

Hemispheres

THREE PERFECT DAYS IN KELOWNA, B.C.



**BRIGHT LIGHTS:
WE HEAD TO LAS VEGAS
TO CHECK OUT SPRING'S
HOTTEST NEW LOOKS**

**HOW SELF-DRIVING CARS
WILL CHANGE AMERICA
(WARNING: IT COULD
BE A BUMPY RIDE)**

**MATT DAMON ON
SOLVING THE WORLD'S
WATER CRISIS—AND
IRKING JOHN KRASINSKI**

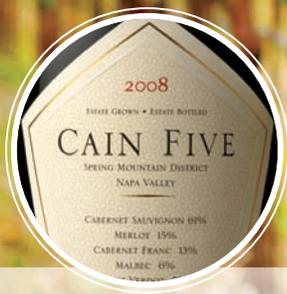
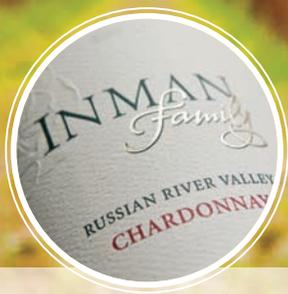
**SEEING RED: MEET THE
CALIFORNIA VINTNERS
UPROOTING TRADITION
IN WINE COUNTRY**

CALIFORNIA

A LITTLE BIT SOFTER NOW

Northern California winemakers tone down their approach

BY MICHAEL KAPLAN



DRIVE DOWN THE BYWAYS of the Napa and Sonoma valleys at the right time of year, and you'll pass vines heavy with glistening grapes just waiting to be turned into the big, tannic, high-alcohol wines—generally cabernets and zinfandels—that have made the region famous. These days, though, you're also liable to spot a few vines that have been stripped of fruit early. These point up a new movement afoot in Northern California—a burgeoning faction of vintners interested in making more balanced vintages (read: less jammy, sun-ripened and strong).

One such producer is Jamie Kutch, a former Wall Street trader who launched Kutch Wines. Though now he's a

SOMETIMES A GRAPE NOTION Inman Family Wines' vineyard; inset, vintages from "balance"-minded winemakers

purveyor of lighter, more finicky pinot noirs, Kutch's early offerings were big and rich in the classic California style. There was only one problem, he says: "I didn't like them."

So when producing his 2007 releases, Kutch experimented by picking an acre of his grapes earlier. He also watered less, to push the grapes to develop flavor quickly without becoming too sugary. Satisfied with the results from his first acre, he picked everything earlier the next year and has been proceeding in that manner ever since. ➔

SARA SANGER (VINEYARD)



SQUASH PRO
Jamie Kutch, founder
of Kutch Wines

➤ Kutch and other advocates of balance have also been pushing back against what they argue is the overly intense oak flavor that often turns up in California vintages. To reduce it, Kutch ages 30 percent of his early-picked grapes in new oak and the rest in barrels that are three to five years old. He also ages the wines with grape stems to further soften their taste profiles.

Asked to describe what he likes about his new, lighter, less oaky vintages, Kutch says they're cleaner and more precise. They're probably also easier to sell. Well-structured wines like these have been experiencing a renaissance among restaurateurs and wine buyers, who find that they pair well with a vast array of foods rather than just the traditional charbroiled slab of rib-eye. "I think of short ribs when I make my pinot noir," says Kathleen Inman, whose Inman Family Wines shares Kutch's philosophy. "But with the chardonnay, just for kicks I paired it with truffle-butter popcorn—and that worked."

"For me, wine enhances food. I'm not one for sitting on the porch and sipping it," says Chris Howell, who chose to plant the vines for Cain Vineyard and Winery on a mountaintop estate above Napa Valley to encourage more balance in his wines. "Good wine is not about power or complexity—it's linked to the wine's finish and character. The wines that seduce you are the ones that stick with you."

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THE TIPPING POINT At Napa Valley's Lucy Restaurant & Bar

GETTING FIZZY WITH IT

Spicing up wine spritzers for classic-cocktail fans

Wine spritzers suffer from an image problem: Though delicious, they're associated with a bit of a boring "day wedding" demographic. In other words, you'd never expect to see a rock star downing a wine spritzer onstage. In Napa Valley, though, where wine is paramount, mixologist Vincent Lee of Yountville's **Lucy Restaurant & Bar** thought to update the staple with grapefruit juice and a dash of sage liqueur, pushing the humble spritzer into spunky New York Sour territory.



YOUNTVILLE SPRITZ

- › 1 oz. sage liqueur
- › 1 oz. grapefruit juice
- › 2 oz. Domaine Carneros Brut Rosé
- › ½ oz. simple syrup
- › Club soda, to taste
- › Grapefruit slice

Combine liqueur, juice, wine and simple syrup and pour over ice. Top with soda and garnish with grapefruit slice.