



The splendid Jordan Estate winery is modeled after the great châteaux of Bordeaux.

Redefining Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

JORDAN WINERY TURNS 40 by Christopher Sawyer



Sally Jordan speaks at the 40-year anniversary luncheon about the winery she and husband, Tom Jordan, founded in 1972.

On domestic wine labels, the term “estate bottled” is a symbolic reference to a winery’s commitment to quality and controlling the destiny of estate grown grapes from start to finish. With Cabernet Sauvignon, the process is often compared to the farming practices used in the famous French winegrowing region of Bordeaux, where world-class *premier cru* (first growth) wines are made with the fruit from a single vineyard.

In 1972, the “estate” concept inspired Bordeaux fans Tom and Sally Jordan to establish Jordan Vineyard and purchase 275 acres in the pristine Alexander Valley of Sonoma County. After planting Cabernet and Merlot vines on the original property, the family purchased an additional 1,300 acres and began the construction of their estate winery in 1974. Modeled after the elegant châteaux found in Bordeaux, this architectural wonder was completed just in time for the first harvest in 1976.

Following the inaugural release of the Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon in 1980, the fan-base grew rapidly. Since the mid 1980s, a series of new releases have been served at the White House and the Academy Awards Governor’s Ball. In the larger marketplace, the Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon has earned the revered number one ranking in *Wine & Spirits* magazine’s annual Restaurant Poll eleven times since 1990.

From the beginning, the winemaking team has been led by Rob Davis, the only resident winemaker at Jordan since 1976. Under the guidance of master winemaker André Tchelistcheff (who became consulting enologist for Jordan in the mid 1970s), Davis developed unique signature style of Cabernet that favors elegance, finesse, silky texture and balance instead of high alcohol, extraction and power.

“I look more for acid than I do for sugar,” said Davis. “It’s my belief that a balanced wine will always age longer than a fruit bomb with too much tannin.”



CEO John Jordan and winemaker Rob Davis in the cellar at Jordan Estate.

In the early years, the goal was to make the wines exclusively with estate fruit. In the mid 1990s that changed when the spread of phylloxera forced the winery to replant the vineyards. While many winemakers saw this precarious situation as a damaging blow, the Jordans saw it as a golden opportunity to improve the health, quality and longevity of the estate vineyards.

In 1996, they planted their first hillside vineyards.



An elegant and mature bottle of 1976 Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon.

Today, with the help of innovative soil mapping technology, the 112 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Malbec planted on the estate are divided into 20 separate blocks that are micro-farmed based on the soil type, climate conditions and water-holding capacity.

But the term “estate” is only part of the equation. At the helm of this movement is John Jordan, the son of Tom and Sally Jordan, who was born on the day the deed to the original property was signed. After becoming the new CEO at the winery in 2005, John opened the gates of the winery to allow Davis and his talented assistant winemaking corps of Ronald Du Preez and Maggie Kruse to start sourcing ultra-premium grapes from neighboring benchland vineyards in Alexander Valley—an additional 40 grower vineyard sub-blocks for a total of 60 diverse fruit sources—to increase the depth and quality of the winery’s red wine program.

This new renaissance has paid off. Like other great vintages in the wine library at Jordan, the current release of the Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon—the 2008—has that classic “Côte de Jordan” flavor profile highlighted with expressive notes of fresh violet, blackberry, blueberry and plum, a silky mouthfeel and nuances of well-integrated oak and spice.

“The combination of new vineyard sources and the updated estate vineyards allows us to make more complex wines that really showcase why being in Alexander Valley is so special,” said Davis.

A Jordan Retrospective

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of Jordan Winery, CEO John Jordan, his mother Sally Jordan and winemaker Rob Davis hosted a retrospective tasting and luncheon at the Jordan Estate in Alexander Valley in late April. Here are my notes from the historic tasting featuring Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon vintages dating back to the 1970s.

Jordan 1976 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley The inaugural release from the winery. Deep, concentrated flavors with hints of dark cherry, wild strawberry, mountain herbs, black olive and shitake mushroom. Overall, this is still a very lively and focused wine with intensive flavors and silky texture.

Jordan 1980 Cabernet Sauvignon, Estate Bottled, Alexander Valley At first the wine was relatively closed, with hints of burnt butterscotch, ash and toasted walnut. But with more exposure to air, the wine opened up with deep flavors of blackberry jam, dried cherry, plum, mineral, hickory smoke, soft tannins and enough acid to preserve the wine many years to come.

Jordan 1981 Cabernet Sauvignon, Estate Bottled, Alexander Valley A warm vintage that was fruit-forward, soft and velvety upon release, the 1981 has evolved into a Bordeaux-style wine highlighted by layers of dark fruits, black licorice, cassis, green peppercorn, sage and cocoa.

Jordan 1990 Cabernet Sauvignon, Estate Bottled, Alexander Valley Balanced wine with aromas of red fruits, dried coconut and cigar smoke. On the palate, the wine opens up with lively notes of cherry red currant, cassis liqueur, pepper, roasted almonds, and plenty of structure helped along by the dollop of Cabernet Franc used in the blend. A true textbook example of the classic Jordan style.

Jordan 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County Deep flavors of ripe cherry, roasted plum, cassis, citrus peel, Mexican baking chocolate, mineral and chewy tannins. Overall, an admirable amount of structure, balance and longevity for an elegant wine made with 75% Cabernet Sauvignon and 25% Merlot.

Jordan 1999 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County A young, vibrant and showy wine with concentrated notes of ripe blackberry, raspberry coulis, black currant, vanilla, cardamom and savory spices, chewy tannins and nice broad mouthfeel.

Jordan 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County Generous aromas of red fruits, leather, tobacco, pine needles and earth. On the palate, intensive flavors of wild berry, cherry, plum, cassis, dark chocolate and layers of spice.

Jordan 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley The exciting return to working with fruit exclusively from Alexander Valley. This current release features elegant aromas of pretty red fruits, violet, raw tobacco and clove. The flavors are rich and expressive with lively notes of ripe cherry, plum, blackberry, white pepper, allspice and long silky tannins. An elegant wine from start to finish! ■■