

IT'S TIME FOR WINE and OTHER THINGS

by

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Fine Napa Wineries – Not All So Near, but, Oh So Worth the Time

and

A London Follow-Up

In Case You Hadn't Heard: Auction Napa Valley raised an impressive \$6,000,000.00 this year that will benefit school and community wellness centers, after-school and summer programs, and parent education. Congratulations to the Napa Valley Vintners and this year's Barrel Auction chair, Alan Viader. Put June 3-5, 2027, on your calendar if you wish to experience something truly unique that actually translates into good for so many.

Robert Foley Vineyards:

Sometimes Napa visitors miss the best wines to taste because they are a bit off the county's two main northern/southern highways (Rt. 29 and the Silverado Trail). Perhaps it is the extra driving time that keeps them away, or perhaps the fear of getting lost in the majestic hills that envelop the Valley. Whatever the reason, those searching for the best wines should often ignore the perceived problems and make the "trek" up the winding roads where they will so often discover what they had hoped to find in wine paradise – scenic vistas, tasting rooms with character, and superb wines.

One such destination should be Robert Foley Vineyards, located up Howell Mountain about 15-20 minutes off the Silverado Trail. Limited to 10 guests/day by appointment, this small boutique production winery is helmed by legendary owner/winemaker Bob Foley, and run on a day-to-day basis by one of our favorite people – his wife Kelly Kehoe.

Bob's pedigree is the envy of those in the know. Heitz Cellars, followed by 15 years as the founding winemaker for *Markham Vineyards*, and then the founding winemaker for *Pride Mountain Vineyards*. He also created the highly acclaimed *Switchback Ridge*, *Hourglass*, *Paloma*, and *School House* wines. Now, his focus is predominantly on his namesake winery, though he still serves as winemaker for *Padis*, *Herson Family*, and *JennaMarise*.

Our Favorites:

-2025 Chardonnay (\$40): From Jamison Canyon, we loved the brightness, the mouthfeel, and the long watering finish all surrounding noticeable nuances of butterscotch.

-2022 Charbono (\$48): How we love this grape, especially when the fruit is grown by a master like Peter Heitz and the wine is made by a pro like Robert. White pepper, soft yet semi chewy tannins, and a dark cherry finish.

-2022 Merlot, Howell Mt. (\$75): Smart people search out Merlot these days to pair with dishes of all types, but when you have a big one, as here, meats are your best bet. This bottle boasts black plums, cherries, great acidity, and mocha couched between a spicy first sip and long finish.

-2021 Cab Franc (\$125): Blueberry on the attack, you won't find any hints of green here. A full mid-palate with soft tannins and excellent balance.

-2019 Claret (\$125): Close to perfect, it is no wonder the winery advertises this one as its flagship. 80% Cab, 17% Merlot, and 3% Petit Verdot (left bank Bordeaux style, of course). Violets, cherries, and a touch of vanilla cascade from front to back. A seemingly never-ending finish.

-2021 Howell Mt. Cab (\$200): Grown at 2,000 feet, this is from a single marvelous vineyard around the winery. Lush and ripe with enviable structure. Can be enjoyed for many years.

Be sure to ask what else might be available for tasting. You can't go wrong with Robert Foley wines of any varietal.

Pride Mountain Vineyards:

Speaking of unique, *Pride Mountain Vineyards* sits at the top of Sprong Mountain straddling the boundary line between Napa and Sonoma counties. We have been fortunate to know most of the talented and hospitable principals here for many years – CEO Steve Pride, Director of Business/Marketing Wendy Brooks, Director of Hospitality Tim Bouchet, and titled wine ambassadors Stuart and Suzanne Pride Bryan. Knowing them is *almost* all one needs to know to understand why this winery is so outstanding.

We say “almost” because the area we omitted was winemaking. *Pride* has not had many in its history, but has been blessed with some of the best, from Robert Foley (yes, the one above), to Sally Johnson Blum (who now consults and owns her own terrific winery), to the present team of Matt Ward as winemaker and Steve Pride, himself, as Director of Winemaking.

Some of our most indelible wine-related memories occurred at *Pride*, including the year violent storms struck the area and no one was traveling up or down the mountain. We happened to already be there and spent the day tasting in the caves with, and getting to know, Steve. When Sally heard, she jokingly said she would do one better, and we had another marvelous tasting day on our next visit.

We have also enjoyed our time with Tim, who we saw last month while updating our notes, which you will see below. He has been with Pride for over 29 years and was one of the first people we met when

we began our Napa journeys about that long ago. We were stunned to realize his kids are now in college. Can we be that old? Anyway, as always, we had a first class tasting.

-2024 Napa Chardonnay (\$50): Aged in only 10% new oak, it is surprising how flavorful this wine presents. Wonderful balance between minerality and creaminess with peaches flooding the senses.

-2023 Merlot (\$72): Always one of the best Merlots “out there,” it is elegant and even seductive. Bright cherries and cassis dominate, though pleasing secondary characteristics (forest floor and cigar box) soon come through.

-2024 Cabernet Franc (\$85): One of our “go to” varietals, we are picky about which ones we recommend. *Pride* has always produced a winner. This one shows blackberries punctuated by black pepper and perhaps a touch of thyme. Medium and pleasing velvety tannins are a hallmark. A hint of truffles completes the picture.

-2024 Syrah (\$72): Blueberries to blackberries with spices and black pepper describes this cold weather, savory, Syrah that is the perfect summer BBQ wine.

-Viognier (\$50): Not to belabor or over-hype, but few American Viogniers can compete with this one, which offers peach and floral aromas before one discovers hints of grapefruit and lychee.

-2023 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$85): Tell us where we can find an \$85 Cab like this (68% Napa and 32% Sonoma) and we will run to taste it. Naturally, no disappointment here. Dense with black and red fruit galore. Earth, cedar, and a little mint complete the picture.

-2023 Reserve Claret (\$175) and 2022 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (\$175): Can we say more than our personal wine cellar has dozens of these wines we have collected over the years? As much as we prefer to use our own descriptions, we can’t convey the beauty of these wines as well as the *Pride* website. The description applies to both in our opinion.

Aromas of cedar, moist tobacco leaf, and coriander seed are the first indication of savory beauty. Dense layers of elderberry, mulberry and blackcurrant are next to unfold. The first taste reaffirms the black fruit quality before graphite and crushed stone comes to the forefront. This minerality has the subtle saline quality of crushed oyster shells. The structure is powerful but does not dominate all the other elements. As the long finish winds down, there is a lovely unfurling of leather, tea tree, and cacao notes.

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As we wrote in the Foley piece above, there are other terrific wines that may be available for tasting, but in the interest of the shortness of life, we cannot cover each one. In fact, not all are listed for sale on the *Pride* website. It can’t hurt to ask what else is open. Everything at *Pride* is excellent.

London Follow-Up:

Our last column on London sparked a great deal of commentary, and we were pleasantly flattered to hear from many people for the first time. There was a common suggestion among the

majority of emails, and it asked us to publish some of the actual dishes or specialty drinks we enjoyed at truly unique establishments. So here are a few.

Evelyn's Table:

- Course 1: Crab, Green Asparagus, Pistachio, Sweet Cicely, Sarawak Pepper Hollandaise.
- Course 2: North Sea Halibut, Langoustine, Courgette, Baby Artichoke, Lemon Verbena
- Course 3: Saddle of Lamb, Crushed Jersey Royals, Smoked Aubergine, Peas, Garlic, Seaweed
- Course 4: Baked Yuzu Cheesecake, Strawberry, Shiso, Black Sesame, and Sake Kasu Ice Cream

Blue Moon:

- Tuna tartare w/ lime/thyme emulsion, Osetra caviar, sockeye salmon w/ lemon emulsion
- Pan-seared scallops with jerusalem artichoke cream, sea urchin sauce and fennel chips
- Homemade raviolo stuffed with burrata cheese, red prawn tails and datterino tomatoes
- Risotto with creamy cheese and pepper, pan-seared langoustines and lime

Mr. Fogg's Gin Safari:

- Hong Kong: Sipsmith gin, Chambord, bergamot, morello cherry, lemon, pink grapefruit soda, topped with creamy strawberry foam
- London: Bombay Sapphire gin, lemon verbena liqueur, Martini Riserva special bitter, blueberry and blackcurrant, rhubarb, lime, foamer bitters, ginger ale
- San Francisco: Monkey 47 gin, Martini Riserva Speciale Rubino vermouth, Benedictine D.O.M. liqueur, Casoni figs & Cherries liqueur, vanilla & Peychaud's bitters
- Bombay: Bombay Sapphire Premier Cru gin, apple & cardamon shrub, cinnamon, coconut milk, foamers bitter and lemon

Next Column: Some Wine Country Gems