



The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine

RATING SYSTEM

Robert Parker's rating system employs a 50-100 point quality scale. It is my belief that the various twenty (20) point rating systems do not provide enough flexibility and often result in compressed and inflated wine ratings. THE WINE ADVOCATE takes a hard, very critical look at wine, since I would prefer to underestimate the wine's quality than to overestimate it. The numerical ratings are utilized only to enhance and complement the thorough tasting notes, which are my primary means of communicating my judgments to you.

- 96-100** An extraordinary wine of profound and complex character displaying all the attributes expected of a classic wine of its variety. Wines of this caliber are worth a special effort to find, purchase, and consume.
- 90-95** An outstanding wine of exceptional complexity and character. In short, these are terrific wines.
- 80-89** A barely above average to very good wine displaying various degrees of finesse and flavor as well as character with no noticeable flaws.
- 70-79** An average wine with little distinction except that it is soundly made. In essence, a straightforward, innocuous wine.
- 60-69** A below average wine containing noticeable deficiencies, such as excessive acidity and/or tannin, an absence of flavor, or possibly dirty aromas or flavors.
- 50-59** A wine deemed to be unacceptable.

SHAHER	2013	CHARDONNAY RED SHOULDER RANCH	LOS CARNEROS	WHITE	94
SHAHER	2012	CHARDONNAY RED SHOULDER RANCH	LOS CARNEROS	WHITE	92
SHAHER	2013	MERLOT	NAPA	RED	(88-90)
SHAHER	2012	MERLOT	NAPA	RED	90
SHAHER	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ONE POINT FIVE	STAGS LEAP	RED	(92-94)
SHAHER	2012	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ONE POINT FIVE	STAGS LEAP	RED	94
SHAHER	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT	STAGS LEAP	RED	(96-100)
SHAHER	2012	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT	STAGS LEAP	RED	(98-100)
SHAHER	2011	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT	STAGS LEAP	RED	96
SHAHER	2010	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT	STAGS LEAP	RED	100
SHAHER	2013	SYRAH RELENTLESS	NAPA	RED	(98-100)
SHAHER	2012	SYRAH RELENTLESS	NAPA	RED	(94-97)
SHAHER	2011	SYRAH RELENTLESS	NAPA	RED	92

"Year in year out, this is one of the superstar wineries, not only in Napa Valley and all of California, but in the entire world. It's the product of visionary John Shafer, who started in 1978 after a successful corporate career. He had the foresight and visionary genius to believe in the microclimates and soils of Stags Leap of the southern Napa Valley. When his son Doug came on board with their brilliant winemaker and Mr. Everything, Elias Fernandez, things soared in quality and diversity. Today, this is a winery that does everything about as perfect as can be. They have kept their feet, heads and egos grounded, and continue to kick proverbial ass with every vintage. They made some of the very finest, possibly the Cabernet Sauvignon of the vintage in 2011, and in 2012 and 2013, they have crafted

one profound wine after another. For starters, their Chardonnay has always been a non-malolactic Chardonnay, of which 75% is barrel-fermented and the other quarter in stainless steel. As good as it is, it's hard to believe they produce a whopping 6,400 cases of it. John and Doug Shafer, along with Elias Fernandez, have certainly excelled at turning out gorgeous Merlots that are concentrated and fleshy as well as elegant. A big success for Shafer has been their Stags Leap One Point Five Cabernet Sauvignon. They make between 6,000-7,000 cases of this wine in any vintage. About one-third of their famous Hillside Vineyard, which represents 100% of their flagship wine Hillside Select, goes into this cuvée. I did an entire vertical of the Shafer Hillside, from 1978-2013, but I'll include

the older notes on the erobertparker.com website. What follows are notes on the last four vintages of the Hillside Select, their 2,400-case cuvée of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon aged 32 months in 100% new French oak. Lastly, another sensational wine from the Shafer portfolio is the Relentless. This has been a terrific Rhône Ranger offering since it was first released in

1999, and it continues to be primarily a 89%-97% Syrah blend and the rest Petite Sirah. Like the Hillside Select, it's aged 32 months in new oak prior to being bottled. I have no idea how long these wines will last, but they're fabulous to drink young, and certainly 20-25 years is well within reach of just about every top vintage of Relentless." – *Robert Parker*

2013 Shafer Vineyards Chardonnay Red Shoulder Ranch

Rating: 94

The 2013 Chardonnay Red Shoulder Ranch looks like one of their all-time greats, and to date they've all been very impressive wines. The crisp tangerine, honeyed citrus, pear and white peach notes are prominent in this beautifully fruited medium to full-bodied Chardonnay that shows additional orange marmalade notes in the mouth. It's textured, crisp acid, from having not gone though malolactic, gives it focus and zest, and the overall impression is one of brilliant richness subtly touched by smoke, but letting the fruit dominate.

2012 Shafer Vineyards Chardonnay Red Shoulder Ranch

Rating: 92

The 2012 Chardonnay Red Shoulder Ranch was a smaller crop for Chardonnay than the 2013, and shows the mandarin orange characteristics with tropical fruit such as pineapple and subtle hints of peach and delicate background smoke. It's medium to full-bodied, lively, and should drink well for another 3-4 years.

2012 Shafer Vineyards Merlot

Rating: 90

The 2012 Merlot, which comes in at 15.5% natural alcohol, is a beauty. It's 91% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest a touch of Malbec. The wine reveals notes of black cherries, tobacco leaf, mocha and darker-berried fruit with a hint of white chocolate. It's ripe, medium to full-bodied, but fresh, elegant and well-delineated. This beauty should drink well for a decade or more.

2013 Shafer Vineyards Merlot

Rating: (88-90)

A barrel sample of the 2013 Merlot, which is a similar blend to the 2012, looks like it's going to be as good, although it plays it closer to the vest and is more restrained at present. The wine exhibits dense ruby/plum color, sweet berry fruit mixed with background oak, soil undertones and a touch of unsmoked cigar tobacco. A little chocolate is also in the mix. Drink this medium-bodied wine over the next 10-plus years.

2012 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five, Stags Leap District

Rating: 94

The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon One Pint Five is a big-time winner, a blend of almost all Cabernet Sauvignon with a touch of Malbec and Petit Verdot. The wine has an opaque bluish/purple color, almost indigo, and is full-bodied with dense chocolaty crème de cassis notes, licorice and a touch of minerality. The wine has well-integrated wood, is full and seems balanced and rich enough to age for two decades or more.

2013 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five, Stags Leap District

Rating: (92-94)

The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five is actually 99% Cabernet Sauvignon and 1% Petit Verdot. It's going to be another great one and as exceptional as the 2012. The wine has notes of blueberries, blackberries, white flowers, a touch of oak, chocolate and cedar wood, terrific focus, delineation, beautiful freshness and vigor with a full-throttle mouthfeel making for a terrific, young, vibrant style of Cabernet Sauvignon that should drink well for 20-25 years.

2010 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select, Stags Leap District

Rating: 100

The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select, already given a 100-point score, was tasted again. It has everything one could ever want in a prodigious, world-class Cabernet Sauvignon. Notes of lead pencil shavings, crème de cassis, vanilla, unsmoked cigar tobacco, licorice and forest floor are all present in this wine that is absolutely remarkable. It's full-bodied, seamlessly constructed, with great purity and a tremendous 50-60 second finish. This obviously will age 25-30 years, if not a lot longer. This has turned out to be a great, great vintage that seems to grow in stature in the bottle.

2011 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select, Stags Leap District

Rating: 96

Possibly the Cabernet Sauvignon of the vintage, is Shafer's 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select. Last year I thought it was a strong effort, but it's even better now that it's been bottled. With opaque black/purple color and notes of subtle burning charcoal embers, blueberry, blackberry and graphite, the wine has a certain Bordelais minerality, but then the richness of Napa kicks in. It's full-bodied (somewhat unusual for a 2011) with lighter tannins, and no doubt the wine will be on a faster evolutionary track than vintages such as 2010, 2012 and 2013. Nevertheless, the Shafers and Elias said this was the toughest vintage they'd ever experienced. To be able to produce a compelling wine like this is a testament of their extraordinary skills and craftsmanship. This wine can be drunk now, or cellared for another 15-20 years.

2012 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select, Stags Leap District

Rating: (98-100)

The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select is not in bottle, but it looks like another three-digit wine in the making. It tips the scales at a lofty 15.3% natural alcohol, but tasters will never feel any "heat" tasting it. This is a beauty, with crème de cassis notes mixed with spring flowers a touch of toasty oak, blackberries, blueberries and cassis, as well as licorice, vanillin

and a full-bodied mouthfeel. At this stage, it is more voluptuous and opulent than the 2010 was, simply because that's the hallmark style of the 2012. No doubt this is a 30- to 50-year wine if you want to cellar it properly and nibble on it over a long period of time, but it will be much more approachable in its youth than most Hillside Selects tend to be. This is, once again, a fabulous effort.

**2013 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon
Hillside Select, Stags Leap District**

Rating: (96-100)

It's amazing how the 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select seems to hide 100% new oak aging, and, of course, the wine spends 32 months in those barrels. Unbelievably rich with great focus, more blue and purple fruits seem to dominate and there's a hint of white flowers and a focus that is nearly surreal. This is a layered wine, built like a skyscraper, a prodigious Cabernet of full-throttle intensity and purity. I can't say enough about winemaking at this level, and how consistent Shafer has been for so many years. Look for the 2013 to have four or more decades of longevity as well.

2011 Shafer Vineyards Relentless

Rating: 92

The 2011 Syrah Relentless is certainly one of the lighter versions of this wine, but still merits an outstanding 92-point rating. A blend of 91% Syrah and 9% Petite Sirah, this wine shows more of a French style than other vintages because there is a hint of austerity and structural tannin that can be noticed

through the roasted herbs, meaty blackberry and blackcurrant flavors and hints of blueberry and lavender. This is spicy, earthy, medium to full-bodied and probably will be the easiest and quickest to mature fully of any vintage of Relentless to date. Consume it over the next decade.

2012 Shafer Vineyards Relentless

Rating: (94-97)

The 2012 Syrah Relentless, which has not yet been bottled, is a blend of 89% Syrah and 11% Petite Sirah. In keeping with this amazing year, it's full-bodied, juicy, succulent, flamboyant, with blueberry and blackberry fruit galore, lots of glycerin and a massive mouthfeel, but no heaviness or astringency characterize this stunning wine. This should turn out to be a great, great Rhône Ranger when released in a year or so.

2013 Shafer Vineyards Relentless

Rating: (98-100)

The same can be said for the 2013 Syrah Relentless, which might end up being the finest one they've ever made. The berries were the smallest they've encountered, and they were not the only winery to say that about the 2013 red varieties. A blend of 97% Syrah and 3% Petite Sirah, the wine is opaque black/purple with an incredible nose of subtle wood, charcoal embers, blackberry, blueberry and black raspberry fruit, baking spices, and again, a roasted meatiness with some *bouquet garni* thrown in the background. The complex aromatics were already starting to roar from the glass, and the wine, enormously endowed, is full-bodied and flawlessly constructed. This is a killer effort that should drink well for 40+ years.