

PMV Reserve Cab Vertical 1994-2017

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I tasted this complete vertical of all 24 vintages of the Pride Mountain Vineyards Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon in eight flights of three vintages per flight, non-blind, starting with 2006 through to 2017 on the first day (the 12 most recent vintages) and then, the next day, starting at 1994 and finishing with 2005 (the earlier 12 vintages). The 12 wines each day were opened about 90 minutes prior to the start of the tasting and it took about 90 minutes to perform the evaluations each day. In addition to my notes on each vintage in the pages that follow, I also provide a summary table at the end with my overall impressions, present-drinking rankings, scores and drinking-window recommendations. I took over responsibility for the winery in 2004, hired a new winemaker Sally Johnson in 2007 and have been responsible for viticulture and in close collaboration with Sally on all details of the winemaking since that time. So, my insights about all aspects of what went into the farming and winemaking of each vintage are much greater over the second half of this vertical compared to the first half.

1994: First comment is that I opened two bottles because the first bottle seemed tired. The second bottle was much deeper and darker and still had fruit. People say, “there are no great old wines, just great bottles,” meaning that bottle-to-bottle variation is a thing as wines get older. We also used shorter corks on the 1994 through 1997 vintages compared to all later vintages. I will only comment on the darker, richer bottle of 1994. Pleasant subtle aromas of menthol, cigar box, earthiness, dark ripe cherries. A pleasure to roll around the mouth due to the resolved tannins even if some chalkiness can still be found on the finish. In the mouth, I would have wanted a bit more pizzazz flavor-wise compared to the intrigue of the nose. A pleasant lovely wine but even the good bottle felt a bit tired. I am at a loss to imagine where this might go. It still has some size and weight, but the fruit is fading faster than the tannin most likely. Will the secondary nuances, that are lovely now but quite subdued, at least in the mouth, shine through as the last of the tannins resolve? I sense that in 1994, perhaps due to it being our first vintage of Reserve Cab, we were still figuring things out (I was living in France at the time as a professor and not privy to what went into the winemaking decisions of the 1994 and how it compared to the immediate vintages that followed) and that this just might be a wine that is past its prime. If you have two, I would open one now and then another in say 5 years. If you only have one, I would wait and check it out again in a few more years.

1995: A first taste after opening this was “wow, this is nice” but because of the experience on the 1994, I opened a second bottle just to see if there was variation between the bottles. I thought I got a bit more tannic grip on one bottle compared to the other, but they were both very similar aromatically and they both had an inner “sweetness” of fruit that was quite appealing and less present on the 1994. This wine is in synch with the flavor profile and expectations of our Reserve Cabs over the decades to follow. Lovely secondary nuances of menthol, cigar leaf, dried flowers mingle with our classic PMV notes of tarweed, oily chaparral underbrush and sweet crème de cassis. Just a beautiful wine. Structurally, the tannins are resolved, though still with a hint of chalkiness on the finish, and this wine has more weight to the midpalate compared to the 1994. A winner. If you have some, you can enjoy now (I would not hesitate) but if you want to wait longer, I sense this wine, much more so than the 1994, will continue to evolve beautifully for some years to come.

1996: Wow, what a beautiful wine. Riper and more fruit forward compared to either the 1994 or 1995, this wine has fantastic flavors of camphor and menthol that is buoyed by rich decadent black fruit. The wine is balanced structurally, feeling great as it enters your mouth and you roll it around, but on the long finish, at the 7 or 8 second level, it still has some chalky tannin to resolve! That said, it is obviously fully in its drinking window. This wine has the most sweet fruit of these three and I would say could favorably evolve with additional aging. But if you have some, I would pull the trigger on at least one sooner than later. That said, the camphor and menthol and cedar flavors that make this so intriguing and fun, and that you don't want to miss, have been there for many years now so I am not worried that they will dissipate with the years to come.

1997: This has always been a somewhat controversial wine. In its youth, it showed some VA aromatics (volatile acidity caused by acetic-acid bacteria activity in barrel prior to bottling) and explicit over-ripe porty notes, but at other times as it aged over the past two decades, has been just a decadently delicious and complex, if not exotic, wine. Today, at 23 years old, it is showing very well. Still has loads of ripe cassis and an explicitly fruit-forward character, but also has exotic coconut (that I have never gotten on vintages before or since the 1997 but has always been a characteristic of the 1997) and lovely classic sweet tobacco and cedary nuances. Compared to the 1994, 1995 and 1996, the tannins on the 1997 are completely resolved with none of the chalkiness that emerged on the older wines on the long finish. A beautiful wine ready to be consumed right now. If you have some, do not hesitate to pull the trigger any time you are ready even if I sense this will continue to favorably evolve with time.

1998: Wow, this is fantastic, showing even better than my previous 1998 sometime in 2019 (bottle variation?) A deep pungent nose featuring cedar, reminiscent of an older Bordeaux, but still with resonant dark fruit that says California all the way. There is nothing tired about this wine. Lively and vibrant while also clearly 22 years old aromatically, it shows resolved tannins, zero chalkiness, still has some density, fantastic menthol, cedar, beautiful intense mature cherry flavors, cigar box, a bit of earthiness, just great! What is most intriguing is the ethereal structure with everything resolved and ready for consumption and yet still possessing some weight on the midpalate. If you are lucky enough to have some of these, go for it! Pull one sooner than later. In a great drinking spot right now. After 2010 and 2011, 1998 was our third coldest vintage ever with Bob Foley, our visionary winemaker at the time, letting some of the grapes that went into this hang until December! Bob always said there were no leaves left on the vines in December and the clusters just hung there and dried a bit, even through snow (!), which surely added to the complex nuanced beautiful character of this wine. A surprise and a revelation.

1999: Another pretty wine. Lovely secondary aromatics of cedar, dried lavender, dark cherry and sweet tobacco. Structurally, this is a bit bigger than the 1998, with greater weight and bit more chalky tannin, though not excessively so. I have always thought this wine was complex and delicious and this showing did not disappoint. That said, if you have the 1998, I would open that first and let the 1999 shed the last of its tannins before consuming over the years to come. If you only have the 1999, go for it! It is a pretty wine in a great drinking window balancing both complex secondary nuances with its California pedigree. In terms of flavor flamboyance, it is a bit more subdued compared to the previous 1995 to 1998 vintages.

2000: I have never understood the 2000 vintage, having been a professor in France at the time that this wine was made. On paper, the 2000 vintage weather statistics don't look so bad. So why did 2000 make such lack luster cabs across the board in Napa and Sonoma? I have never gotten a satisfactory answer. This wine has a great complex nose with a range of secondary nuances and still some ripe fruit, but in the mouth, it comes across as dusty and dry, with chalky tannins still present and a lack of ripe fruit that all of the previous vintages with the exception of 1994 showed beautifully. This is still a nice wine that can be enjoyed at present but there is too much drying tannin compared to lively fruit for it to stand out in this vertical. If you have both this vintage and the other surrounding or older vintages, I would hold off on this hoping that as the tannins further resolve, the secondary flavors further develop. But that is only a hope!

2001: The nose of this reminds me more of the vintages to come (meaning more recent vintages) than the vintages already tasted through. This has always been one of our favorite vintages of all time at PMV and this tasting did not disappoint. Aromatically and flavor-wise, there are loads of the oily chaparral and tarry weed character that surround our vineyards, loads of ripe crème de cassis and some peppery and spicy notes that add intrigue. Structurally, there is a gorgeous weight and still present tannic finish without the tannins being too excessive. A lovely balance between young and old. In human terms, this wine has gotten to be in its late 30s agewise; still explicitly beautiful in the youthful sense, but with life experience to make it more interesting and nuanced. A beautiful wine. Drink or hold. I am confident that as the last of the tannins are shed, given that there is still plenty of fruit, this wine will still be interesting and delightful further down the road over the tens of years to come.

2002: What fun! 2002 was one of our largest yielding vintages in history. The block that dominantly goes into our Reserve Cab (called Rock Arch and planted just behind the winery building), which is 10.5 acres, produced 60 tons in 2002, while in more recent years, as trunk disease and other issues have forced us to remove vines from this 40 year old block, the yield is now about 25 tons. This wine is gorgeous and all about the lovely fruit and perfectly resolved tannins. Compared to the 2001, this wine is squarely in its drinking window and is a real beauty. I recommend pulling the trigger on this one, which is a true delight.

2003: This wine has always been one of the ripest vintages in our PMV history. With age, the wine is showing a great balance between the decadently ripe, almost porty, nose and the complex flavors of cedar and menthol in the mouth. Still a youthful "big" wine, the 2003 is weighty, as it always has been, and still shows some tannin on the long finish, but this has definitely become interesting flavor-wise with both complex sweet tobacco nuances and youthful dark fruit and cassis flavors mingling together. You will definitely enjoy this wine today. But I imagine this will still be showing great 10 years from now as well.

2004: Our winemaker at the time, Bob Foley, experimented and began bringing in the cab from this warm vintage much earlier than normal, beginning in September. I was not involved in that decision, having just taken over in August 2004 after my father passed away but I was intrigued to learn the result of this experiment. It is a pretty wine that still has some tannin to shed but does not have the range of flavor or complexity compared to vintages prior or past. Although better today than it was 15 years ago, this is not one of the most full flavored and head-turning of vintages. Great to bring in the fruit earlier than in say 2003, but not as early as we did in 2004. You have to be always learning.

2005: This vintage was light in crop due to spring rain in 2005 that impeded fruit set and has always shown great fruit and density on the palate and a classic savory cabernet character; I loved this wine over its first 10 years in bottle. Today, although it has a more youthful personality compared to the previous 11 vintages, it did not show the soaring range of complex cedar and ripe fruit character as it has displayed in the past. It was dense but lacked the flamboyant concentrated flavors I was expecting. Is it just in a dumb phase? Especially if you have only a single bottle left, I would recommend holding for another year or two to see if the inner beauty is simply hiding at present and will reveal itself once more. A second bottle was the same.

2006: Gorgeous aromatics of camphor, pine and menthol nuances with a pretty expression in the mouth of concentrated blackberry and cassis liqueur with a lovely round velvety tannic expression and a long lingering finish that still has just a bit of chalky grip. In a pretty place right now but with plenty of life ahead. My one complaint is that for the first time ever, I picked up a nuance (not a dominance) of stewed fruit character that I wish was not there. 2006 was an interesting vintage. After a cold winter and early spring, the vines finally leafed out the first week of May and virtually all 85 acres of vines started growing at the same time. From May on however, it was a fantastic growing season. Veraison for all grape varieties also happened at roughly the same time in late August. Overall, this was the most uniformly ripening vintage in our history, which presents its own challenges at harvest as all the fruit becomes ripe at the same time. If you have many of these, I would definitely pull one now and see what you think. If you only have one, I would let it go a bit longer. I imagine it will evolve similarly to the 1996.

2007: A big intense savory wine with complex notes of black fruit, Mediterranean garrigue (oily underbrush and California tarweed) and sweet tobacco and a beautifully structured mouthfeel, that although still bigger than the 2006, is beginning to resolve nicely. Has a long beautiful life in front of it. Entering a nice drinking window. No hurry on this one, however. 2007 was a straight down the middle of the fairway vintage with no big drama or huge surprises. This is the first vintage that Sally and I worked together, and we did not make huge changes to our standard protocols on this first vintage. Over its first several years in bottle, it was a big black tower of a wine but has been slowly unwinding over the years and is now becoming more approachable. If you only have a couple of these, I would open them beginning in say 2 years from now. If you have a bunch, try one now and see what you think. This one should be great for the next two decades.

2008: Wow, a really complex and pungent aromatic profile with nuances of everything we have on the property: oily tarweed, cigar leaf, blackberry candies, earthy forest floor. The mouthfeel is beautifully resolved, similar to the 2006, and in a fantastic drinking window. The complexity follows through into the flavors including subtle smoke and dark-roasted coffee nuances that remind me of an Haut Brion but packed with lots of California dark-fruit layers (Stephen Tanzer once said of this wine, "Graves on steroids"). Note that this complexity is not due to any change of barrels in 2008 and is a characteristic of the extremely sparse crop we had in 2008 due to a big hail event in April that wiped out roughly 1/3 of the crop and led to small clusters and small yields. My favorite of the entire 24-vintage tasting for sheer complex flavor intensity and it's gorgeous mouthfeel. Enjoy today for sure but this should continue to evolve favorably for many years to come.

2009: A fantastic PMV nose with the usual pungent range of sweet tobacco, blackberry candies, hints of black pepper, oily underbrush, antique furniture nuances ... really compelling. Consistent with how it has been these last many years, the mouthfeel is sublime pleasure with a slightly greater viscosity, weight and roundness compared to the 2006 and 2008 and without any chalky grip on the finish making it nicely resolved and pleasing. Just one of the best Reserve Cabs we have ever made. This wine has always been 100 pts in my book, right out of the gate, and continues to evolve in a beautiful way without ever once having lost its stride along the way. A winner that for sure can be enjoyed right now or anytime over the next two decades.

2010: Although many of the classic PMV traits are present in this wine, including the savory garrigue and dark spices that our wines usually have, this wine has a shade more red fruit character. The mouthfeel is beautifully resolved with a silky and more ethereal character compared to any of the earlier vintages. In previous tastings over the years, I have gotten notes of over-ripeness on some of our 2010 reds, including this 2010 Reserve Cab, with candied and even porty nuances being a bit too present. But today, the 2010 is showing beautifully and is in a great drinking window. Over our past 30 years, 2010 and 2011 were our two coldest growing seasons (followed by 1998), with 2010 only slightly less cold than 2011. We harvested these 2010 cab sauvignon grapes well into November and if anything, erred on extracting too much ripeness from this cool vintage. That said, this 2010 Reserve Cab is really pretty right now and is in a fantastic drinking window. I would pull one now and see for yourself how you are liking it.

2011: A sublime complex nose with peppery spices, some dried herb, complex tarweed and other oily California chaparral nuances and just great concentrated dark fruit layers. Gorgeous in the mouth with great roundness and yet a bit more tannic grip, without being excessive, on the finish compared to the 2010. A gorgeous wine from the coldest growing season in our history. As you may recall, the 2011 vintage has a poor reputation in Napa and Sonoma due to several days of humid rain at the end of September that caused botrytis throughout many/most vineyards, with vintners forced to bring in their fruit in this cool year much earlier than desired. However, we had no fungus or other problems and could profit from the warm and sunny October that followed. What many critics get wrong about 2011 and other cool growing seasons is they recommend drinking these wines early. This 2011 Reserve Cab has benefited enormously from 8 years of bottle age as it continues to uncoil and reveal its inner beauty. Drinking beautifully now but will be even better a few years further down the road. If you have a bunch of these, I would open one soon so that you can assess where it is at, but if you only have a couple, I would wait another year or two.

2012: Again, the usual PMV Reserve Cab pungent intensity on the nose, with camphor, oily garrigue, spice cake and more subtle black fruit nuances. The mouthfeel is great for a wine of this relatively young age, with a bit more chalky grip compared to say the 2006, 2008 and 2009 but drinking beautifully now. 2012 was a straightforward, no-angst vintage with cabernet grapes harvested toward the end of October and no weather concerns; reminiscent of the 2007 growing season but this wine came out to be less of "bruiser" compared to the 2007. Gorgeous cabernet sauvignon! I have opened more of the 2012 Reserve Cabs over the last few years compared to likely any other wine we make. My one surprise at this tasting was it showing a bit more chalky grip than I recall from previous tastings. If anything, I would recommend waiting another year or two on this based on the present showing. But you won't go wrong if you open one today.

2013: The aromatics are darker and more nutty compared to any of the earlier vintages with a brooding complex intensity that is thrilling. Wow, the flavors are superb as well with a complex range of sweet tobacco, crème de cassis, California chaparral and spicy nuances; this screams Pride Reserve Cab. The mouthfeel is sneaky, with a great round and even smooth attack and middle but with chalky grip emerging on the long finish. Although this wine can definitely be enjoyed today, if you have patience and give this more time, those grippy tannins that emerge at the 5-9 second range in the mouth will further relax and this wine will further open up. At the top of the Mayacamas at 2100' elevation, 2013 was one of our most mouth-puckeringly tannic vintages ever. In the valleys, the extra phenolic concentration added weight and structure making 2013 one of the best vintages ever for the valleys but up here on the mountaintop, it was too much of a good thing, at least when these 2013 reds were young. It was truly a painful exercise to taste through our multitude of blend trials of all the 2013 reds due to the intense chalky astringent grip that would coat your mouth and cheeks. But I am happy to report that the tannins on the 2013s are resolving beautifully even if I would still hold off on this 2013 Reserve Cab for another few years. These last 2 to 3 years of bottle age have enormously benefited this wine.

2014: What a treat this wine is. Although the nose is consistent with all earlier vintages, showing subtle hints of complex Mediterranean garrigue, sweet tobacco and Earthy nuances in addition to the expected sweet dark fruit, it is also more subtle and refined (less explosively pungent, while still being intense), with great minerally nuances and hints of sweet spice (carrot) cake. The mouthfeel is utterly sublime, with the tannins beautifully integrated with an ethereal uplift allowing the flavors to be fully on display with absolutely no excess chalky grip on the finish. Our 2014 reds had always been a somewhat dull vintage for me, and I typically never pull a 2014 when opening wine for friends and family, but this 2014 Reserve Cab is a revelation and is presently in a great drinking window and should remain there for years, even decades to come. A delightful surprise and a wine I will be opening much more of starting now! One of my favorites today at this 24-vintage tasting.

2015: This wine is utter perfection. The spicy complexity on the nose, the perfectly balanced weight showing tannins but with no explicit excess chalkiness, wow. This has always been one of my favorite vintages of Reserve Cab and this tasting shows it to be, controversially I will admit, my favorite vintage of the 24-vintage vertical. The fruit flavors are not just explicitly crème de cassis but show great refined red fruit nuances as well, the pungent intensity of the nose is fantastic without there being too much of that intense tar weed and oily chaparral we always have (which I love but I love even more when balanced with subtle red-fruit aromas as in this 2015). The mouthfeel is just pure silkiness right now and yet I have every confidence this wine will beneficially evolve for decades. When Sally Johnson took over as winemaker in 2007, we agreed that for the cab to be "perfect", a bit less tannic character and a bit more subtle nuanced complex flavor would be desirable. This 2015 is our closest yet to hitting perfection and I think this wine will age beautifully even if it should not be missed now.

2016: But wow, the 2016 is a close contender to the 2015, with a bit more pencil shaving adding to the complex flavor profile and a bit more weight through the middle and tannin on the finish. Just a gorgeous cabernet sauvignon. All of the 2016 reds had the “sneaky tannin syndrome” for their first year in bottle, meaning the wines entered your mouth and were silky perfection until the chalky grip kicked in after 6 or more seconds, but now with a couple of years in bottle, the chalky grip on the long finish has dissipated and all of the 2016 reds are drinking beautifully right now. This 2016 Reserve Cab will drink even better with a few more years of age and may, eventually, surpass the perfect balance of 2015. It is weightier than the 2015 with a darker fruit character, so I look forward to being the arbiter of the horse race between the 2015 and 2016 over the decades to come.

2017: Gorgeous. A bit more of the classic PMV pungent oily chaparral California intensity on the nose along with subtle sweet tobacco, but also with youthful caramel and vanilla nuances still showing from the 40% new oak that will subdue with another year in bottle. The mouthfeel is already near perfection with silky roundness on the attack, plenty of weight through the middle and only a bit of chalky grip that needs resolution, as is expected of such a young wine, having been bottled a few months ago in December 2019. I love this wine and can enjoy it right now. But it’s perfect drinking window is still years down the road. Tough to know right now, between the 2015, 2016 and 2017, which will eventually emerge as the superior wine, even if the 2015 is perfection at present and is already in its drinking window.

Concluding Thoughts:

Overall, one senses that the 1994-2006 vintages, on average, were made in a riper style and that the 2008-2017 wines have a different character due to a number of changes Sally Johnson and I made after hiring her in 2007 that aimed to reduce a bit the chalky tannins of these big wines with the goal of allowing the beauty of the fruit and complex flavors to be more fully on display. For the 2007 vintage, we decided to make the wines in a way similar to earlier vintages. Technically, the acidity of the last decade of vintages is somewhat higher and the alcohol a bit lower compared to the earlier vintages and one senses these more recent wines are going to age better, meaning get to a place where the tannins are fully resolved earlier in their life concomitant with a greater range of complex secondary nuances opening up. Only time will tell about this enhanced aging ability! At present, the wines from 2007 through 2017 show a great consistency of flavor that is a real signature of our vineyards at 2100’ elevation. This distinct personality, characterized by aromatics such as cedar, sweet tobacco and the pungent oily chaparral surrounding our vineyards along with dark concentrated fruit flavors reminiscent of crème de cassis and packaged with weight and structure on the long finish, allows these wines to be easily spotted in a blind tasting with other producers. Overall, I think we are going in a great direction with all of our wines. The changes in our French oak barrel producers and decreased percentage of new oak, our new destemming and entire crush system in 2008, picking strategies, fermentation details, farming approaches, etc., all beginning largely with the 2008 vintage but ongoing, have benefited the quality of not only these Reserve wines but all of our wines. If you could have tasted with me all 24 vintages of our Reserve Cab over these last two days, I think you would agree! Enjoy.

Summary of 24-Vintage Complete Vertical of PMV Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

Vintage	Today's Drinkability Ranking 1-24	Steve's 100 pt. Scale	Summary and Recommendation	Drinking Window
1994	22	90	Beginning to tire but still enjoyable.	2020-2024
1995	16	95	Pretty; drink now or hold for a few more.	2020-2030
1996	15	96	Dramatic; more resolved than the 1995.	2020-2030
1997	17	96	Intensely flavored; most resolved between the 95, 96, 97.	2020-2030
1998	14	98	Beautiful; drink now but can hold longer.	2020-2030
1999	21	93	Very nice with Bordeaux character. Drink or hold.	2020-2030
2000	24	88	A bit tired with some drying tannin. Drink or hold.	2020-2025
2001	13	97	Just a tad more structured than the 2002. Drink or hold.	2020-2030
2002	10	98	Seamless and beautiful. Fully in its drinking window.	2020-2030
2003	19	94	Ripe and big. Drink or hold.	2020-2035
2004	23	90	Enjoyable but lacks drama and intrigue. Drink or hold.	2020-2030
2005	20	93	Former favorite. Losing some flamboyance. Drink or hold.	2020-2030
2006	9	94	A perennial favorite. Can go longer, but open one now.	2020-2035
2007	8	96	A beauty; will benefit with a few more years in bottle	2022-2040
2008	2	100	Wow, complex flavors, pleasing structure. Drink or hold.	2020-2040
2009	3	100	Gorgeous; beautiful fruit and weight. Drink or hold.	2020-2040
2010	7	96	Decadent and beautifully resolved. Drink or hold.	2020-2035
2011	11	95	Pretty with some tannins to resolve; give it 2 more years.	2022-2040
2012	6	99	Gorgeous. The wine I've opened most these last years.	2021-2040
2013	18	98	Dark and intense. Should last forever. Give it more time.	2023-2045
2014	4	99	Surprise of the tasting. A beautiful already resolved cab.	2020-2040
2015	1	100	My favorite! Drink or hold. Should evolve beautifully.	2020-2045
2016	5	100	Bigger than the 15, give it another year even if great now.	2021-2045
2017	12	99-100	Gorgeous but needs 1-2 years to shed the new oak.	2021-2045