

WINE NEWS

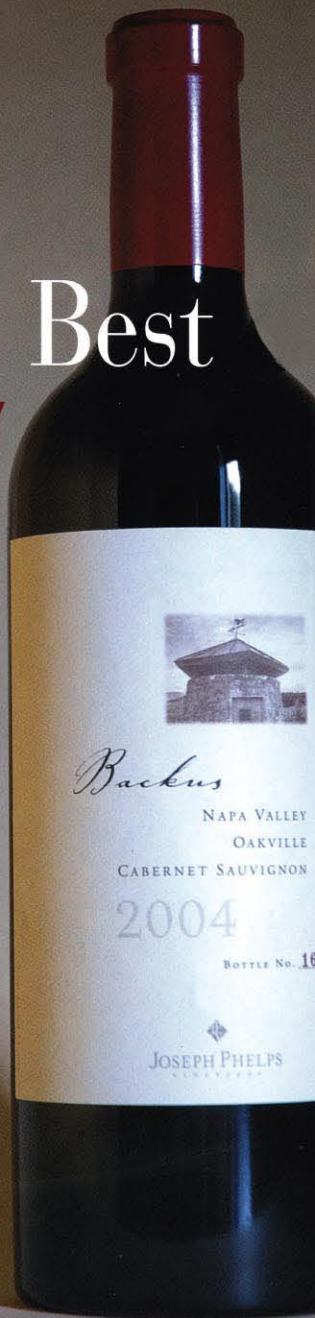
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California's Best of 2007

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When California is blessed with a vintage like 2004, the critic's task of singling out the best in any varietal or blend category becomes frustratingly difficult. It's always that way with a truly stellar year, and 2004 is universally acknowledged as just that. The process is akin to selecting the best example among a pile of mint-condition gold coins.

To complicate matters further, a limited number of late-released iconic wines from the 2003 harvest are among the candidates to be considered. In the end, it's purely a matter of personal palate preference. This is especially true of the Cabernet Sauvignon and Proprietary Blend categories in this report, now in its tenth year. Here's why.



Cabernet Sauvignon Cabernet Sauvignon of the Year

Joseph Phelps, 2004 Backus Vineyard, Oakville — \$200: From the brick-red soil of a steeply terraced, *grand cru* estate vineyard rising up from the Silverado Trail, Phelps' winemaker Craig Williams has crafted a magnificent Oakville Cabernet, assisted in no small measure by 2004's superb fruit. Intense and powerful, yet at the same time elegant and focused, the wine's concentration and depth of flavor are amazing. Forward aromas exude a mélange of black fruit accented by a blueberry note from the 3% petit verdot in the blend, broadened by fruitcake spices and dark chocolate. Like characteristics translate harmoniously to the palate, which is richly textured and framed by firm, supple tannins and subtle French oak. Super-long finish. This wine's structure and balance ensure continuing pleasure over the next 10 to 20 years. (1,500 cases)