



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.

SHAFER	2014	CHARDONNAY RED SHOULDER RANCH	LOS CARNEROS	WHITE	93
SHAFER	2014	MERLOT	NAPA	RED	92
SHAFER	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ONE POINT FIVE	STAGS LEAP	RED	94
SHAFER	2014	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ONE POINT FIVE	STAGS LEAP	RED	91
SHAFER	2013	SYRAH RELENTLESS	NAPA	RED	95
SHAFER	2012	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT	STAGS LEAP	RED	100
SHAFER	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT	STAGS LEAP	RED	98+

There are very few wineries in California where you can say that the original wine owners and winemaking staff are totally intact and have been, in this case, since 1978. The estate was founded by John Shafer and run with great precision by himself and more recently by his son Doug and Elias Fernandez. The team has been working together for 38 years since the first vintage in 1978. Six years earlier in 1972, John Shafer bought the property and established the vineyard in the hillsides of Stags Leap.

They produce about 30,000 cases of wine – all of it noteworthy. Their Cabernet Sauvignon is true first-growth quality and their Rhone Range wine made from Syrah and Petite Sirah, called Relentless, is about as profound as you can get the those varietals.

2014 Shafer Vineyards Chardonnay Red Shoulder Ranch

Rating: 93

First, their non-malolactic 2014 Chardonnay Red Shoulder Ranch comes from a cool-climate vineyard in Carneros. This is aged in 75% oak casks and 25% stainless steel, which seems to be the perfect marriage for showcasing this wine's rich fruit. The wine has loads of tangerine oil, citrus blossom, a hint of apples and orange marmalade. The oak is subtle, the wine medium to full-bodied, pure and rich. (This is the official tasting note, but I shared two bottles with some friends of mine at the casual Market restaurant in St. Helena, and it was a huge hit.)

2014 Shafer Vineyards Merlot

Rating: 92

Shafer also makes one of the better Merlots. The 2014 Merlot includes 8% Cabernet Sauvignon and is a beauty. Mocha and chocolaty notes intermixed with red cherry, plum and blacker fruits jump from the glass of this perfumed and fragrant style of Merlot. It is medium to full-bodied, exceptionally pure and rich and should drink beautifully over the next 10-12 years of life.

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

Rating: 94+

The Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five takes its name from the fact that John and Doug Shafer, as father and son, have worked together for a generation and a half – hence the name. This wine comes from their Stags Leap property and is a beauty. The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five is a stunner made from 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest other varietals. It is aged in 100% new oak, but you would never tell that given its richness of blackcurrant fruit, classic flowers and unsmoked cigar tobacco. The wine needs 3-4 years, as most 2013s do, and should be a 30-year wine. It is a beautiful baby, but bottle age will definitely unleash more subtleties and richness. This is a full-bodied classic that is superb.

**2014 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon
One Point Five, Stags Leap District**

Rating: 91

The 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five shows beautiful purity, not the weight, profound depth and structure of the 2013, but it is still medium to full-bodied, elegant, graceful and a classic example of the Stags Leap appellation. Drink it over the next 15+ years.

2013 Shafer Vineyards Relentless

Rating: 95

The anomaly in the Shafer portfolio is the Relentless, which is created from the southern foothills of the Vaca mountain range and was debuted largely at the insistence of Elias Fernandez. The first vintage was 1999, and this big, massive, Rhône Valley-inspired wine is certainly a wine capable of lasting 20-25 years. A blend always dominated by Syrah, but with various percentages of Petite Sirah, the 2013 Relentless has a tiny quantity of Petite Sirah (only 3%). It is a stunning wine, with notes of roasted meats, beef blood, lavender, new saddle leather, blackberry and pepper, followed by a wine with a huge, massive, plush texture, an opulence and richness that are stunning, and a long, long finish. It can be drunk young for its exuberance and boisterous character or cellared for another 20+ years.

**2012 Shafer Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon
Hillside Select, Stags Leap District**

Rating: 100

Shafer's flagship wine, and one of the world's greatest Cabernet Sauvignons, is the Hillside Select, which comes from the rocky, volcanic soils on hillsides above the winery. Vineyard production is small, and the wine an incredible example of Cabernet Sauvignon. Aged in 100% new oak for 32 months and bottled unfiltered, this can generally be expected to be one of the top dozen or so Cabernet Sauvignons in virtually any vintage in Napa, and certainly possesses 25 to possibly 50 years of aging potential. The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select is a perfect wine. It elicits more than a few "wows" when you smell the incredible notes of charcoal, graphite and subtle toast, buttressed and dominated by blackcurrant, blackberry and blueberry fruit. The purity of these fruits, the multidimensional mouthfeel, the seamless integration of acid, alcohol, tannin and wood are all flawless. The 2012 signature adds an extravagant opulence and density that is just mind-boggling, and the wine is a total hedonistic and intellectual turn-on already, although it has 30+ years of life ahead of it.

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

Rating: 98+

The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select will probably hit the magic three-digit score, but it is a more backward style of wine, although probably even more concentrated than the 2012, and that's saying something. Fabulous potential of 30-50 years is evident in this profound bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon that is inky blue/black to the rim and offers up notes of charcoal embers, scorched earth, blackberries, cassis, blueberries, a hint of coffee, and background barrique smells. Massively concentrated but incredibly elegant and poised, this is a wine of great energy and vibrancy. It is fabulously deep, built like a skyscraper, and set for an incredibly long life. Try not to consume a bottle for at least another 4-5 years and then watch the magic unfold.