towering eucalyptus trees, which have also inevitably contributed to the terroir of this vineyard, as the wines from here have always been marked by a decided mintiness that comes from the surrounding trees. The vines here are a superb selection that produces small, thick-skinned berries, which no doubt play a pivotal role in creating the very long-lived wine that is Martha's Vineyard cabernet sauvignon. The vineyard was hit by phylloxera in the late 1980s and eventually had to be fully replanted with cuttings taken from the vineyard. Consequently, there were no Heitz bottlings of Martha's Vineyard cabernet in the 1993, 1994 and 1995 vintages. Like all of the Heitz family's own vineyards, Martha's Vineyard has been farmed organically for many, many years now. The vineyard continues to be owned by the May family, as second generation Richard May and Laura May Everett are committed to farming their parents' vineyard and continuing the Napa tradition that was started with a handshake between their father and Joe Heitz in 1964.

The style of the Heitz Wine Cellars Martha's Vineyard cabernet is one of the most unique and compelling in all of California. The often intense mintiness is one of its signature aromatic elements, as the surrounding eucalyptus trees have contributed this characteristic since the very earliest vintages of the wine. It has always been a very structured wine in its youth, which Joe and David Heitz have always set to round off with sufficient barrel aging before the wine is bottled and released for sale. As noted above, the wine spends one full year after its fermentation (remember, no malolactic for any of the Heitz cabernet sauvignons) in very large, old, American oak foudres of various sizes (all more than 1,000 liters in capacity, and several significantly larger), before the wine is racked into traditional, 225 liter French oak barrels for another three years of aging prior to bottling. These days most of the French barrels will be new for the Martha's Vineyard bottling, and when I asked David Heitz if this was a fairly new phenomenon for the wine, he replied "that in the first few vintages my dad probably used a lower percentage of new oak for the French barrels- once of course they had been bought in the first place- but it has now been several decades that the vast majority of the small oak barrels for the Martha's have been new barrels." But he is quick to point out that the percentage of new wood is tailored a bit to the style of the vintage, so that the occasional, more delicate vintage would see a smaller percentage of new oak used for the three years' worth of cellaring in small barrels. The resulting wine is always, deep, full-bodied and impressively complex right out of the blocks, with firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and the potential for thirty to fifty years or more of positive evolution in the bottle. And Martha's Vineyard is unequivocally a wine that gains in complexity with bottle age, so one is richly rewarded for patience with this iconic cabernet sauvignon.

I have heard in some circles that the quality of the Martha's Vineyard bottling post-replanting from phylloxera is not at the same high level as was the case previously. Often folks commenting in this fashion relate it to the young age of the vines currently in the vineyard, as the entire vineyard was replanted after the 1992 vintage. Keep in mind however that it is perfectly possible to make great wine from young vines, if one is

vigilant in keeping down the vigor of the young vines and reigning in their yields to create depth and concentration in the juice. This has of course been done by the Heitz viticultural team led by Mark Neal. And do not forget that Martha's Vineyard had only been planted in 1961, so when Joe Heitz had been so impressed by the quality of the wine being produced here in that first vintage of 1965, this was from the production of vines that were only four years old at the time- or younger than the vines currently are in the vineyard after replanting! The first vintage of Martha's Vineyard released on its own, the 1966, by all reports continues to drink beautifully to this day, and some of the legendary early vintages of Martha's, such as the 1968, 1969 and 1970 were also all the products of young vines! In my experience, the younger vintages of Martha's Vineyard are every bit as superb as those produced in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, and reports of the wine's quality slipping a bit post-phylloxera are simply speculative tales fashioned as true knowledge fails. With the slightly riper octanes of the Martha's bottlings these days, it may take the wines a few more years to fully integrate when they are first released than might have been the case in 1978 for instance, but to my palate there is little doubt that today's Martha's Vineyard bottlings will age as long and gracefully as any of the previous vintages in the long and illustrious history of one of California's true First Growths.

2006 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2006 Martha's Vineyard is just about to be released from the winery and it shows excellent potential. Like all recent vintages of this bottling, the 2006 weighs in around 14.5 percent alcohol, but out of the blocks it carries its ripeness with no signs of heat at all. The beautiful nose is deep, pure and still quite primary, as it offers up scents of cherries, eucalyptus, tobacco smoke, really lovely soil tones and a touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really possesses a very elegant and rock solid core of fruit, with ripe tannins, excellent focus and balance and a very long, tangy and youthful finish. This will be a lovely bottle, but I would give it a full decade in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge from behind its significant structure. At this very early stage, it looks to be a classic vintage of Martha's Vineyard in the making. 2025-2075. **94.**

2005 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2005 Martha's Vineyard has an absolutely flamboyant nose that soars from the glass in a celestial blend of red and black cherries, mint, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, Rutherford Dust and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, beautiful complexity, a very generous attack, impeccable focus and balance and stunning length and grip on the ripely tannic and perfectly poised finish. This tastes as if it could be a young release of the 1975 or 1978, it is that classic in size and shape, despite it being at a higher alcohol level and having seen a touch more new wood during its élevage. A great Martha's in the making. 2020-2070. **94+.**

2004 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2004 Martha's Vineyard, which was tasted in New York at the same tasting where the 2007 chardonnay was sampled, is a bit lower in alcohol than several of these other vintages, as it comes in at an even fourteen percent. The wine was raised in eighty percent new wood this vintage, but carries its wood component quite well. The bouquet is

deep, complex and very classy, as it delivers scents of red and black cherries, chocolate, a gentle touch of mint, lovely soil tones and a generous coating of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely purity and balance and very long, ripely tannic and fairly oaky finish. The new wood component here seems to be a tad less well-integrated on the backend than with some of these other young vintages of Martha's, and I wonder if the crop was a little short and they needed to use the barrels that they had bought. In any case, this will be a very good vintage of Martha's Vineyard that should start drinking in another five to seven years. 2015-2040+? **93+**.

2002 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 2002 Martha's Vineyard is another very strong vintage for the iconic Napa bottling. The bouquet is simply great, as it delivers a classic mix of red and black cherries, eucalyptus, chocolate, a touch of meatiness, Asian spices, soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very deep, with great attack, a sappy core of fruit, ripe, round tannins, impeccable focus and balance and just a bit of wood spice currently coloring the very long and tangy finish. Another beautiful vintage of Martha's, the 2002 should begin to really drink well in another five or six years and last many, many decades. 2016-2045. **94**.

2001 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

After bouncing a bottle of 2001 Martha's Vineyard unceremoniously around in the car during a day of tasting in the Santa Cruz Mountains in January (prior to having time to pull the cork), I was very happy to have a chance to taste a second bottle of this lovely wine that had been neither "shaken, nor stirred" on my most recent visit to Napa. This is a lovely vintage for Martha's Vineyard, as the wine offers up a deep and classy nose of red and black cherries, chocolate, mint, tobacco smoke, a touch of fruitcake, soil tones and a nice framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with lovely focus, ripe tannins and impressive length and grip on the long and just beginning to blossom finish. At age ten, this is still very early days for a top vintage of Martha's Vineyard, but with another decade or so of bottle age, this will be outstanding. 2021-2075. **94+**.

1999 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

1999 was only the fourth vintage "back" for Martha's Vineyard, after its replanting in the late 1980s, but the wine is absolutely spectacular. The alcohol here is a tad lower than the 14.5 percent of the 2005 and 2002 Martha's, as it weighs in at 14.2 percent. The bouquet is absolutely a classic expression of this inimitable *terroir*, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, eucalyptus, raw cocoa, Rutherford Dust, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suave on the attack, with a great core of fruit, a touch of mid-palate tariness, ripe tannins, superb focus and great grip on the very, very long, refined and intense finish. A great young vintage of Martha's Vineyard. 2016-2050+. **95**.

1997 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

There have only been three vintages in the history of the Martha's Vineyard bottling that have been given unique labels by the winery: the 1974, 1985 and 1997. When I asked Kathleen Heitz Myers about this, she said that the special labels were selected to denote vintages of absolutely extraordinary character. The 1997, which was only the second vintage to be produced from the replanted vineyard, is indeed a brilliant

young vintage of Martha's, as it soars from the glass in a deep and youthfully beautiful blend of black cherries, cassis, saddle leather, woodsmoke, gentle notes of eucalyptus and still a touch of cedary oak spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, excellent focus and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly poised finish. A tad less ripe than some of the recent vintages, the 1997 Martha's tips the scales at 14.3 percent alcohol and seems likely to be one of the all-time classics in the history of this bottling. 2020-275. **97.**

1991 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1991 vintage has long been touted as one of the great recent vintages for cabernet sauvignon, and this is certainly evident in the '91 Martha's Vineyard. The nose is deep, ripe and absolutely classic in its aromatic mélange of red and black cherries, mint, tobacco, a touch of chocolate, lovely soil tones and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and quite powerful in style, with a great core of pure fruit, a lovely signature of soil, ripe tannins and impeccable balance on the very, very long and tangy finish. Superb juice, and decidedly more impressive than many of the highly-touted 1991 cabernets that I reported on several issues ago in the newsletter. This is still a very young wine and will need a good decade more cellaring to really reach its apogee. 2021-2075. **94.**

1990 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1990 vintage of Martha's Vineyard is less ripe and powerful than the 1991 and is one of Kathleen Heitz Myers' favorite vintages from the decade of the 1990s. One taste and it is very easy to understand why this is the case, as this is a beautifully elegant rendition of Martha's Vineyard. The bouquet is deep, complex and stunning, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, new leather, eucalyptus, cigar smoke, Rutherford dust and just a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined, with fine mid-palate depth, beautiful complexity, moderate tannins and superb length and grip on the dancing finish. While the 1990 Martha's Vineyard is already drinking beautifully, I would be inclined to give it just a few more years of cellaring, to allow it to reach its zenith. It will drink well for many decades on into the future. Great wine! 2015-2065. **95.**

1987 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1987 Martha's Vineyard hails back to the time when the labels stated 13.5 percent alcohol, and in this most recent vertical tasting of the wine, one did get a strong sense that this vintage and earlier were indeed just a tad less ripe than subsequent vintages. This slightly lower octane seems to allow an even stronger signature of soil to infuse the wines. The 1987 Martha's is a great, great wine that seems to have been lost a bit in the shuffle when it was released, as it followed on the heels of the specially labeled 1985. The bouquet is deep and absolutely stunning, as it delivers a complex blend of black cherries, mint, a touch of chocolate, Rutherford dust, pretty mineral tones and an exotic topnote of allspice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and transparent, with a seamless attack, a sappy core, and great length and grip on the tangy and perfectly poised finish. A great vintage of Martha's that is a bit undeservedly overlooked in the pantheon of Martha's Vineyard bottlings. 2011-2050+. **96.**

1986 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1986 Martha’s Vineyard is still an impressively young wine and a bit bound up in its adolescence crankiness at the present time, though the underlying quality here is quite evident. The nose offers up a deep mélange of black cherries, a bit of tariness, eucalyptus, cigar ash, fine soil tones, cedar and a topnote of Rutherford dust. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tight, with a rock solid core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and fine focus on the long and still quite closed finish. I may be underrating this vintage a tad, but the wine is still quite reticent and needs a handful more years of bottle age before it really starts to stir from its extended hibernation. 2016-2050+. **92+**.

1985 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

I can distinctly recall from my early days in the wine trade the release of the 1985 Martha’s Vineyard, which was eagerly anticipated after it was announced that this was the first vintage to be graced with a special label since the legendary 1974. This was at the height of the winery’s popularity and the 1985 Martha’s was an extremely difficult bottle to come by at the time of its release. Consequently, I had not seen a bottle in many years and was delighted to see it included in our vertical at the winery in June. The wine is flat out brilliant, as it soars from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, saddle leather, a great base of soil tones, eucalyptus, smoke, incipient notes of petroleum jelly and a very gentle framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful, with a rock solid core of fruit, great complexity, moderate tannins and a very long, perfectly balanced, tangy and palate-staining finish. This is a very intense vintage of Martha’s that is decidedly younger than the 1987 for instance, and still demands plenty of cellaring time. It will clearly prove to be a legendary vintage of Martha’s and certainly has earned its special label. 2025-2100. **96+**.

1984 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1984 Martha’s Vineyard has always lived a bit in the shadow of the 1985, whose reputation was already blossoming before either it or the 1984 were released. Nevertheless, I have always been a very big fan of this vintage of Martha’s, and the recent bottle was a stunning wine. This is still relatively young and will continue to improve with further bottle age, but offers up a very deep and absolutely classic bouquet of red and black cherries, fresh mint, a deep base of soil tones, eucalyptus, incipient notes of nutskin, woodsmoke and the first stirring of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a tad closed, with a great core of fruit, beautiful focus and balance, moderate, ripe tannins and stunning length and grip on the classy finish. A superb vintage of Martha’s Vineyard, the 1984 really should still be given a bit more bottle age before broaching it in earnest. 2017-2075. **94+**.

1983 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

1983 was a very difficult year for North Coast cabernets and the ’83 Martha’s Vineyard certainly shows a much “cooler vintage” profile on both the nose and palate. The deep and complex bouquet offers up scents of cassis, chipotle peppers, cherries, a touch of cigar ash, lavender, mint and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and just a touch sinewy, but with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus, impressive complexity and a very long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is not a classic vintage of Martha’s Vineyard (it is much more black fruity in profile than most vintages), but it remains a beautiful bottle of cabernet that is now fully mature and shows

every indication of drinking at this high level for several decades to come. A very successful 1983. 2011-2040. **91.**

1981 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1981 Martha’s Vineyard is an absolute classic vintage at its peak of maturity. The deep and very beautiful nose soars from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, eucalyptus, cigar smoke, cloves, new saddle leather, allspice and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very, very soil-driven, with tangy acids, melted tannins and absolutely perfect focus and balance on the brilliantly long finish. I cannot recall the 1981 Martha’s Vineyard having the reputation as one of the great vintages of this bottling, but this is clearly one of the legends. 2011-2050. **95.**

1980 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1980 Martha’s Vineyard is a lovely wine that is just now reaching its apogee of peak maturity. It is not a great year for Martha’s, which shows itself with just a touch of backend bitterness, but this is a very small point in what is otherwise a very nice, more measured vintage of this lovely wine. The bouquet is *à point* and quite classic in its aromatic blend of red and black cherries, mint, cigar ash, lovely soil tones, incipient notes of chipotle and just a touch of tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite refined on the attack, with good mid-palate depth, melted tannins, lovely focus and very good length and grip on the finish. There is a possibility that the touch of backend bitterness here will vanish with more bottle age, and if this is the case, then my score will seem conservative. But for the moment, despite the wine’s lovely complexity, one has to knock just a couple of points off the score for this characteristic. 2011-2030+. **90.**

1979 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

I cannot recall the 1979 Martha’s Vineyard having a great reputation- which is perfectly understandable, given that it came hard on the heels of the celestial 1978, which is surely one of the greatest vintages of Martha’s Vineyard ever produced- but this is a great wine and one of the great “sleeper” vintages from the decade of the 1970s. The deep, complex and utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a fully mature mélange of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of petroleum jelly, a beautiful base of Martha’s soil, fresh herbs, nutty overtones and just a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with lovely plushness on the attack, a sappy core of fruit, a fine signature of soil, melting tannins and absolutely stunning length and grip on the classic finish. A beautiful, beautiful vintage of Martha’s Vineyard and one of my absolute favorites for current drinking. 2011-2035+. **94.**

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

I have had the ’78 Martha’s Vineyard on two or three occasions in the last few years, but until I sampled a bottle directly from the cellars in June, I had always had bottles that I had sourced from auction and which I would have classified as in “good, but not great condition.” What a difference a pristine example makes! 1978 was a great, great year for Napa cabernet sauvignon and the Martha’s Vineyard is an utterly profound example of the vintage. The celestial nose soars from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of blood orange, mint, chipotle pepper, allspice, cigar smoke, a touch of nuttiness and a bit of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the sappy core, with flawless balance, stunning transparency, very little remaining tannin and laser-like focus on the hauntingly complex and endless finish. After having had less than perfect bottles of the ’78 Martha’s

previously, I am so happy to finally have crossed paths with a pristine bottle of this legendary Napa cabernet. 2011-2040. **98.**

1977 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

I had never previously tasted the 1977 Martha’s Vineyard, and the wine turned out to be a superb example at its apogee of drinkability. The bouquet is deep and utterly enchanting, as it wafts from the glass in a beautiful mélange of cassis, warm berries, cherries, eucalyptus, woodsmoke, herbs and a lovely, complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and focused, with a seamless palate impression, a lovely core of red fruit, melting tannins, excellent grip and superb complexity on the long, focused and refined finish. A terrific vintage of Martha’s Vineyard, and a wine to keep an eye out for at auction, as the quality of this wine far exceeds its reputation. 2007-2025.

94.

1976 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

In the drought years of 1976 and 1977, the Heitz wines that I have tasted are some of the most brilliant examples to be found, and this is certainly true of the ’76 Martha’s Vineyard. This was the first time that I can recall tasting the 1976 and it is a beautiful bottle of wine that is now at its apogee. The deep and utterly brilliant nose soars from the glass in a complex and pure blend of cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, mint, a touch of coffee, nutskins, cigar smoke and a wonderfully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with superb delineation and balance, fine mid-palate depth, melting tannins and stunning length and grip on the dancing finish. A great bottle that shows no signs of the more “roasted” character evident in most cabernets from this torrid vintage. 2011-2030+. **95.**

1975 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

The more I drink California cabernets from the decade of the 1970s, the more I am convinced that I have a slight preference for the style of the 1975s over their more highly touted brethren from the riper year of 1974. The brilliant 1975 Martha’s Vineyard is certainly pretty persuasive evidence that 1975 is indeed a great, great year for cabernet in Napa, as the wine is beautifully deep, pure and still a tad on the young side at age thirty-six! The magical and deep-pitched nose offers up a great mélange of black cherries, petroleum jelly, cigar smoke, leather, a touch of chipotles, coffee and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerfully built, with impeccable focus and balance, a rock solid core of fruit, still a bit of tannin to resolve, superb, tangy acids and simply stunning length and grip on the perfectly poised and refined finish. A wine of First Growth depth and dimension by any stretch of the imagination. 2015-2075. **97+.**

1974 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars

(This note dates back to 2004, as I have not crossed paths with a bottle of the ’74 Martha’s since that time. Given that it is one of the most highly sought after and expensive wines from this golden era of California wine, I felt it would be inappropriate to ask to revisit it when the winery graciously offered to put together a small vertical of Martha’s Vineyard to fill a few holes I had in my tasting notes. I have drunk the wine on several occasions over the years and have never been anything short of absolutely thrilled with its stunning quality. But given that this note from 2004 was from a bottle with a touch of volatile acidity to it, there is a very strong possibility that the wine is even better today than is reflected in this particular note, so please keep that in mind.) I have

had the good fortune to taste the 1974 Heitz Martha's Vineyard on a number of occasions over the years, and this wine has always been outstanding. When I first crossed paths with this wine back in the late 1980s, it was so marked by its mintiness and eucalyptus tones as to be immediately identifiable in blind tastings. However, as the years have gone by, the wine has gained nuance and complexity, and is now a stunning aromatic package of eucalyptus, cherries, spit-roasted venison, coffee, earth and vanillin oak. There was just a whiff of volatile acidity in this particular bottle that elevates the aromatics and adds to the complexity. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and heroically proportioned, with great inner mouth complexity for a California cabernet, a lush core of fruit, and tremendous length and grip on the very long, meltingly tannic and complex finish. I would be very surprised to not still see the '74 Martha's Vineyard still drinking well twenty years from now. A brilliant wine. 2004-2020+. **96.**

1973 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1973 Martha's Vineyard is fully mature and is drinking beautifully at nearly forty years of age. The deep and utterly classic nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, petroleum jelly, fresh mint, chipotle peppers, spice tones, a beautiful base of soil and a nice touch of nutskins in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with a silky palate impression, lovely intensity of flavor, lovely complexity and stunning length and grip on the perfectly focused and dancing finish. The '73 Martha's Vineyard will not last anywhere near as long as wines such as the 1974 or 1975, but it still has plenty of life in it and will continue to dazzle for decades to come. Just a beautiful bottle of wine. 2011-2045. **95.**

1972 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1972 Martha's Vineyard is a beautiful bottle of wine at its apogee of maturity and is a classic expression of this extravagant and minty Napa Valley crown jewel. The bouquet is deep, very fine and quite serious, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, coffee beans, a rather gentle note of eucalyptus for Martha's, smoke, petroleum jelly, a touch of cocoa powder and a beautiful base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and just a touch chunky, but with great mid-palate depth of sweet fruit, impeccable balance and a very long, focused and complex finish that closes with superb grip and delineation. A lovely, lovely wine, and a vintage of Martha's Vineyard that is not as well-known as the 1970 and 1974, but which is not too far off the qualitative pace of those two legendary bottlings. 2007-2020+. **93.**

1970 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

I had not tasted a bottle of the 1970 Martha's Vineyard since 2004 and was very happy to cross paths with a bottle recently, as it was inserted as a ringer into a large 1970 Bordeaux tasting that I attended very recently in southern California. This is one of my favorite vintages of Martha's Vineyard for current consumption, and though the most recent bottle was a tad more easy-going structurally than the last bottle I tasted, there is no rush to drink up this lovely wine. The nose is deep, pure and quite classic in its superb mélange of black cherries, red berries, gentle mintiness, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite velvety on the attack, with a very solid core of fruit, melting tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. I wonder if this bottle was not quite pristine, as it did not possess quite the vigor on the backend that I remember in my previous tastings of the wine, but time of course, is moving inexorably

forward. However, as all previous bottles of the 1970 Martha's Vineyard that I have tasted rated between 94 and 95 points, so I have my suspicions that this most recent bottle may have not seen perfect storage for its entire life. 2011-2025+? **92.**

1968 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1968 vintage was the first truly legendary Martha's Vineyard bottling and its reputation has been stellar since the wine was first released in 1973. At age forty-three, the wine remains absolutely at its zenith and is drinking stunningly well. The bouquet is deep, wide open and brilliant, as it soars from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of chocolate, a beautiful signature note of fresh mint, woodsmoke, Rutherford dust, a touch of petroleum jelly, red curry and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and absolutely *à point*, with a sappy core of fruit, a beautiful base of soil, great focus, bright, tangy acids and flawless balance on the very, very long and utterly seamless finish. This is a legendary vintage of Martha's Vineyard that remains at its absolute apogee. 2011-2025+. **96.**

1967 Cabernet Sauvignon "Martha's Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

The 1967 Martha's Vineyard- only the second vintage ever produced of this iconic Napa cabernet sauvignon- has no doubt been fully mature for decades, but continues to drink very nicely and offer up a lot of pleasure. The nose is deep and classy, as it offers up a complex mix of cherries, woodsmoke, red curry, lovely soil tones, eucalyptus, soil and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-full and now getting just a tad delicate structurally, but still with lovely intensity of flavor and complexity, fine balance and very good length and grip on the finish. I would guess that the 1967 Martha's is getting towards the end of its plateau of maturity and will probably start to slide gently into decline within the next eight to ten years, and it is probably best drunk up in regular-sized formats. But it remains a lovely wine for current consumption. 2011-2020+? **89.**

Port

Heitz Cellars has offered various iterations of Port and other dessert wines over the years, often produced from purchased wine and offered "to add a bit to the cash flow and help finance the aging of the cabernets" as Joe Heitz might say in his day. But the Port bottlings were often made from the estate's own vineyards- first from grignolino in the early days, and now from classic Portuguese varieties that have been planted in the Ink Grade Vineyard. The current release is very well executed.

Ink Grade Port- Heitz Wine Cellars (375 ml.)

The current release of the Heitz Ink Grade Port, which is made from classic Portuguese varieties, is really quite lovely. The nose shows off a ripe and complex blend of black raspberry, cassis, tarry tones, chocolate, licorice and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit youthfully marked by its spirit component, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, good acids and fine length and grip. This is a lot like drinking a young bottle of vintage Port with less tannin, and while it is approachable today, I would give it a few years to mellow out and blossom. 2014-2030+. **88.**