

A SARDINIAN JOURNEY, CHINA'S CHARDONNAY HEIGHTS AND RISING ABOVE NAPA'S HEAT DOME: WEEKLY TASTING REPORT

September 19, 2024

RISING ABOVE THE 2022 HEAT DOME

Topping the list of our 155 California tasting notes is a brilliant lineup of Napa Valley chardonnays and cabernet sauvignons from a well-connected vintner that James and Executive Editor Jim Gordon first met 40 years ago.

Tor wines are named for founder Tor Kenward, who enjoyed a whole career in wine marketing and public relations for Beringer Vineyards before becoming a wine producer himself in 2001.

Kenward started as a home grape grower and winemaker while at Beringer. Then, as part of his educational outreach, he began coaching wine writers and trade members, including Jim, on how to make wine. Ultimately he went pro, with a lot of valuable connections and experience already in his pocket.

The rest is history, as Kenward's concept of producing only Bordeaux-style reds and chardonnay from the top blocks of top vineyard sites in the top appellations of Napa Valley has repeatedly paid off in plush yet structured and complex wines.



Tor winemaker Jeff Ames (left) with Tor Kenward.



Stunning Bordeaux-style blends by Tor from Napa Valley.

Tor's 2022s, both red and white, dispel any notions about that "heat dome" vintage producing only average wines. Guided by the light touch of Tor winemaker Jeff Ames, their Chardonnay Napa Valley Carneros Beresini Vineyard Cuvée Torchiana 2022 is the highest-rated California white in this report: broad, indulgent, luscious and lingering.

Two other Tor wines tied for tops among reds. The Napa Valley Black Magic 2022 is an incredibly dark and delicious blend based on cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot from two famous Oakville vineyards that Kenward wouldn't name for the record. The Napa Valley Pure Magic 2022 is equally stunning but more sleek, elegant and minty. It's a co-fermented cuvee of cabernet franc, petit verdot and cabernet sauvignon.

During the tasting with Jim, Kenward and Ames also uncorked a superb, mineral and savory-scented 10-year old white from another all-star vineyard. The Tor Chardonnay Napa Valley Hyde Vineyard 2014 is hitting its fascinating stride now, as is the ever-so-slightly more mature Tor Chardonnay Napa Valley Carneros Hyde Vineyard 2015.