



## NAPA VALLEY TRILOGY: 2014, 2015 & 2016 - PART ONE

ANTONIO GALLONI, DECEMBER 2016

Winemaker Dan Petroski's focus on more sustainable farming practices and a move towards picking at lower sugars are two recent developments here. To be sure, this historic Calistoga vineyard naturally produces pretty big, powerful wines, so it will likely be some time before the full effects of these changes are felt. Perhaps more important is Larkmead's increased focus on single-parcel wines at the top of the range. For starters, the two Cabernets now have more specific identities than the White Label and Black Label monikers that were used at the beginning of the redesign. Today, the White Label Cabernet is simply the Larkmead Cabernet Sauvignon and is an entry-level wine that is meant to represent the entire estate. The Black Label has been renamed Dr. Olmo, after Dr. Harold P. Olmo, the UC Davis scientist whose clonal research formed much of the early knowledge that exists today in Napa Valley on Cabernet Sauvignon. In the 1930s, Dr. Olmo set up a research station at Larkmead. When UC Davis built their Oakville research station in the 1950s, the plant material came from Dr. Olmo's clones at Larkmead. Today, the Dr. Olmo Cabernet is made from the same parcel that Dr. Olmo used for his research back in the 1930s and 1940s. As for the wines, they are terrific. The 2014s have all shut down considerably post-bottling, something I saw at many properties during my fall tastings. The 2015s are the product of a very condensed harvest. Yields are down about 20% across the board. Petroski adds that he left the wines on the skins a few more days than normal in order to give the wines a bit more structure to balance the natural intensity of the fruit. Dan Petroski is doing fabulous work at Larkmead. Petroski is among the young Napa Valley winemakers who have an enormous amount of passion and respect for Napa Valley's history. Larkmead could not be in better hands.



VINTAGE	NAME	TASTING NOTES	SCORE	DRINKING WINDOW	RELEASE PRICE
2015	Tocai Friulano	Larkmead's 2015 Tocai Friulano is striking. Silky and beautifully textured throughout, the 2015 possesses intense old-vine oiliness that gives the wine its distinctive personality. Lemon confit, white flowers and mint add nuance throughout, but it is the wine's overall feel that is its most distinctive attribute. This is a gorgeous Tocai from Larkmead.	92	2016-2020	\$45
2015	Lillie	The 2015 Lillie (Sauvignon Blanc) is bright, focused and nuanced, with plenty of Sauvignon Blanc aromatics. This fruit was picked very early, on August 12(!), so the wine retains quite a bit of freshness. Lemon peel, white flowers, mint and white pepper add lift throughout.	90	2016-2020	\$60
2014	Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)	Larkmead's 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon is a very pretty, understated wine. Bright red stone fruit, floral notes and spice give the 2014 its refreshing, vibrant personality. The fruit is nicely pushed forward, but the 2014 is light on its feet and gracious, especially for a Calistoga Cabernet. Even so, this is a relatively laid-back style built on finesse more than power.	92	2018-2029	\$135
2014	LMV Salon	The 2014 LMV Salon offers lovely depth and intensity. Today, the Cabernet Franc is really expressive, not just in its signature aromatics, but in its mid-weight, refined feel. The 2014 was much more expressive last year. Then again, it was just bottled. Red stone fruit, mint, rose petal, mocha and raspberry jam open up nicely, while beams of tannin give the wine its energetic feel.	94	2019-2034	\$200
2014	Firebelle	The 2014 Firebelle, Larkmead's Merlot-based wine, is terrific. Succulent black cherry, lavender, mint and dark spices infuse this pliant, creamy wine. Expressive savory and mineral-infused notes punctuate the finish. The tannins need time to soften, but there is plenty to like and look forward to.	94	2017-2029	\$165
2014	Cabernet Sauvignon Dr. Olmo	The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Dr. Olmo is holding back quite a bit of its potential. Dark cherry, smoke, licorice, tar and menthol give the Dr. Olmo much of its brooding personality. The tannins are quite firm, but that should be less of an issue as the wine won't be released for about a year.	(92-95)	2019-2034	\$180
2014	Cabernet Sauvignon Solari	The 2014 Solari is wonderfully deep, pliant and expressive, but also shows all the restraint of the vintage. Gravel, graphite, menthol, smoke, licorice, herbs and inky blue fruits are front and center. The 2014 possesses striking inner sweetness and fabulous overall balance. Creamy, nuanced and expressive, the 2014 will likely start drinking well with just a few years in bottle.	95	2020 - 2034	\$240
2014	Cabernet Sauvignon The Lark	The 2014 The Lark is the most reticent and tightly wound of the 100% Cabernets at Larkmead. A host of graphite, game, smoke and leather wrap around a core of intense dark fruit. The 2014 was much more expressive from barrel than it is today from bottle. Readers will have to be especially patient.	95+	2022-2036	\$360



VINTAGE	NAME	TASTING NOTES	SCORE	RELEASE PRICE
2015	Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)	Larkmead's 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon is deep, inky and powerful, but with plenty of tannic backbone to back up the intensity of the fruit. There is plenty of potential here. This is a promising wine from Larkmead. Virtually all of the fruit for this wine was harvested in late August.	(90-92)	\$135
2015	LMV Salon	The 2015 LMV Salon is a wine of real personality and class. The tension and energy are palpable in this vibrant, super-expressive wine. As with the 2014, the Cabernet Franc adds tremendous aromatic intensity. This is another impeccable, beautifully balanced wine from Larkmead. The 2015 is the first wine in which the Cabernet Franc moves up to 40%, which looks like the direction Larkmead will pursue with the LMV Salon going forward.	(92-95)	\$200
2015	Firebelle	The 2015 Firebelle is surprisingly tannic for a Merlot-based wine. Then again, the move from 3% Petit Verdot in the 2014 to 8% in the 2015, co-fermented with the Merlot, gives the wine much of its darkness and powerful feel. Dense and muscular to the core, the 2015 gives the impression it will be slow to mature.	(90-93)	\$165
2015	Cabernet Sauvignon Dr. Olmo	A huge, explosive wine, the Cabernet Sauvignon Dr. Olmo (formerly Black Label) is another Larkmead 2015 that is endowed with serious structure and overall intensity. Dark red cherry, purplish berries, licorice, graphite, bittersweet chocolate and gravel infuse a wonderfully deep Cabernet Sauvignon built on gravitas. Ample and enveloping in all directions, the 2015 is shaping up to be a real gem. I can't wait to taste it from bottle.	(91-94)	\$180
2015	Cabernet Sauvignon Solari	The 2015 Solari opens with exquisite aromatics. Deep, powerful and concentrated, with exceptional overall balance, the 2015 hits all the right notes. Graphite, gravel, smoke, scorched earth and dark fruit notes abound. Today, the Solari is the most impressive of the 2015s. Even at this early stage, it is captivating.	(93-96)	\$240
2015	Cabernet Sauvignon The Lark	The 2015 The Lark speaks to refinement above all else. Next to the other 2015s, the Lark comes across as a bit restrained. Aromatic lift, silkiness and fabulous purity of flavor are the signatures. The fruit notes are more red-toned than the darker overtones that are more often found in the 2015s here.	(92-95)	\$360