



LARKMEAD

LARKMEAD	2007	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(93-95)
LARKMEAD	2006	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	NAPA	(\$55.00-60.00)	RED	94
LARKMEAD	2007	CABERNET SAUVIGNON THE LARK	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(93-96+)
LARKMEAD	2006	CABERNET SAUVIGNON THE LARK	NAPA	(unknown)	RED	96
LARKMEAD	2007	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(96-100)
LARKMEAD	2006	CABERNET SAUVIGNON SOLARI RESERVE	NAPA	(\$75.00)	RED	96
LARKMEAD	2007	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(91-93)
LARKMEAD	2006	FIREBELLE PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(\$45.00)	RED	91
LARKMEAD	2007	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(94-96+)
LARKMEAD	2006	LMV SALON PROPRIETARY RED	NAPA	(\$65.00-75.00)	RED	95+
LARKMEAD	2007	SAUVIGNON BLANC	NAPA	(\$20.00)	WHITE	89

This is one of the reference points as well as historic vineyards of Napa Valley, yet remarkably, Larkmead is not as well known as the quality of these wines or the stature of this vineyard merits. With 145 acres in vines, and a vineyard established in the late 1800s by the Solari family, it has been run for multiple decades by Kate Solari Baker and her husband Cam. Perhaps the fact that the vineyard and winery have an actual road named after them (Larkmead Lane) says it all. Andy Smith, who has done such a brilliant job at DuMol and a few other places, is the consulting winemaker, and he seems to be going from strength to strength with these wines. As much as I loved what Larkmead did in 2004 and 2005, their 2006s are among the vintage's most compelling, great wines, and the 2007s look to be as prodigious, with the potential to eclipse even the 2006s.

They do make some white wine, as they have nearly 13 acres planted with Sauvignon Blanc. It is a wine that is barrel-fermented then kept for ten months on its lees. Since there is no malolactic fermentation, the **2007 Sauvignon Blanc** displays the classic varietal character of grapefruit, some flowers, and hints of melon and crushed rocks. Fresh, lively, with a medium-bodied texture, this wine, despite having some time in oak, shows no real influence of wood in the aromas or flavors.

The 2006s have all been bottled, and after this report goes out, I'll be stepping in line to buy some as well. The **2006 Firebelle Proprietary Red** (1,800 cases) is a blend of 55% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, and the rest Cabernet Franc and Malbec, aged 18 months on its lees. A beautiful nose of sweet black cherries, white chocolate, coffee beans, and subtle earthiness is followed by a full-bodied, powerful, moderately tannic wine that looks set for 10-15 years of aging. It is accessible already, with its terrific aromatics and plush, succulent style. It is also a fairly priced wine from one of the benchmark vineyards of Napa Valley. The 4,400-case cuvee of **2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** (96% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Merlot and Cabernet Franc) is brilliant. It would probably be hard to find a Cabernet Sauvignon of this quality with this production level, all estate fruit, and such impeccable viticulture and winemaking. This wine reminded me of a great vintage of Pontet Canet in Pauillac, Bordeaux. The deep crème de cassis flavors intermixed with charcoal and lead pencil shavings soar from the glass. Its full body, stunning ripeness, sweet tannin, and substantial flavor authority make for a brilliant Cabernet Sauvignon to drink over the next two decades. Equally prodigious are the 800 cases of **2006 LMV Salon Proprietary Red**, a blend of 62% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Cabernet Franc, and the rest the other three Bordeaux varietals (Merlot, Malbec, and Petit Verdot). Spicy, chocolatey espresso roast notes intermixed with spring flowers and a hint of bay leaf are followed by a full-bodied wine with oodles of black currant and cherry fruit. The sweetness of the tannins, the breadth and savory mouthfeel, as well as the layered texture, make for an exceptional glass of sumptuous wine. It should drink nicely for 15+ years. Absolutely brilliant, the 100% Cabernet Sauvignon cuvee, the **2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve** (825 cases) has gorgeous notes of cedar wood, *crème de*

cassis, creosote, and forest floor in its fragrant, full-bodied, velvety textured, opulent style. It must be considered in the running as a candidate for wine of the vintage in Napa. Just sensational stuff, this wine should drink well for at least 20-30+ years. A new *cuvée*, the **2006 The Lark** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) comes from the proprietor's favorite block, which was once identified by the late Harold Olmo as his choice for Cabernet Sauvignon. It is only four barrels, or 100 cases, so I'll keep my notes short. The wine displays beautiful sweetness and opulence in a style very much like the Solari, and at this stage it seems hard to differentiate from that wine.

As one might expect, the 2007s are extraordinarily opulent, seductive wines already, despite the fact that none of them are in bottle. The seamlessness of the tannins, the purity of the fruit, and the undeniable concentration suggest these wines will be absolute crowd pleasers when released, but are easily capable of lasting 20-30 years for the top *cuvées*. The **2007 Firebelle Proprietary Red** (a 1,600-case *cuvée* made up of 60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Malbec, and the rest Cabernet Franc) is still one of the great bargains in Napa, as it will be released in 13-14 months at a price of \$55.00. It exhibits great ripeness, sweet tannins, and a beautiful, sumptuous mouthfeel. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2020+. The **2007 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** (92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Franc, totaling 4,200 cases) is another blockbuster wine with a fabulous inky blue/purple color and notes of graphite, *crème de cassis*, incense, and spring flowers. Its seductiveness at this early stage is almost unreal. The wine is broad, long, rich, with the tannins nearly concealed by the lavish concentration of fruit. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2030. The **2007 LMV Salon Proprietary Red** (1,000 cases of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10% merlot, and the rest equal parts Malbec and Petit Verdot) takes seduction and opulence to a new level. With nothing out of place, again it could be considered a wine resembling *haute couture*. However, even this brilliant offering must take a backseat to what looks like a wine flirting with perfection, the **2007 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve**, a 1,000-case blend of 96% Cabernet Sauvignon and 4% Petit Verdot that comes from some of the oldest vines on the estate (25+ years of age and older). This wine is out-and-out profound Cabernet Sauvignon, and anyone who loves the best of what Napa can produce should have this in the back of his mind when it is released in 2010. The **2007 The Lark** seems to show more tannin, restraint, and backwardness than the Solari, the LMV Salon, or even the Cabernet Sauvignon Estate, but it is loaded and I am sure it will turn out to be a fabulous wine. Again, though, only four barrels, or 100 cases of wine were produced.

Larkmead is a sensational producer, and the prices seem incredibly fair for wines for such quality. Previously recommended: **2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate (90)**, **2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Reserve (94)**, **2005 Firebelle Proprietary Red (91)**, **2005 LMV Salon Proprietary Red (91)**. Tel. (707) 942-0167; Fax (707) 942-6934.