

Littorati, Copain and Cain wines from California



THREE TO CELLAR

Bottles worth the investment. **BY CHAD WALSH**

Wine collecting used to be pretty simple: Buy first growth Bordeaux, grand cru Burgundy and “cult” Napa Cabernet, wait a decade or two and then either drink the bottles or sell them for many times the original price paid. And costs in these categories have indeed gone from expensive to stratospheric as global demand has soared; in fact, the current auction sales record was set in Hong Kong last year when a case of 1978 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Grand Cru from Burgundy, France, sold for \$476,280.

Even for those who have thousands of dollars to spend on a Domaine de la Romanée-Conti La Tâche upon its release, it can be more interesting to build a cellar that will appreciate in value by looking for underrated gems. Some of the best options of

this kind are actually being turned out now in California.

For the Burgundy lover, there is no better guide than Littorati’s Ted Lemon, who makes Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the cooler parts of the state’s North coast, including Anderson Valley in Mendocino and the Sonoma coast, where the winery is located. He began his career at the University of Burgundy, in Dijon, France, and later worked at the region’s domaines Dujac and Georges Roumier before becoming the first American winemaker of a Burgundian estate, at the esteemed Domaine Guy Roulot, in Meursault. He returned to the United States, and since 1993 has been producing world-class

wines. The one to buy is the **Littorati Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** (\$65).

Like Lemon, Chris Howell studied wine-making in France before moving back to California, but he ended up on the other side of the Mayacamas Mountains, at Cain Vineyard & Winery, in the Spring Mountain district, in St. Helena. Unlike many of his neighbors, who add enzymes and use filtration to control the microbial life in their wines, Howell is not afraid of the wild nature of the process—including an acceptance of the dreaded *Brettanomyces*, a yeast strain that is often derided in California but is present in many old-world wines. The character of Howell’s wines, especially the **Cain Five** (\$125), blended from five Bordeaux varieties, is long-lasting, and only now are the wines that were made in the previous decade beginning to reveal their true personalities.

It would be a shame, though, to limit one’s collecting to the all-star varieties. Think outside the box with a Syrah. There are tons of great examples, including Pax Mahle’s Pax and Wind Gap labels, mostly from Sonoma, as well as Bob Lindquist’s Qupé, from Santa Barbara County. But my favorite is from the far north, in Mendocino, made by Wells Guthrie of Copain Wines. Tight and wound-up on release, the wine has a high acidity that might be off-putting to some, but that’s exactly

what will contribute to its longevity. (Acid and tannin provide the structure that allows the wine to develop over time, yet those same qualities can make wine less immediately appealing.) Even after just a few years in the bottle, the nose goes from dark fruit and dried herbs to showing notes of violet and intense, stony minerality. Although his recent popularity has meant that his

corks are being pulled faster than he can get juice in the bottle, those smart enough to lay down a **Copain Hawks Butte Syrah** (\$45) now will be rewarded handsomely. ♦

ASK AN EXPERT
Is dessert the only acceptable time to drink sweet wine? “Try Riesling with Chinese food,” says Erin White, the sommelier at August in New Orleans, “or Beerenauselese with foie gras.”

THE TABLETOP SHOWPIECE Rare and collectible wines deserve a proper pour. Enter **Riedel’s Amadeo Double Magnum**, a more than two-foot-tall crystal decanter created by Maximilian Riedel, the 37-year-old, 11th-generation CEO of his family’s namesake glassware company. Adorned with red-and-black tuxedo stripes, its lyre-shaped body is designed to let a three-liter bottle of wine breathe and achieve its full flavor very efficiently. Because each piece is mouth-blown and requires the work of three master glassmakers in Austria, only 100 of the sculptural items are going to be produced annually. \$1,990; riedel.com. — J.F.

