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# Robb Report

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I could see how insular certain properties [in Napa] that had been around for a long time had become. We wanted to look outward, as well as inward. So that was why we came up with the concept of Bond."

Bond is, as Harlan says, a covenant between his team and the owners of the six Bond hillside vineyards: a pact of friendship, an oath of duty, and a pledge of responsibility to develop a diverse collection of wines conceived as authentic expressions of these "thoroughbred" properties. Although the wines come from single vineyards and comprise mainly Cabernet Sauvignon, each has been given a proprietary name rather than a varietal designation, which not only gives Levy flexibility with regard to the blends, but underscores the goal of articulating the character of place. They are sold together in wooden cases containing a bottle of each.

Four of the six wines—Vecina, St. Eden, Pluribus, and Melbury—have been introduced to date. While all of

them are spectacular evocations of their individual *terroirs*, Melbury stands out in the 2004 vintage for its seamless reconciliation of power and supple grace. Grown northeast of Rutherford, near Lake Hennessey, this inky, voluptuous wine gives off heady, spell-binding aromas of blackberry, black cherry, rosewater, and wildflowers, while its equally complex and protean palate seems to shift and alter endlessly, from flavors of blueberry and mineral to Asian spice, blackberry, plum, and violets. True to the defining principle of Bond itself, the 2004 Melbury achieves beautiful unity in multiplicity. —BRETT ANDERSON

*Bond*, [www.bondestate.com](http://www.bondestate.com) (\$285)

ART, AS MUCH as agriculture, furnished the inspiration for Amuse Bouche, a Pomerol-style wine from Napa Valley produced by legendary winemaker Heidi Barrett, formerly of Screaming Eagle. When Barrett and a longtime friend, restaurateur John

Schwartz, began to discuss making a wine together, they decided to incorporate their mutual love of fine art into the concept.

Barrett and Schwartz took their cue from Château Mouton Rothschild, which commissions a different label design from a prominent artist for each vintage. However, the partners go a step further by producing a limited-edition series of lithographs of the original artwork, printed on a 19th-century hand-pulled press; one of these lithographs accompanies each six-bottle case of Amuse Bouche.

Artist Wayne Thiebaud's creation graces the label of the **Amuse Bouche 2005** ([www.amusebouchevine.com](http://www.amusebouchevine.com), \$200), itself an artful composition. Sultry red-berry and cocoa scents greet the nose, while on the palate this lusciously textured, Merlot-based blend is awash in rich black cherry, plum, and a medley of earthy, exotic spices. —B.A.

Although many a Napa Valley winemaker will tout the region as Cabernet



Sauvignon country, some of the most extraordinary releases to issue from California's most renowned wine destination are made from that other Bordeaux grape: Merlot. While some critics have argued that Merlot is too fleshy, too fruity, and lacks the structure and complexity necessary for extended aging in the cellar, others have (rightly) noted that several of the most coveted and long-lived wines of Bordeaux—Château Pétrus and Château Le Pin, for instance—are Merlot-based. Michael Polenske, entrepreneur and proprietor of Blackbird Vineyards, is among these Merlot admirers, and his releases stand among Napa's most beautifully articulated boutique wines. Located in the Oak Knoll District, near Yountville, Polenske's vineyard enjoys soil and growing conditions strikingly similar to those of Pomerol—a circumstance reflected in the fruit's quality. What nature renders, virtuoso winemaker Sarah Gott perfects in the **Blackbird Vineyards 2005 Proprietary Red Wine** ([www.blackbirdvineyards.com](http://www.blackbirdvineyards.com), \$80). Deep

black-red in color and velvety in texture, this beauty exudes floral aromas and, on the palate, evokes concentrated flavors of blackberry, black plum, and bittersweet chocolate. —B.A.

The Darioush winery, as viewed from Napa Valley's Silverado Trail, suggests what one discovers at once when one tastes the wines: They are like nothing else from the region. The recently completed winery complex resembles a temple of Persian travertine and tinted glass rising up from the valley floor. The building is a fascinating amalgam of ancient motifs and cutting-edge technology—an apt expression, in many respects, of the personality of its owner, Darioush Khaledi, who founded the winery in 1997. Having grown up in the Shiraz region of Iran, where Syrah originated, Khaledi has always harbored a particular passion for this grape, and he brings to his winemaking project a deep sense of tradition, as well as an entrepreneur's enthusiasm for innovation.

The **Darioush Signature Shiraz Napa Valley 2004** ([www.darioush.com](http://www.darioush.com), \$64) combines the essence of Shiraz—earthiness and substantial structure—with the ripeness and concentration that characterizes the wines of Napa. Indeed, the perfume of this intense red wine, redolent of plum and wild berries, is almost enough to satisfy on its own; but to merely nose this wine would be to deny oneself the pleasure of its complex, lush flavors and satiny texture. —B.A.

From the beginning of their careers as vintners, Jess Jackson and his wife, Barbara Banke, understood that great wines are all about place. Having made the momentous decision in the early 1980s to give up their San Francisco law practices to pursue their dream of making wine, the couple searched the length of California for the very best Chardonnay vineyards they could find, and blended the resulting wines to create the award-winning Kendall-Jackson 1982 Vintner's Reserve Chardonnay. In