

All-Star Wines

A Napa Valley Vineyard Sparkles with Incredible Bottles

By John Vankat

Who has more clout: an eight-time all-star professional basketball player or a winemaker probably known to only a handful of people outside the wine world? It's a slam dunk in favor of the well-known athlete, right?

On a recent wine media trip to the Napa Valley, we visited Frank Family Vineyards. Our host was winemaker Todd Graff, who was dressed in his work clothes of jeans and a casual, un-tucked shirt. Dinner that evening was to feature Frank Family wines at Meadowood, a luxury resort where men are required to wear a jacket. Graff, however, arrived at the restaurant in his work clothes.

While we waited for the rest of our group, the athlete—Paul Pierce of the Boston Celtics—entered the restaurant wearing very expensive clothing but lacking a jacket. As he and his dinner companion walked into the dining area, a maitre d' moved quickly to intercept and lead them to a more casual outside dining area saying, "I just want to show you the dining options." It was a polite way of saying, "this is where jacketless men are seated."

But the winemaker was treated far differently. It was Napa after all.

Our party, including Graff in his work clothes, was seated in the elegant dining room. To find out why the winemaker had more clout, try tasting a few of his all-star wines:

Frank Family 2008 Chardonnay "Napa Valley" (\$33): This fine Chardonnay features creamy texture and well-integrated oak that adds engaging complexity but doesn't overwhelm the fruit flavors. The finish is bold, complex and very long.

Frank Family 2008 Pinot Noir "Carneros, Napa Valley" (\$35): Frank Family's inaugural vintage of a non-reserve bottling is an impressive bargain for upper-end Pinot. A wonderfully complex nose presages silky smooth texture, excellent balance and an exceptionally long finish.

Frank Family 2007 Zinfandel "Napa Valley" (\$37): Boldly flavored, this powerful wine has excellent ripe fruit, appealing complexity and an extended finish. Tannins call for pairing with barbecued ribs or grilled steak.

