



## Famed Bordeaux consultant Stephane Derenoncourt releases inaugural Napa Valley wines

By **Napa Valley Insider Examiner**, Annette Hanami  
February 10, 8:01 AM



Stephane Derenoncourt, international consultant, Napa Valley winemaker

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Iconic Bordeaux consultant and winemaker Stephane Derenoncourt introduced his small, 1,500 case production Napa Valley wines to an intimate group of wine professionals at

Auberge du Soleil in Rutherford yesterday. The Derenoncourt wines represent the 2006 vintage of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Syrah, and 575 cases of Lake County Cabernet Sauvignon from Red Hills Vineyard. The consumer allocations of the 2006 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc have been pre-sold, with the 2007 vintages expected to be released sometime between September and November.

These are not Bordeaux-style wines but Napa Valley wines with concentrated fruit and ripe tannins, fresh acidity from high elevation vineyards and incredible finesse from the signature winemaking style of one of Bordeaux's premier consultants. In Bordeaux, 'rock star' winemakers as we know it don't really exist. Oenologists are technical directors and even public relations directors, but the winemaking style is often determined by the consultants who work closely with chateau owners and oenologists in creating the house style. The most famous consultants include Michel Rolland with his big, powerful reds and Denis Dubourdieu with his aromatic sauvignon blancs. The third of this triumvirate is Stephane Derenoncourt, who is sometimes referred to as the "sensitive" winemaker for his gentle extraction practices. The purity of fruit and silky tannins of his Napa Valley wines are achieved with whole-berry ferment

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at relatively cool temperatures, gentle, manual punch-downs, limited macerations and ageing on the fine lees with only a single racking. Derenoncourt says he makes wines that he wants to drink at home rather than what the consumer demands. Based on the success of his consultancies which include many of the *grands cru classes*, his style clearly resonates with today's consumers and investors.

His wines are also clearly Napa Valley wines in that they are all – with the exception of the syrah – 100% varietal wines, something that would be difficult to accomplish, save early-ripening merlot, in Bordeaux's cooler climate. When Derenoncourt started his Napa Valley project, he looked forward to making single varietal wines from the outset, especially with cabernet franc, a varietal he likes and has increased plantings of for his own Domaine de l'A in Cotes de Castillon in the far east of Bordeaux.

Derenoncourt's objective in making Napa Valley wines is to make "American wines with freshness" and distinct terroir, and so he sought out expressive single-vineyards at high elevations such as Stagecoach Vineyard or cool micro-climates such as Carneros – the cool temperatures helping to retain acidity in these full-bodied wines. Derenoncourt has other single-vineyard wines in development

including one from Howell Mountain which is expected to be released with the 2007's; overall case production though is expected to remain low.

The flagship **2006 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$220) from Caldwell Vineyard is an opulent wine with lifted cassis aromas and nuances of cedarwood, dark earth and toasty oak. The wine has layers of black currant, cherry and berry fruit, mouth-filling, velvety tannins, full body and balanced acidity. 100 cases.

The **2006 Napa Valley Cabernet Franc** (\$140) from Caldwell Vineyard is a near perfect expression of the grape. Napa Valley does single varietal cabernet franc so well, yet few attempt it. This is not the dense, lush style of cabernet franc – it is fruit-driven with lifted black currant and chambord aromas and concentrated black berry fruit, but under Derenoncourt's gentle handling it is utterly transparent, with the minerality leaping out of the glass and lingering on the palate. The wine has very fine, ripe tannins, balanced acidity, integrated oak and long finish. 225 case production.

The **2006 Napa Valley Merlot, Stagecoach Vineyard** (\$140) demonstrates Derenoncourt's success in achieving freshness in a full-bodied wine, beginning with the site selection

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nearly 2,000 feet above sea level in Atlas Peak. It is full of dark plummy fruit and fresh acidity, balanced by finely-grained tannins and full body. Elegant finish. Not a soft, fleshy merlot and not a powerful, cabernet-like merlot. What merlot wine was meant to be. 100 cases.



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The **2006 Napa Valley Syrah, Carneros** (\$60) is from Hudson Vineyards and shows many aspects of cool climate syrah with floral violet and black berry aromas, a hint of spice and subtle earthy notes, but without the hard tannic backbone. 600 cases.

The **2006 Lake County Cabernet Sauvignon, Red Hills Vineyard** (\$40) shows Derenoncourt's respect for the vineyard site vs. strict appellation. Red Hills Vineyard at 2,200 feet high achieves the cool nights but luminous days that create the sweet tannins in this classic cabernet sauvignon. It is an extraordinary value given the purity of fruit, seamless balance and finesse, and a great introduction to Derencourt's style of winemaking.

Derenoncourt California wines are available through the [website](#).

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