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Winemaker Andy Smith, who told me that the harvest here in 2008 was early "relative to this property," now places 2008 at the same level as 2007, thanks in large part to the small size of the crop (mostly between 1-1/2 and 2 tons per acre). The harvest, though, was drawn out to 40 days, compared to 19 in 2009 and 18 in 2010. Smith is a big fan of the 2009 vintage here. The yields were higher than those of 2008, but the fact that the soils were dry during the summer "slowed down vigor, and the vines stayed in balance." The clusters and the berries were small, he added, and an extended period of very warm weather from September 17 through 27 "really brought the vintage forward." After that, the afternoons cooled off to the 75 degree range, and the team finished the harvest on October 11, just before the damaging rains arrived. Smith says the 2009s are characterized by blacker fruits than the 2008s; the earlier vintage shows less primary fruit character than either 2009 or 2007.

**2009 Sauvignon Blanc Lilly Napa Valley** (made from a 1.5-acre block of ten-year-old vines; 80% fermented in a vertical *foudre*, the rest in stainless steel and a couple of *barrisques*, then aged for 10 months): Medium lemon-yellow color. Pungent aromas of grapefruit, lemon zest and minerals; still a hint of reduction, perhaps owing to the use of the vertical *foudre*. Then ripe and rich but firm in the mouth, with lovely floral lift; turned creamier with air, with the floral element growing stronger. Finishes with good bite. Larkmead sold off the fruit from the other block that normally goes into this wine, as it ripened too quickly and did not show enough flavor development. **91**

**2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate Napa Valley** (includes 6% cabernet franc and 5% petit verdot): Good deep ruby-red. Aromas and flavors of black cherry, blackberry, crushed stone and menthol. Sweet and lively on the palate, with lovely clarity and vinosity. Finishes with fine-grained tannins and excellent length. This will gain in complexity with another five years of cellaring. "Embrace the menthol," notes winemaker Andy Smith. "It's a character of the vineyard." **92(+?)**

**2008 Firebelle Proprietary Red Wine Napa Valley** (55% merlot, 27% cabernet sauvignon and 18% malbec): Ruby-red. Plum, dark chocolate and licorice on the nose, plus a whiff of woodsmoke. Lush and sweet, with a distinctly glyceric texture and attractive gravelly lift to the dark raspberry and tobacco flavors. The tannins arrive late, allowing the wine to expand on the aftertaste. I like this. **92**

**2008 LMV Salon Proprietary Red Wine Napa Valley** (a blend of 55% cabernet sauvignon, 18% cabernet franc and 9% each merlot, malbec and petit verdot): Ruby-red. Distinctly gravelly aromas of plum, minerals, menthol and tobacco. Dense but bright and high-pitched, with lively black fruit and bitter chocolate flavors complicated by licorice and flowers. Really conveys the energy of the best 2008s. **93(+?)**

**2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Napa Valley** (includes 8% petit verdot, as well as the cabernet sauvignon that would normally go into the winery's Lark bottling): Full ruby-red. Subdued but pure aromas of blue- and blackberry, bitter chocolate and sexy oak, complicated by a gravelly quality. Compellingly sweet and palate-saturating, with terrific breadth to the black fruit, licorice, mineral and violet flavors. This one conveys an almost grapey impression of primary fruits and finishes with mouthcoating tannins and echoing minerality. Very impressive. **94**

**2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate Napa Valley** (blended with 12% petit verdot and 8% cabernet franc): Good medium ruby. Classic cabernet aromas of black cherry, licorice, violet and minerals. Dense, sweet, pliant and tactile, with a strong gravelly quality and lovely inner-mouth floral lift to its black fruit and dark chocolate flavors. Seriously structured, very long wine with a saline quality running through it. **92-94**

**2009 Firebelle Proprietary Red Wine Napa Valley** (53% merlot, 29% cabernet sauvignon, 10% petit verdot, 5% malbec and 3% cabernet franc): Aromas of dark berries, licorice and violet pastille. The very pure palate shows a distinct blue fruit character, with a piercing, aromatic character that may be attributable to the petit verdot. Densely packed and extract-rich, with a mid-palate seamlessness of texture that reminded me of pinot. Plenty of tannic support. **91-93**

**2009 LMV Salon Proprietary Red Wine Napa Valley** (a blend of 63% cabernet sauvignon, 16% cabernet franc, 16% malbec and 5% merlot): Good medium ruby. Black fruits, violet, crushed rock and menthol on the nose. Densely packed and glyceric, with powerful, primary flavors of blackberry, violet and licorice pastille. Strong, building tannins arrive late and build, giving the finish terrific thrust. This really saturates the palate with dark fruit and chocolate flavors. **92-95**

**2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Solari Napa Valley** (100% cabernet sauvignon): Deep medium ruby. Pure, fruit-driven aromas of crushed cassis, blackberry, minerals and violet. Fat, lush and sweet, but with lovely lift to the dense flavors of cassis, licorice, gravel and clove. Offers an uncanny combination of glyceric texture and powerful underlying cabernet structure. The noble tannins arrive late and are buried under a wave of fruit. Winemaker Andy Smith noted that these 2009s have thus far been racked only once, for the assemblage in April of 2010. **93-96**

**2009 The Lark Proprietary Red Wine Napa Valley** (a small lot produced from vines planted in 1996 on rocky soil; 100% new oak): Good full medium ruby. Very ripe aromas of cassis, chocolate, graphite and menthol, plus a whiff of cough medicine. Fat and rich but youthfully unforthcoming, with the medicinal quality carrying through in the mouth. In a tougher, rather old-fashioned style, with granular tannins that currently cut off the wine's fruit. A bit lower in alcohol than the other 2009 reds here but still around 14.5%. Very long on the finish, but this will require time in bottle to harmonize. **92-94**

**2009 Cabernet Franc Napa Valley** (from five-year-old vines; blended with 25% cabernet sauvignon): Medium ruby. Subdued but pure aromas of blackberry, violet, licorice, menthol and mint. The strong mineral and menthol notes carry through on the palate, along with a distinctly saline savory quality and a hint of bitter chocolate. The strong tannins arrive late, but this very young and rich wine will nonetheless need bottle aging to reveal its complexity. Winemaker Smith notes that the cabernet franc on this estate was picked at nearly 26 degrees Brix in 2009, riper than the cabernet sauvignon. **90-93**