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12TH SEP 2024

Realm's 2022s

Realm's Proprietor/Winemaker duo, Scott Becker and Benoit Touquette, are still recovering from the sales losses of the 2020 vintage. Realm was one of the few wineries that chose not to release anything from the smoke-taint blighted 2020 vintage, strongly feeling that the wines were not up to standard. The more I taste the 2020s, and the more that previously masked smoke taint characters emerge in wines, the more I believe they made a wise decision to maintain the long-term loyalty of their customers. However, the aftermath of such a substantial financial hit was that they had to bring forward their 2022 release dates, hoping to return to their regular release schedule next year.



Aftermath

Coming on the heels of an impressive but small 2021 crop, 2022 was tracking to be a relatively effortless vintage for Napa Valley until Mother Nature decided to throw growers a heatwave curve ball during the first week of September. Many winemakers were able to bring in some fruit before and during this heat event, but a significant portion of the Bordeaux varieties were not ripe at this stage. Most Napa vintners would need to ride the potentially devastating wave for a proportion of their crop. Fortunately, similarly timed heatwaves had occurred in 2017 and 2020, so evasive maneuvers were ready to be deployed.

As the early September heatwave approached, the two major choices were stark: 1) Pick what was ripe or close to ripe before and during the heatwave, or 2) Ride the heatwave out with whatever irrigation, shade cloth, and mister strategies you had. Knowing this, I expect to see some under-ripe 2022 Napa Cabernet expressions on one end of the spectrum, and some desiccated fruit and VA-stripped train wrecks at the other. This said, Realm did a really great job of toning down the possible deleterious aftermath of both major harvest options.

"One of the big saviors in 2022 was having the extra tank space at Nine Suns (the winery on Pritchard Hill purchased by Realm in June 2022)," Scott pointed out. "We had to harvest quickly, and being able to process everything as it was coming in was a real advantage."

"We pulled in what we could before the heatwave," said Benoit. "We wanted to capture more crunchy fruit and tension for the Merlot. By September 5th, the peak of the heat, we had all the Merlot in."



- Scott Becker and Benoit Touquette



The Tempest, mostly Merlot, is a lovely surprise in 2022. Merlot has a broader ripening spectrum than Cabernet and very little tolerance for extreme heat, so most, including Realm, brought their Merlots in before the heatwave. I love this 2022 brighter, fresher Tempest (maybe even prefer it?). The other big, pleasant surprise is Dr. Crane Vineyard. Benoit chose to harvest this before the heat, which was a brave move. I find him to be one of Dr. Crane's most skilled crafters, and he really pulled this 2022 off. It's a more elegant, shimmery wine—so counterintuitive to the vintage—and similar in style to what Sam Kaplan does with Dr. Crane for Memento Mori.

"Houyi Vineyard, we also picked early," said Benoit. "We saw what was happening, and it was like, 'Just go, go, go!' We picked from September 2nd onwards, same as Dr. Crane."

The heat hit hard on Pritchard Hill, and so Houyi was picked through the heatwave. This vineyard needed a lot of selection—nearly 30% of the fruit was discarded. It's an excellent wine, given the circumstances.

To Kalon came in not long after the heatwave. Andy Beckstoffer's crew did an amazing job getting this vineyard through the storm. I've now tasted a few different To Kalon 2022s made by other wineries, and they are also impressive.

"The vineyards that were most sensitive to the heat were those that were closest to being ready," said Benoit. "Farella wasn't close to ripe, so we let it hang. The fruit that was further behind did better than the fruit right on the ripeness line. After the heatwave, we went through and cleaned up the vineyard by clipping away the raisins. We also had to go through and inspect the vines to figure out if the vine was finished or if it was still progressing after the heat. If the vine isn't functioning, you have to pick."

Farella Vineyard (Coombsville) and the Stags Leap District vineyards (Moonracer and Hartwell XX) weren't ready when the heat hit and rode the wave. Again, there was a lot of selection here, but the wines are not that far off 2021 in terms of quality and fruit style. The big difference is the structure. 2021 is a more structured vintage—more acidity and tannins (and riper tannins)—and the 2021 wines will be longer lived than their 2022 counterparts.

Meanwhile, The Bard and Absurd are delicious uber-blends that don't miss a beat.

"We did a lot more aging in concrete in 2022 to maintain the brightness," said Benoit.

I asked Benoit if he back blended the 2022s with the 2023 vintage, which is permitted in Napa up to 5%.

"We used a little 2023 in some of the blends," he said. "But it was a very different animal, so we couldn't use too much. We wound up using 2 or 3% at most, even though we could have gone up to 5%."

Those interested in reading more about the history of Realm can refer to the **Realm Story** published last year.

For more information about the 2022 vintage in Napa Valley, head over to the **2022 Vintage Preliminary Report** we published last year.

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Article & Reviews by Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW
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2022 Realm Cellars

Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

2022 ▾

99

The 2022 Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon was one of Realm's first harvests that year, coming in just before the early September heat hit. The blend is 96% Cabernet Sauvignon and 4% Petit Verdot. Deep garnet-purple colored, it shoots from the glass with bold notes of fresh blackberries and blackcurrants, plus hints of crushed rocks, dried sage, and fragrant earth. The medium to full-bodied palate is electric with black fruit and mineral layers, supported by firm, grainy tannins and incredible tension, finishing long and earthy. This is on the crunchier side of Dr. Crane fruit, and I love it!

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

2022 ▾

97

The 2022 Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is composed of 94% Cabernet Sauvignon and 6% Cabernet Franc. Deep garnet-purple colored, it prances out of the glass with showy scents of violets, dark chocolate, juicy blueberries, and kirsch, leading to hints of menthol, cedar chest, and Chinese five spice. The medium to full-bodied palate offers layers of exotic spices and earthy nuances, supported by firm, lightly chewy tannins and plenty of freshness, finishing with epic length. That classic To Kalon power really comes through on the finish!

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

Farella Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

2022 ▾

97

The 2022 Farella Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Merlot, sporting a deep garnet-purple color. After a bit of shaking, the nose erupts with vibrant wild blueberry and fresh blackberry scents, soon opening out to classic cassis, pencil lead, and bay leaves notes with a touch of tree bark. The full-bodied palate is tightly wound with muscular black fruits and firm, grainy tannins, finishing long with lots of earthy nuances coming through. Clearly, Farella managed this challenging vintage very well. Impressive!

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

Hartwell XX Cabernet Sauvignon

2022 ▾

98

The 2022 Hartwell XX Cabernet Sauvignon is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Deep garnet-purple in color, it opens with a classic nose of blackcurrant/cordial, red currant jelly, and pencil shavings, followed by slowly emerging nuances of iris, bulb, black olives, and Indian spices. The full-bodied palate delivers a rock-solid structure of firm, grainy tannins and just enough freshness, finishing long and spicy. Only 200 cases were made from this tiny 1.5-acre plot of mature vines.

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

Houyi Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

2022 ↕

96

The 2022 Houyi Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is a blend of 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot. Deep garnet-purple colored, it is quite closed at the moment, needing a lot of coaxing to bring out notes of plum preserves, blueberry compote, and black cherries, giving way to hints of tar, star anise, and cumin seed. Full-bodied, the palate is dense with black fruit preserves layers, supported by firm, grainy tannins and just enough freshness, finishing long and opulent. Houyi Vineyard was picked through the 2022 heatwave. This fruit needed a lot of selection (nearly 30% of the fruit was discarded), making this a stellar effort.

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

Moonracer Cabernet Sauvignon

2022 ↕

96

The 2022 Moonracer Cabernet Sauvignon is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Deep garnet-purple colored, it shimmies out of the glass with energetic scents of red currant jelly, Morello cherries, mint tea, and rose oil, followed by suggestions of clove oil, cinnamon toast, and graphite. The medium to full-bodied palate delivers lightly chewy tannins and impressive freshness to frame the baking spice-laced red berry flavors, finishing with a minty lift.

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

The Absurd

2022 ↕

97

Realm's uber-blend, the 2022 The Absurd is opaque garnet-purple colored. It slowly emerges from the glass with an evocative perfume of garrigue, fallen leaves, fragrant soil, and lilacs, leading to a core of plum pudding, baked black cherries, and mulberries, plus touches of sandalwood and spice cake. The full-bodied palate delivers surprising freshness and tension with plush tannins and bags of black fruit, finishing long and perfumed. Gorgeous!

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

The Bard

2022 ↕

95

The 2022 The Bard is composed of 87% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot, 1% Petite Sirah, and 1% Charbono. Deep garnet-purple colored, it needs a little swirling to bring out a fruity core of crème de cassis and baked plums, leading to hints of cedar, vanilla pod, licorice, and dark chocolate with a touch of saffras. The full-bodied palate is velvety textured with bags of juicy black fruits and well-knit freshness, finishing on a lingering licorice note. This was bottled in mid-July 2024.

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**

2022 Realm Cellars

The Tempest

2022 ↗

96

The 2022 The Tempest is a blend of 67% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, and 23% Cabernet Sauvignon. Deep garnet-purple colored, it comes skipping out of the glass with bright, cheery notes of black raspberries, mulberries, and kirsch, leading to hints of lavender, wild sage, and aniseed. The medium to full-bodied palate delivers bright, crunchy fruit with firm, fine-grained tannins and great tension, finishing on a lingering peppery note. This was bottled in March 2024.

Reviewed by: **Lisa Perrotti-Brown**

Review date: **2024-09-12**

Source: **Realm's 2022s**