



by Jon Bonné
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Great winemakers seem to give all the credit to their vineyards. But as we closed in on the Top 100 Wines for 2008, the winemaker's craft never seemed more important.

Not to say that great vineyards don't matter. Look no further than the two Cabernets from Sonoma's Monte Rosso Vineyard that made the list, two great products from that venerable site. Or wines like the 2006 Hirsch Vineyards Pinot Noir and the 2006 Varner Home Block Chardonnay. These are all terrific expressions of place.

But the ability to find an exceptional place for wine grapes is half the fight. There are plenty of sought-after plots all over the West Coast, and no sooner do we familiarize ourselves with one than another becomes all the rage. If there was one constant this year, it was that truly outstanding winemakers not only hunted these sites, but dedicated themselves to winemaking that seemed like a wonder of economy: no unnecessary steps, no overwrought flavors. Such talents are important enough that our 2008 list includes a separate list of great deals made by some of the same winemakers who made this year's Top 100. (See Page 26.)

All these wines are showing their mettle at a time when it's hard to stand out. There are more West Coast wineries than ever before - 3,345 in California, Idaho, Oregon and Washington state, up over 15 percent in just a year. The proliferation of new names can be dizzying. And yet the competition is propelling the most talented vintners to do their very best. For each Robert Mondavi Winery that's known around the world, there's an Anthill Farms valiantly trying to make its name.

2005 Trivium Les Ivrettes Vineyard St. Helena Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$60)

A new project from three St. Helena dads, neighbors and wine industry veterans: Stuart Harrison, Jack Stuart and Doug Wight. Fruit hails from Wight's extraordinary Lewelling Vineyard, where the three men's daughters enjoyed some college-age fun. ("Les Ivrettes" loosely means "little drunken ones.") The 100 percent Cabernet expression is pure: tobacco tinged, with toasty, mouth-coating blackberry and an impressively plush finish.



TRIVIUM

"LES IVRETTES VINEYARD"

2005

ST. HELENA · NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON