



Robert Parker's
Wine Advocate

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LARKMEAD

2005	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA (\$55.00; release date 1/07)	RED	(90-92)
2004	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA (\$55.00)	RED	93
2005	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA (\$75.00; release date 6/07)	RED	(90-93+)
2004	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA (\$75.00)	RED	95
2005	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA (\$45.00; release date 10/07)	RED	(88-90)
2004	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA (\$45.00)	RED	91
2005	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA (\$65.00; release date 6/07)	RED	(90-92+)
2004	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA (\$65.00)	RED	94

Larkmead, one of Napa's historic properties, went through a long period where most of the fruit was sold off, but proprietor Cam Baker and his talented winemaker, Andy Smith, have put the wine world on notice that this is now one of California's up-and-coming wineries. Some of the fruit from this large vineyard (150 acres, 120 of which are under vine) is still sold, but the remainder is used to fashion impressive reds under the Larkmead label. The **2004 Firebelle Proprietary Red** is a blend of 49% Merlot, 34% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Malbec, and the rest Petit Verdot. Spicy, ripe, mocha-infused, black cherry, cedar, and underbrush aromas emerge from this soft, full-bodied, unfiltered, and unfiltered cuvée. Beautiful elegance, purity, and richness are present in this Napa version of a hypothetical blend of a Pomerol and St.-Emilion. It should drink well for 10-15 years. The stunning **2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** (a 3,650-case blend of 92% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot) reveals a Pauillac-like *crème de cassis* note interwoven with notions of charcoal, incense, scorched earth, and graphite. Powerful, full-bodied, and opulent, it is a rich, elegant, pure Cabernet with layers of fruit. It can be enjoyed over the next 15+ years. A more limited production cuvée, the **2004 LMV Salon** is a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Cabernet Franc, 10% Petit Verdot, and 11% Merlot. Its dense purple color

is followed by an extraordinary perfume of sweet black fruits intermixed with smoke, licorice, roasted herbs, espresso, and white chocolate. This deep, chewy red has the softness of its siblings, but lasts even longer in the mouth. It can either be drunk now or cellared for 15 or more years. The **2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve** (94% Cabernet Sauvignon and 6% Petit Verdot) is a 400-case cuvée boasting fabulous power as well as elegance. Its inky/blue/purple color is followed by sumptuous aromas of acacia flowers, blackberries, cassis, melted licorice, and lead pencil shavings. Super-rich, full-bodied, powerful, and loaded, this stunning Cabernet exhibits the vineyard's grand cru character.

The 2005s are even more Bordeaux-like with more noticeable tannin, and slightly more restrained personalities without the opulence and richness of the 2004s. They are still full-bodied, powerful wines that should age uncommonly long. The **2005 Firebelle** (48% Merlot, 42% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot) comes across like a St.-Emilion in its notes of crushed rocks, herbs, black cherries, incense, spice box, and cedar. Elegant, medium to full-bodied, and pure, it should drink well for 10-12 years. Pontet-Canet comes to mind when tasting the **2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate**, a combination of 93% Cabernet Sauvignon and 7% Petit Verdot. A deep ruby/purple hue is

accompanied by aromas of graphite, black currants, *pain grillé*, and spice. Medium to full-bodied, impressively pure, and lighter than the 2004, it is neither as heady nor fleshy as that wine, but should provide plenty of pleasure over the next 15 years. Cut from the same cloth with good acidity, powerful tannin, a more austere finish, and undeniable nobility, complexity, and richness, the **2005 LMV Salon** is a blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc, and 4% Petit Verdot. It requires 4-5 years of bottle age, and should keep for 20-25 years. The dense ruby/purple-tinged **2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari**

Reserve (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) is a backward, tannic, rich effort displaying more acidity, firmer tannins, and a big, structured, muscular finish. It should age well for 25 or more years.

2004 and 2005 could not be more different, with the 2004s flashy, flamboyant, and opulent, even voluptuous, and the 2005s linear, restrained, and more discrete, with slightly more austere tannins.

Previously recommended: **2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate (93), 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve (94), 2003 Firebelle (92), 2003 LMV Salon (90)**. Tel. (707) 942-0167; Fax (707) 942-6934