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Supple California Cabernet is stunning

Off The Vine by Russ Disotell

People often think I'm being evasive or overly cute when I answer the question of what my favourite wine is with "the next one I hope!" That's not my intention. My approach to wine, and life for that matter, is think of the possibilities. In this instance it is the possibilities of what the next bottle may offer. It would be rather too morose to expect that the best is over. Every now and again a wine like this week's rewards this optimistic approach, in spades!

All you really have to know about **Painter Bridge Cabernet Sauvignon 2010** (CPSC # 219113, \$13.05) is that it is delicious and an outstanding value, but you know I can't leave it at that! This charming Californian is one of the most eminently likeable wines I have come across in quite some time with qualities that will appeal to all levels of wine drinkers.

J. Lohr Winery, the maker of Painter Bridge line of wines, is known for their uncanny ability to produce stellar quality wines in the medium price range, wines that are a step above the competition. They view their wines as "flavourful everyday wines that are an alternative to mass produced varieties". They are that, and much more!

In the Painter Bridge Cabernet the winemaker's goal is to allow the wine to express the dark fruit character of Cabernet Sauvignon without overwhelming the fruit with heavy-handed layers of oak. To achieve this goal the wine spends two to six months in stainless steel tanks with just a short time in older, smaller oak barrels, which doesn't impart too much oak to the wine.

The nose does a fine job setting the stage for the pleasures to come. It is open, bold and enticing with aromas of black plum, red and black cherry, currant and dark berry fruit with a touch of mint and herbaceous spiciness. The wine itself falls somewhere near the upper range of medium-to-medium full-bodied.

The palate can best be described as rich and plush. It has an extra degree of complexity and focus that takes it a step beyond being simply jammy. Look for cassis, dark cherry, blackberry, and plum fruit with a touch of mint or eucalyptus, anise, herbal spice and just a whisper of dark chocolate. A framework of soft tannins and just the right amount of fresh acidity combine to produce stunning balance and superb structure that provides ample support for the generous fruit. The finish is persistent and absolutely delicious.

This is a wine that from the moment it is opened commands your attention and seduces your senses. Yes, it is that enjoyable! This is a wine for lingering over and idle contemplation of all the exquisite it offers. However if you can bear to be parted long enough to prepare supper it is also an outstanding food wine. Robust baked pasta dishes rich with tomato, meat or cheese sauce, so popular at this time of year, readily spring to mind, whether prepared with the care of five star cuisine or simply hearty peasant style. Similarly, richly flavoured stews will provide a spectacular tapestry for our versatile Californian. Pizza, burgers of every description and a wide variety of pan-fried or roasted red meats will also partner.

