

# THE WINE NEWS

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2008-2009

## California's Best Wines of 2008

Introduction by STEVE PITCHER • Photographs by TOM E. SMITH

### The Golden State's 2004 vintage was a hard act to follow.

Based on the showing of North Coast Cabernet Sauvignons alone, it was acclaimed as a truly stellar vintage. It certainly is the greatest 21st-century vintage to date and is, arguably, the benchmark against which succeeding California vintages are being judged. That said, 2005 compares quite favorably to 2004, although there are some important distinctions: Where 2004 was lighter than normal, 2005 was the largest harvest ever in terms of the volume of wine grapes picked, with crush up 20 percent from the previous year. Where 2004 was one of the earliest and fastest harvests in California history (running two to three weeks ahead of normal), 2005 was drawn out, with late harvest extending into the early part of November after a few heat spikes in September. Indeed, throughout most of the '05 harvest season, vineyards were bathed in sunshine and warmth – ideal conditions that enabled growers to make multiple passes for optimum selection.

### The Criteria

All wines were evaluated on the BuyLine 100-point scale purely in terms of quality, regardless of price or case production. There is a separate, first-place position or a varietal or blend of the year, which stands alone because of the extraordinary character that lifted it above the field.

### Other Outstanding Cabernets

**Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon**  
**John C. Sullenger Vineyard, Oakville**

**Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon**  
**Martin Stelling Vineyard, Oakville**

**Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon**  
**Vogt Vineyard, Howell Mountain**

### Top Ten Chardonnays of the Year

**Nickel & Nickel, 2006 Chardonnay, Medina Vineyard, Russian River Valley** – Ripe aromas of grilled pineapple, peach nectar and dark honey. Fat and juicy with a mix of peach, pear and apricot flavors. A nice balance between rich tropical fruit and crisp acids that enliven and extend the close.

### Other Outstanding Chardonnays

**Nickel & Nickel, 2006 Chardonnay**  
**Truchard Vineyard, Carneros, Napa Valley**

### Top Ten Syrahs & Petites of the Year

**Nickel & Nickel, 2005 Syrah, Darien Vineyard, Russian River Valley** – Dense purple to the rim. Heady black cherry aromas with hints of flint and graphite. Friendly and supple with flavors of plum and cooked cherry. Lengthy finish with soft, sweet tannins and tempered acidity.