

Wine Specator

2006 Napa Cabernet

16 Cabernet Sauvignons from Napa Valley that offer uniformly high quality in a vintage that has proven tricky to assess

by [James Laube](#)

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The 2006 vintage for Napa Valley Cabernet has been all over the charts. For every charming, sumptuous wine there's another that's terribly hard and tannic.

This flight of mountain- and hillside-grown Cabernets impressed me for its uniformly high level of quality. Make no mistake—these are firm, tight, structured young wines, with no baby fat showing. But they're also very complex and balanced, offering ripe flavors (and they're devoid of the overly dry and tannic character that too many 2006s have shown).



2006 was a tough year for Cabernet, as many wines show the greener, herbal traits of late and marginal ripening.

Diamond Creek, Robert Craig and Terra Valentine each have several wines in this tasting. From Diamond Creek, the Volcanic Hill, a single-vineyard wine, outshone the Gravelly Meadow and Red Rock Terrace bottlings.

Robert Craig's Cabernets from Howell Mountain and Mount Veeder were impressive for their balance and nuance, while the Spring Mountain bottling showed a bit tighter. Still, it's impressive given this is a very cool climate for Cabernet.

Terra Valentine's four Spring Mountain Cabernets were locked in a dead heat for quality. But for me it's easy to focus on the estate bottling at about half the price of the others, which at this point tasted more alike than distinctive. But perhaps time will offer a clearer taste of their individuality.

Look too for the Hess Collection 19 Block Cuvée Mount Veeder, which is more approachable (both in price and drinkability) than the winery's Mount Veeder bottling.

As an aside, longtime Cabernet drinkers may recall the name Yverdon. This vineyard on Spring Mountain was also once a brand in the 1970s and 1980s before disappearing. But while labels disappear, vineyards don't; they just change hands. Angus and Margaret Wurtele of Terra Valentine bought the vineyard in 1999 and have revived the vineyard name.

DIAMOND CREEK Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Volcanic Hill 2006 Score: 93 | \$175

Deep, rich and concentrated, with loamy earth, currant, dried berry, leather, peppery tobacco and sage flavors that are bold and, at points, fleshy in texture. Impressive for its depth, focus and complexity, with plenty of backbone for the cellar. Best from 2012 through 2020. 650 cases made. —J.L.

BRANDLIN Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder 2006 Score: 90 | \$85

Firm, rich, intense and concentrated, with fresh, vibrant black cherry, currant and wild berry fruit that's pure and vibrant, showing a pleasing earthy mineral character, joined by a touch of herb. Drink now through 2016. 807 cases made. —J.L.

ROBERT CRAIG Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain 2006 Score: 90 | \$80

Rich and tannic, with a beam of earthy dried currant, sage and savory berry and herb notes that are firm and concentrated, if a bit disjointed. Still, everything is in place. This just needs time to come around. Best from 2010 through 2016. 1,240 cases made. —J.L.

ROBERT CRAIG Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder 2006 Score: 90 | \$70

Bordeaux-like in its structure and character, with aromas of anise, currant, rose petal, cedar and blackberry, turning taut and firm on the palate. Full-bodied, with excellent balance, depth and dimension, ending with tight, ripe tannins. Best from 2010 through 2016. 1,700 cases made. —J.L.

DIAMOND CREEK Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Red Rock Terrace 2006 Score: 89 | \$175

Intense and concentrated, very tight and compact. Complex aromas lead to ripe blackberry and wild berry fruit, with mineral, sage and dusty berry and cedar notes that are juicy and layered at points. Needs a lot of time. Best from 2012 through 2020. 525 cases made. —J.L.

THE HESS COLLECTION Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder 2006 Score: 89 | \$50

Tight and structured, with firm, full-bodied currant, blackberry, anise and mineral flavors that are intense and concentrated, complex and balanced, ending with tannins that are austere but not excessive. Drink now through 2016. 11,100 cases made. —J.L.

SBRAGIA FAMILY Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain Cimarossa Vineyard 2006 Score: 89 | \$75

Intense and concentrated, tight and structured. Shows a full-bodied mix of earthy currant, mineral, spice and blackberry, with a dash of toasty mocha-laced oak and anise, followed by a tannic finish. Best from 2010 through 2017. 700 cases made. —J.L.

TERRA VALENTINE Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District Wurtele Vineyard 2006 Score: 89 | \$60

Tightly wound, with firm tannins wrapped around a core of dried currant, plum and blackberry fruit. Full-bodied and spicy, this offers a measure of finesse and grace, even with its tannic muscle. Best from 2010 through 2016. 800 cases made. —J.L.

TERRA VALENTINE Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District Yverdon Vineyard 2006 Score: 89 | \$70

Compact and tight, with spicy, earthy tannins wrapped around a core of ripe dark berry fruit. Full-bodied, balanced and lively, gaining complexity and length. Drink now through 2016. 937 cases made. —J.L.

TERRA VALENTINE Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District Estate 2006 Score: 88 | \$38

Intense, with spicy, loamy earth, mineral and pebble notes mixed with dried currant and blackberry fruit. Full-bodied and tannic, yet the flavors push through on the finish. Drink now through 2016. 5,586 cases made. —J.L.

TERRA VALENTINE Marriage Spring Mountain District 2006 Score: 88 | \$75

Spicy, peppery wild berry and blackberry fruit is taut, structured and full-bodied, with firm, loamy tannins, gaining depth and ending with a touch of black licorice. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Best from 2010 through 2016. 300 cases made. —J.L.

COHO Cabernet Sauvignon Diamond Mountain District SummitVine Ranch 2006 Score: 88 | \$60

Very tight, rich and concentrated, with a mix of mineral, dried currant, herb and sage. This is full-bodied and cloaked in tannins, but the finish gains complexity. Best from 2011 through 2017. 402 cases made. —J.L.

ROBERT CRAIG Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District 2006 Score: 88 | \$70

Pleasantly earthy, with mineral, loamy clay, herb and underbrush, with dried currant and savory berry flavors that are full-bodied and cloaked in tannins. Best from 2010 through 2016. 220 cases made. —J.L.

J. DAVIES Cabernet Sauvignon Diamond Mountain District 2006 *Score: 88 | \$80*

Minty bay leaf and herbal flavors are full-bodied and gain some riper dark berry fruit, but this is very backward, tight and tannic. Gains depth on the finish, where this is balanced and more complex. Best from 2011 through 2018. 2,047 cases made. —*J.L.*

DIAMOND CREEK Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Gravelly Meadow 2006 *Score: 88 | \$175*

Herb, bell pepper, rye, sage and taut Cabernet flavors are intense and complex, slowly unfolding and suggesting that this will require substantial cellar time. As it stands, this is solid, compact, tight and tannic. Best from 2012 through 2020. 475 cases made. —*J.L.*

THE HESS COLLECTION 19 Block Cuvée Mount Veeder 2006 *Score: 88 | \$35*

Fresh and vibrant, with lively plum, raspberry and wild berry fruit that's pure, supple and full-bodied, picking up a spicy, peppery note on the finish. The tannins are firm but integrated. Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Syrah, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc. Drink now through 2016. 14,200 cases made. —*J.L.*