

# Wine Spectator

## 9 Bold California Reds

New reviews of Rhône-style wines from the Central Coast

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*Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.*

Paso Robles and Santa Barbara lead the charge with Rhône grapes on the Central Coast. Farther north, the inland Santa Lucia Highlands AVA is gaining a reputation for its Pinot Noir, followed closely by Syrah and white Rhône grapes.

At the top of this list are two single-vineyard Syrahs from Jaffurs. Owner Craig Jaffurs is a veteran Rhône producer in Santa Barbara; he debuted his first Syrah from the 1994 harvest. Both his wines show ripe and dense flavors from the late, cool 2011 vintage.

A few of the wines here carry the broad California designation, a nod to the fact that the grapes come from multiple appellations. Winemaker-owner Russell From used Syrah from nine vineyards in Santa Barbara County and Paso Robles for his Nuts & Bolts, while On The Road is a blend of Grenache from many of the same sites. Conversely, Big Table Farm is based in Oregon but made a Syrah from the White Hawk Vineyard in Santa Barbara's Los Alamos hills.

From Paso Robles come two Rhône-style blends from Calcareous. Father and daughter Lloyd Messer and Dana Brown established the winery in 2000 when they purchased 342 acres of land in the hills west of Paso Robles. Two years later they planted a mix of Rhône, Burgundy and Bordeaux varieties on the property's limestone soil. Messer passed away in 2006, and Brown now runs Calcareous with her sister Erika. Jason Joyce is the winemaker.

**JAFFURS Syrah Santa Barbara County Thompson Vineyard 2011 Score: 91 / \$46**

A pure, dense, richly flavored style, with a mix of blueberry, blackberry and wild berry flavors. Jammy without being weighty. Ends with a burst of raspberry and spice notes. Drink now through 2022. 231 cases made.—*J.L.*

**BIG TABLE FARM Syrah California White Hawk Vineyard 2011 Score: 90 / \$48**

Shows good richness, density and focus, with vivid dark berry, mocha and cedar notes. The creamy texture allows for a long, smooth finish and lingering flavors. Drink now through 2023. 166 cases made.—*J.L.*

**CALCAREOUS Trés Violet Paso Robles 2011 Score: 90 / \$48**

Tight and vibrant, with a firm, dense core of loamy earth and dark berry notes, showing shades of wilted flower and raspberry, gliding along smoothly on the finish. Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah. Drink now through 2023. 550 cases made.—*J.L.*

**EPIPHANY Grenache Santa Barbara County 2011 Score: 90 / \$30**

Presents a tight beam of vivid blackberry and red berry fruit, intense and snappy. A bit raw in texture, but finishes with a long, fruit-driven finish. Drink now through 2022. 349 cases made.—*J.L.*

**JAFFURS Syrah Santa Barbara County Verna's Vineyard 2011 Score: 90 / \$46**

Centered on ripe berry and spicy peppery notes that are deep and persistent, this firms midpalate and ends with a spicy, layered finish and good length. The tannins are chewy. Drink now through 2022. 367 cases made.—*J.L.*

**HERMAN STORY Grenache California On The Road 2012 Score: 90 / \$48**

Offers a firm, rich, dense medley of vivid blackberry, blueberry and wild berry flavors. This is well-structured, with lively acidity, chewy tannins and splashes of pepper and spice. Drink now through 2023. 873 cases made.—*J.L.*

**HERMAN STORY Syrah California Nuts & Bolts 2012 Score: 90 / \$48**

Exhibits rich, generous, sturdy tiers of blackberry, red berry, plum, graphite and mocha flavors. Holds focus and ends with a deeply persistent, tannin-laced finish. Drink now through 2025. 1,197 cases made.—*J.L.*

**CARLISLE Syrah Santa Lucia Highlands Sierra Mar Vineyard 2012 Score: 89 / \$43**

Firm and well-structured, with lively acidity and tannins wrapped around a core of earth- and mineral-laced dark berry and dried herb flavors. Needs time. Best from 2015 through 2025. 201 cases made.—*J.L.*

**CALCAREOUS Moose Paso Robles 2011 Score: 88 / \$48**

Dense and tight, offering a chewy mix of Syrah and Petit Verdot, showing a tannic flex. The core features loamy earth and dried berry flavors. Drink now through 2023. 420 cases made.—*J.L.*