

# San Francisco Chronicle

## YOUR WINE BUCKET LIST

# THE 52 CALIFORNIA WINERIES YOU NEED TO VISIT IN 2018

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“We’re the most famous winery you’ve never heard of,” Larkmead winemaker Dan Petroski likes to say. First established in 1895, this Calistoga winery has a long and rich history. Its wines were the first from Napa Valley to reach the East Coast post-Prohibition, thanks to famed wine importer Frank Schoonmaker and to the fact that the Larkmead property was on a railroad stop.

Now, more than 120 years into its existence, Larkmead is undergoing something of a transformation. “We’ve made a commitment to luxury,” Petroski explains. A recently completed renovation of the facilities includes a brand-new winery whose tanks are fitted precisely to different vineyard blocks, and a gorgeous new building for seated tastings, with a semi-outdoor patio and an indoor, cellar-temperature chamber lined with Georgia O’Keefe-esque paintings by Larkmead owner Kate Solari-Baker.

Part of this transformation has meant an upward tick in price: Larkmead’s highest-tier wine, The Lark, now exceeds \$350. That makes it inaccessible to most people, to be sure, though it’s worth noting that the Larkmead wines provide a welcome departure, style-wise, from most other similarly priced bottles from Napa Valley. Collectors, take note.

**WHAT TO TRY:** The Larkmead Cabernets are rustic, frequently herbal, not exactly polished or smooth; their power can feel aggressive. Each corresponds to different parcels from the vineyard: the Dr. Olmo is high-toned, intense, linear; the Solari is marked by cinnamon and sweet spice, with rough tannins; the Lark showing denser, darker fruit, met eventually by dried herb. Don’t miss the Lillie either, a blend of Sauvignons blanc and musque that’s floral and crisp, tasting of lemongrass.