



Robert M. Parker, Jr.'s

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# The WINE ADVOCATE®

## LARKMEAD

2003	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA	(\$48.00)	RED	(90-92)
2002	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA	(\$48.00)	RED	93
2003	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA	(\$70.00)	RED	(91-94)
2002	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA	(\$70.00)	RED	95
2003	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(\$38.00)	RED	(91-93)
2002	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(\$70.00)	RED	93
2002	MERLOT ESTATE	NAPA	(\$38.00)	RED	92

Dating from the late 19th century, this historic winery has traditionally sold much of its crop, but that began to change when the talented Scotsman, Andy Smith, was brought in to make the wines. Consumers are now beginning to see the full potential of this vineyard, which boasts a beautiful valley floor location between St. Helena and Calistoga. As I reported in issue #150, the 2001s were impressive, and the 2002s raise this estate to a new status. The 2003s are an attractive follow-up to the brilliant 2002s. Larkmead still sells off about one-third of their crop, and one of the finest kosher wines I have ever tasted is produced from Larkmead fruit by former Wine Spectator writer, Jeff Morgan.

The 2002 Merlot Estate, a blend of 78% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, and 4% Petit Verdot, possesses superb density along with gorgeous sweet black cherry and currant fruit, and a full-bodied, pure, opulent personality with more character than is possessed by most California Merlot. The 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate (100% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3,500 cases produced) is performing even better from bottle than it did from cask. It is a sexy, supple Cabernet offering a dense saturated purple color, and a big, full-bodied, heady bouquet of black fruits, mellow licorice, and smoke. This fleshy, hedonistic Cabernet Sauvignon will have huge crowd appeal, and should fare well in blind tastings. Enjoy it over the next 10-15 years. The spectacular 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve (350 cases) boasts a Mouton Rothschild-like bouquet of black currants, licorice, tobacco smoke, plums, and flowers. With a deep purple color, great richness as well as intensity, fine structure, plenty of sweet tannin, and well-integrated acidity and wood, it should be at its finest between now-2020. A new offering, the Bordeaux-styled 2002 Firebelle Proprietary Red (53% Merlot, 29% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Malbec, and 5% Petit Verdot) is not as rich as the pure Cabernet, but it reveals plenty of nuances along with loads of purity (a hallmark of all these wines), a beautiful texture, sweet tannin,

and a long finish. It should drink well for 10-12 years.

Winemaker Andy Smith told me he thought the dramatic viticultural changes instituted over the last 3-4 years are paying off handsomely in the vineyard. He also believes 2003 has the potential to be the estate's best vintage to date, even though the potential for the raw materials, climatically speaking, was not as trouble-free as 2002. There are 3,500 cases of the 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate. Possessing crowd appeal, it has loads of crème de cassis fruit intermixed with licorice, smoke, earth, incense, and blueberries. Medium to full-bodied, with supple tannin, it hits all the sweet spots on the palate. It should drink well young, yet age handsomely for 10-15 years. The inky/purple-tinged 2003 Firebelle Proprietary Red (58% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Cabernet Franc, 6% Malbec, and 4% Petit Verdot) offers up scents of graphite, pen ink, blueberries, and cassis. With admirable purity, great elegance, tremendous power and intensity, and no hard edges, this beautifully made, sumptuous, Bordeaux-styled 2003 will drink well for 10-15 years. Sweet crème de cassis fruit intertwined with camphor, licorice, white chocolate, and toasty oak aromas jump from the glass of the 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve. About 75% new oak was utilized in this multilayered wine's upbringing. It exhibits an enticing texture (a hallmark of all Andy Smith's wines) as well as a deep, long, concentrated finish. For a winery that is embarking on its third century, it's about time they started making noise like this! Tel. (707) 942-6606; Fax (707) 942-6019