

# STARS OF THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS

BY LAURA NESS

Huge in area at just shy of half a million acres, and comprised of thousands of little mountain tops and ridges, each of which has its own microclimate, the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation offers a wide-ranging panoply of varietals and styles. There are so many subregions to explore, each with its own unique set of characteristics. We've gathered shining examples from the Corralitos, Gilroy/San Martin, Saratoga Hills, Lexington Hills, Skyline, and Woodside subregions.

You can taste the place of origin in so many of these wines: the parched underbrush of warm foothills, bright orchard fruit, salty sea air, sun-ripened blackberries, tangy citrus, and pine-scented forest. Fill your glass with one of these wines and toast to your backyard.

Photos: Mockingbird Studio



## ALFARO FAMILY VINEYARDS

2015 CABERNET FRANC,  
BATES RANCH

Hola! This wine is a festive garden party from the first whiff, with a riot of bright ripe bush berries, heady gardenias, star lilies, and cranberry spice. If spring fever has an aroma, this might just be it. Abundantly fleshy flavors of crushed fruit, including pomegranate, applesauce and cranberry plum jam, breakdance together with abandon. Juiced up with a hint of spicy horseradish and a hint of pepper, this is just plain fun. To make it even more enticing, the beaming countenance of winemaker Richard Alfaro greets you from the label. He sourced this cheery Cabernet Franc from Bates Ranch, in the southernmost part of the AVA, and made it in a style that embraces early consumption. Just don't drink it in the car on the way home.

14% | \$40



## THOMAS FOGARTY WINERY

### 2014 ESTATE CHARDONNAY

The shiny gold color of this sassy Chardonnay hints at its oak influence, as almond toffee, roasted hazelnuts, tangerine zest and apple butter fill the nose with warmth and possibility. An assertive streak of blood-orange acidity runs wide and deep through caramel popcorn, walnut fudge, cashew toffee, and apple turnovers, ever-so-slightly iced with Meyer lemon and vanilla frosting. From the cool-climate Fogarty Estate vineyard, as well as from the warmer Gist Ranch property to the south, it shows the lovely weight and depth of fruit from the latter and the bright citrus and zing of the former. This is just one of a handful of beautiful Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnays crafted by winemaker Nathan Kandler, currently available under the Fogarty label.

**13.7% | \$35**



## HOUSE FAMILY VINEYARDS

### 2011 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

In the glass, this wine's black raspberry hue with just a hint of garnet on the edges is stunning. Aromas of mahogany, cedar and pine bring to mind a fine furniture shop, while scents of saddle leather transport you to the tack room of an equestrian club you probably can't afford. Subtle notes of fig balsamic open on the palate, revealing layers of chocolate raspberry truffle, pomegranate, sage, and tarragon. Built to last from a well-knit-together blend of 79% Cab Sauvignon, 13% Cab Franc and 8% Merlot from Dave House's estate vineyard, the velvety tannins are softening, making this wine a textural delight.

**13.3% | \$54**

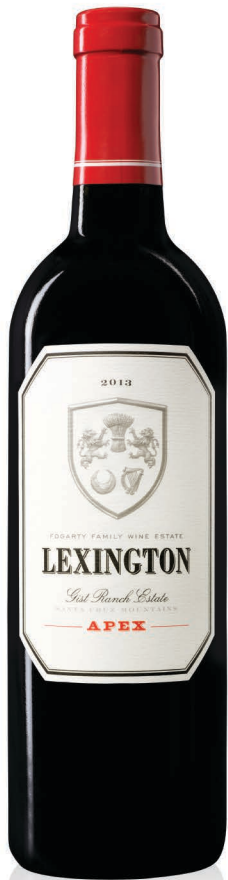


## LEFT BEND WINERY

### 2014 CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CAMEL HILL VINEYARD

This enticing wine, made of Cabernet Sauvignon (80%) and Cabernet Franc (20%) comes from a vineyard perched at an elevation of 1,000 feet overlooking Lexington Reservoir off Bear Creek Road. Yes, there are actually camels, as the topiary at the bottom of the driveway suggests. Yet, there is very little smoke in this wine (vague reference to the cigarette brand my uncle smoked), with the aromatics being more cherry tobacco and brownies, accompanied by pure pomegranate. A flood of blackberry and cocoa powder, along with rose hip tea provides a lively and smooth excursion into a classic wine that exhibits the elegance of Audrey Hepburn.

**14% | \$48**



## LEXINGTON WINE CO.

### 2013 APEX BORDEAUX BLEND

From the Gist Ranch, off Skyline Boulevard, comes the crowning achievement of this Bordeaux-varietal-focused program, under the direction of Tommy Fogarty. Comprised of 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Cabernet Franc and 8% Merlot, and aged for 22 months in 100% new French oak, Apex is powerful stuff, built to last and a revelation with every sip. Its deep pool in a dark forest color hints at the hidden power. Scents of cassis, dark chocolate, graphite and dusty blackberry pie are wrapped in pleasing sandalwood. Although dense and monstrous in its youth, a little air reveals a lovely texture of polished rock, brimming with cassis, black raspberry, fig balsamic, and ganache. This is one for the cellar, and a magnificent rib eye steak.

**14.3% | \$95**

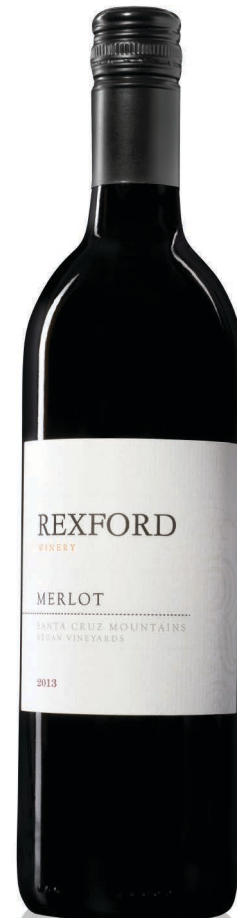


## NICHOLSON VINEYARDS

### 2014 ESTATE CHARDONNAY

From a sunny vineyard in Corralitos, this wine defines a spring day on the Central Coast. Peace rose, Bartlett pear and toasted marshmallow fill out the pretty and appealing aromas, with a whiff of coconut-covered snowball cookies—remember those? Blessed with abundant natural acid, this Chardonnay flows like a stream of white fig, caramelized apple, honey crisp apple, marshmallow crème, and Buddha's hand citrus. There's an undercurrent of bright lemon and finger lime, with unmistakable vanilla wafers on the finish. Should you be on the hunt for a refreshing take on Chardonnay with abundant fruit, good acid and transparent oak, this is a winning choice.

**14.2% | \$29**

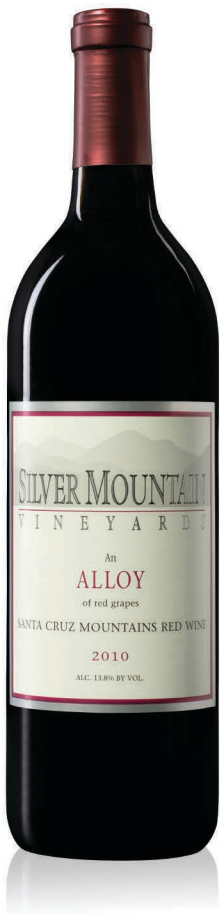


## REXFORD WINERY

### 2013 MERLOT, REGAN VINEYARD

When you're in the mood for a Merlot that's big enough to kick its big brother, Cabernet Sauvignon, off the couch, this power player from Rexford will be right over. You don't even need a corkscrew. Just twist, pour, enjoy; repeat. A dead ringer for Right Bank Bordeaux in a warm year, with abundant earth, warm tobacco and roasted chestnut, the beguiling aromas are fleshed out with dried cherry and baking spices. In the mouth, it's as decadently rich as chocolate fondue laced with cherry liqueur and as satisfying and intriguing as brownie bites packed with raspberry, cinnamon and nutmeg. This vineyard site on a hillside south of Santa Cruz, produces some dark and stormy Merlot when conditions are right. If you haven't had a serious Merlot in a while, give this one a twist.

**14.8% | \$35**



## SILVER MOUNTAIN VINEYARDS

### 2010 ALLOY BORDEAUX BLEND

This is quintessential Bates Ranch Cabernet right out of the gate, with its grand nose of white pepper, cassis, leather and cedar chest. Reminiscent of a humidor in a fine cigar shop, this Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (78%), Cabernet Franc (12%), Petit Verdot (6%) and Merlot (4%), richly rewards your olfactories. Impressively structured and impeccably balanced, it delivers intense flavors of cherry tobacco, cassis, raspberry and cocoa, framed with hints of balsam, juniper incense and cinnamon stick. The medium-firm tannins are pert and pleasing, endowing the wine with a divine texture and a finish that crescendos like a master pianist playing Rachmaninoff on a Steinway.

**13.8% | \$38**



## STOCKWELL CELLARS

### 2016 PINOT NOIR, SAVERIA VINEYARD

The Saveria Vineyard in Corralitos is an older vineyard planted to Pinot Noir and a few rows of Petite Sirah. Lying 6 miles from the ocean at an elevation of 700 feet, it produces consistently bright, aromatic Pinots that are charming and lithe. Aromatics of rose hips, newly tanned leather, grated nutmeg, flint, and red plum dominate. Driving flavors of pomegranate, cranberry, vivid red raspberry, and currant converge in a headlong plunge down a fern-banked river rushing through a hardwood forest. The savory finish leaves you with haunting notes of sage, rosemary and basil, making you crave roasted lamb, pork ribs or maybe boar sausage.

**13.5% | \$38**



## MARTIN RANCH WINERY

### 2013 SYRAH, THÉRÈSE VINEYARDS, LESTER FAMILY VINEYARD

One whiff of this wine, with its signature aromatics of white pepper, violets, blueberry, soy and graphite, and you know it's Syrah. Not just any Syrah, though. This heady stuff comes from the vaunted Lester Family Vineyard, a playground for grapes in Pleasant Valley, farmed by local viticulture expert and "grape whisperer," Prudy Foux. In the hands of talented winemaker, Thérèse Martin, this Syrah sings of its sun-soaked Mediterranean roots, delivering a brilliant mélange of boysenberry, smoked meat, roasted figs and dark chocolate. Exhibiting perfect balance and an abundance of firm tannin, it leaves you wanting pumpernickel bread slathered with apple butter. Garnering a Double Gold in the 2018 *San Francisco Chronicle* competition, this is solid, exemplary Syrah.

**14.5% | \$38**