

From Napa and Sonoma

by Antonio Galloni

A STRIKING HILLSIDE PROPERTY, Cornell is located on the Sonoma side of Spring Mountain, not too far from Togni, Pride and Fisher. ... In 2013, proprietors Henry and Vanessa Cornell hired consulting winemaker Françoise Peschon to oversee a complete makeover. Peschon brought in vineyard guru Phil Coturri, who created the plan to redevelop the property and convert the estate to organic farming. Today, all farming is done in house, which is the kind of investment one only sees in properties with very high aspirations ... the just-bottled 2015 hints at what the ultimate potential of this site might be. The wines are done in the contemporary, classically leaning style that has brought Françoise Peschon so much acclaim at Araujo Estate and, more recently, at Vine Hill Ranch. Quite simply, these are gorgeous mountain Cabernets endowed with real class and pedigree.

2017 CORNELL VINEYARDS ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 94-97 points

The 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon is the most exotic wine I have ever tasted from Cornell. Powerful and voluptuous in the glass, with tremendous fruit intensity, the 2017 has more than enough energy to balance its decidedly overt leanings. Time in the glass allows more red fruit profile and a measure of vibrancy to unfold. Readers will likely have to be patient with the 2017, as the tannins are quite imposing at this early stage.

2016 CORNELL VINEYARDS ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 97 points

The 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon shows just how far the estate has progressed in just the last few years. Powerful and explosive, with tremendous aromatic intensity, the 2016 is a rapturously beautiful wine. Dark cherry, mocha, bittersweet chocolate, new leather, spice, sage, and lavender add layers of understated nuance and complexity in this riveting, stunningly dramatic mountain Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2016 shuts down quickly after opening, which is probably a very good thing for its aging prospects. The 2016 is an extraordinary and deeply moving wine from Cornell.

2015 CORNELL VINEYARDS ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 95+ points

Just bottled two weeks before this tasting, the 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon is a total knock out. Creamy, ample and explosive, the 2015 has a level of richness and textural intensity that have eluded previous vintages. An exotic mélange of dark cherry jam, plum, menthol, licorice, leather and spice build as the 2015 shows off its arresting beauty. The 2015 is a mere infant, but it is alluring, sensual and incredibly inviting.

Drinking window 2020- 2035.

2014 CORNELL VINEYARDS ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 94 points

Bright, polished and super-refined to the core. Medium in body and gracious in the style of the year, the 2014 possesses remarkable balance. The 2014 is tightly wound and in need of time, but it is exceptionally beautiful and resonant. Beams of salinity extend the finish while adding brightness. This is a terrific debut for the winemaking team in their first full year in charge of the farming and winemaking.

Drinking Window 2020 - 2034.

2013 CORNELL VINEYARDS ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 92 points

Done in a soft, supple style, especially within the context of the year. Black cherry, plum, mocha, torrefaction and discreet new oak are all pushed forward. Silky tannins add to the wine's sleek feel. The 2013 is a big step up from the wines that were made here in the past, but the team did not have the benefit of working the entire year in the vineyard. As good as the 2013 is, it is also clearly a transition into the 2014 and 2015, both of which are stronger efforts. Drinking Window 2018 - 2028.