



Robert Parker's
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JOSEPH PHELPS VINEYARD

JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2006	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(88-90)
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2005	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA	(\$50.00)	RED	88
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2004	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA	(\$50.00)	RED	90
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2006	CABERNET SAUVIGNON BACKUS VYD.	OAKVILLE	(not yet released)	RED	(91-93+)
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2005	CABERNET SAUVIGNON BACKUS VYD.	OAKVILLE	(\$175.00; rel. date 1/08)	RED	94+
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2004	CABERNET SAUVIGNON BACKUS VYD.	OAKVILLE	(\$175.00)	RED	95
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2006	INSIGNIA PROPRIETARY RED WINE	NAPA	(not yet released)	RED	(92-94)
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2005	INSIGNIA PROPRIETARY RED WINE	NAPA	(\$150.00; rel. date 9/08)	RED	(93-96)
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2004	INSIGNIA PROPRIETARY RED WINE	NAPA	(\$150.00)	RED	95
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2006	LE MISTRAL	MONTEREY	(not yet released)	RED	(87-89)
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2005	LE MISTRAL	MONTEREY	(\$45.00; rel. date 1/08)	RED	90
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2006	PINOT NOIR FREESTONE	SONOMA COAST	(not yet released)	RED	(89-91)
JOSEPH PHELPS VYD.	2006	SAUVIGNON BLANC	NAPA	(\$25.00)	WHITE	86

Joseph Phelps' **2006 Sauvignon** has 8% Semillon, is 100% barrel-fermented, and shows plenty of grapefruit in a crisp, elegant, light to medium-bodied, non-malolactic style. Drink it over the next 1-2 years. Phelps is on the cusp of becoming a very serious Pinot Noir producer. Their vineyards in the cool Sonoma Coast estate called Freestone are coming into production, and the **2006 Freestone Pinot Noir**, which is a proposed blend, looks to be outstanding. The wine exhibits beautiful pomegranate and raspberry notes with some sassafras, forest floor, and underbrush notes. Classic Pinot with good acidity, medium to full body, but light on its feet, this looks to be a wine with outstanding potential that should drink nicely for at least a decade. The wine is aged in 60% new French oak and aged on its lees. Remarkably, the Freestone estate of Joseph Phelps has 80 acres of Pinot Noir planted, so this could become a serious player in this very hot category.

Cabernet Sauvignon at Phelps is represented by the opulent **2004 Napa**, a blend of 86% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Merlot. A sexy style of Cabernet, dark ruby/purple-colored, with notes of subtle herbs intermixed with black currant, cedar, and spice, this medium to full-bodied wine should be drunk over the next 7-8 years. The **2005 Cabernet Sauvignon** (89% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Merlot and Petit Verdot with a touch of Malbec) comes across as very Bordeaux-like, and not dissimilar from a good Médoc. The wine exhibits some cedar, spice box, licorice, and black currant notes with medium body, good acidity, and a fresh finish. It should evolve nicely for up to a decade. The **2006 Cabernet Sauvignon** (81% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Merlot, and the rest Petit Verdot and Malbec) is a well-made wine that exhibits the classic notes of bay and tobacco leaf, black currant, spice box, and a hint of tea. The wine has sweet tannin, a bit more up-front fruit than the 2005, and slightly lower acidity. It should drink nicely for 7-10 years at least.

Of course, the flagship wine is their proprietary red, the *Insignia*, which was first made in 1974. Production varies, but it's usually a minimum of 10,000 cases, and it can actually be in excess of 15,000 in the most abundant, trouble-free years. It is a cross-Napa Valley blend of essentially six to seven vineyards from Yountville in the south to St. Helena in the north. The **2004 Insignia** (the first to be 100% from the estate vineyards) is a blend of 72% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Merlot, 12% Petit Verdot, and the rest Malbec. I had this wine several times in Napa, and it is a beauty. A flashy, exuberant style for Phelps, with dense ruby/purple color, a gorgeous nose of *crème de cassis*, incense, licorice, smoke, and spice, the wine has supple tannins, a flamboyant, full-bodied mouthfeel, and tremendous length. Despite its precociousness and up-front style, this wine should evolve easily for 20 or more years. There are 10,000 cases of the 2004. The **2005 Insignia** (12,500 cases) is a blend of 92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petit Verdot, and 1% Malbec. Elegant and restrained (which is very much in keeping with the style of this vintage), the wine is also rich, dense, pure, with chocolatey cassis notes intermixed with hints of subtle wood, roasted herbs, and spice. It is ripe, rich, full-bodied, but in need of 4-5 years of bottle age. It should last for 25-30 years. It is far more reticent than the more flamboyant 2004. The newest

baby, the **2006 Insignia** (approximately 15,000 cases) is a blend of 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot. A big, backward, tannic effort, with a dense purple color, beautifully sweet, pure notes of graphite, blackberries, cassis, licorice, and earth, the wine has a firm, almost Bordeaux-like structure, plenty of tannin, muscle, and richness. It is still too early to predict the maturity curve, but I suspect this wine is also going to require 3-5 years of bottle-age when it is released, and have a similar aging curve to the 2005, but perhaps is slightly more rigid in style.

Production rate is between 1,600 and 2,500 cases from the 100% biodynamically farmed Phelps vineyard on the hillsides of western Oakville, the Backus Vineyard. This is concentrated, seriously endowed wine. The **2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Backus** (96% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Petit Verdot and Malbec) is absolutely fabulous. The wine has a bluish purple color to the rim and an extraordinary nose of graphite, spring flowers, blackberries, cassis, and espresso roast. A savory, full-bodied, powerful wine with great fruit, low acidity, and abundant tannin, it cuts a broad swath across the palate. This is a classic Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon. It should drink well for at least 20 years. The **2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Backus Vineyard** (92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot, and 3% Malbec) is backward and restrained, and like so many wines from this vintage, exhibits the cooler climate and European style of the Bordeaux varietals. It is a full-bodied, powerful wine, but it will need 5-7 years of bottle age, and last for at least three decades. I believe it is only hinting at its ultimate potential given how closed the wine tasted, but it is impressively endowed and well-made. The **2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Backus Vineyard** (94% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec) is also a mouthful of huge tannin and extract. A backward, dark purple-colored wine with exceptional richness and huge structure, I wouldn't be surprised to see this wine take even longer to come around than the 2005. For now, let's say it needs 6-8 years of bottle age and should last for three decades as well. These are wines for the patient connoisseur, and not for those unable to defer their gratification.

Phelps is one of the first of California's wineries to experiment and develop a program for Rhône Valley varietals. They have moved the entire operation to their vineyards in Monterey County, and the **2005 Le Mistral** is one of the best they have made over recent years. A blend of 59% Syrah and 23% Grenache, and the rest Carignan, Petit Syrah, and Alicante, it is a beauty. A delicious bistro and brasserie wine with loads of peppery black cherry and black currant fruit, the wine is expressive, soulful, and just delicious. Drink it over the next 4-5 years. The **2006 Le Mistral** (62% Syrah and the rest Grenache) has a dark ruby color, not the breathtaking expansiveness and joy of the 2005, but of course it's a year less evolved. It is well-made, medium to full-bodied, with peppery, earthy notes intermixed with some kirsch and blackberry. Drink it over the next 6-7 years.

Previously recommended: **2003 Insignia (94)**, **2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Backus Vineyard (96)**, **2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa (88)**. Tel. (707) 963-2745; Fax (707) 963-4831