Savoring Napa's Most Reliable Cabernets

By LETTIE TEAGUE

Excerpt: (read full article at: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304450004577279754123148664.html?KEYWORDS=spottswoode)

Spottswoode Estate

Spottswoode Estate was one of the relatively rare all-women operations in the Napa Valley until proprietor Mary Novak and her daughter Beth Novak Miliken elevated Aron Weinkauf from assistant to full winemaker. Rosemary Cakebread, Spottswoode's winemaker from 1997 to 2006, has remained an ongoing consultant.

Ms. Cakebread joined Ms. Novak Miliken, Mr. Weinkauf and me at 9:30 a.m. to contemplate nine vintages of Spottswoode Cabernet and discuss 30 years of winemaking, starting with 1984.

"I chose the vintages that really represent our vineyard and what we're doing," Ms. Novak Miliken explained.

The two wines from the 1980s (1984 and 1987) were remarkably fresh, showing bright cherry fruit and snappy acidity. The 1997 was aromatic and lush, as was the 2001 which was beautifully balanced, perhaps the most harmonious wine of the moment. ("Eight to 10 years is the sweet spot," said Ms. Miliken Novak). And yet all of the wines showed the same elegance, bright acidity and polished fruit.


Current Vintage: 2009, $145. Trademark Spottswoode elegance and finesse. To be released this fall.

"The land ultimately trumps any individual," Ms. Cakebread said, echoing Mr. Araujo—an observation that could be a perfect coda to this column. A wine can only be consistently great if it comes from a place of "structural integrity," as Ms. Cakebread says—and if it's made by winemakers who allow that integrity to show.