



## **Santa Barbara: A Rare Bright Spot for California in 2020**

**BY ANTONIO GALLONI | AUGUST 25, 2022**

Santa Barbara is one of the few bright spots for California in 2020. Tucked away to the south, far away from fires that were so damaging in the north, Santa Barbara was blessed with far more favorable conditions throughout the year, especially during the critical weeks around harvest. There were some challenges, most notably heat spikes in middle to late August and all of the stresses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but overall Santa Barbara fared much better than the rest of California. Based on what I have tasted and seen so far, Santa Barbara produced the finest wines in California in 2020 by a wide margin.

I have been a big admirer of these wines for some time. The more than 800 wines I tasted for this report only reinforced that view. Best of all, Santa Barbara wines remain, inexplicably, largely undiscovered by both consumers and the wine trade. A quick look at prices for most of the wines in this article will undoubtedly come as a (positive) shock to readers given the massive price appreciation for wines from other regions around the world. Here's one more tip: when dining out, look for Santa Barbara wines on restaurant lists – they often have the most gentle of markups.

### **Alma Rosa**

This is a strong set of wines from Alma Rosa. Winemaker Samra Morris continues to dial in the approach here. The Pinots, sourced from both estate and outside vineyards, are done in an attractive, forward style that offers tons of immediacy. At the same time, I can't help note how compelling the Rhône wines are here, and in this sector of the Sta. Rita Hills.

### **2020 Pinot Noir Caracol**

Color: Red

**94**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Pinot Noir Caracol emerges from a single block on the property that encompasses various exposures and a number of clones. Dark plum, lavender, spice, menthol, licorice and mocha all soar out of the glass. The Caracol is dark and sumptuous, but not at all heavy or overdone.

### **2020 Syrah El Jabali**

Color: Red

**94**

Drinking Window: 2024 – 2034

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

A new wine in this range, the 2020 Syrah El Jabali, shows how promising Rhône varieties can be here. Inky blue/purplish fruit, chocolate lavender, cloves and white flowers are amplified in this decidedly opulent Syrah. This could be quite good, especially if the tannins soften a touch.

### **2020 Barrel Select**

Color: Red

**93**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Barrel Select is a dark, sumptuous wine. It offers up copious ink blue/purplish fruit, spice and sweet new oak. There's plenty of density here, but a bit less in the area of nuance. Readers who enjoy large Pinots will enjoy this most.

### **2020 Chardonnay El Jabali**

Color: White

**93**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2028

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Chardonnay El Jabali marries richness with energy, tension and brightness. Lemon confit, white flowers, mint and chalk add an attractive upper register to balance all of the natural intensity of the fruit.

### **2020 Red Wine Attente**

Color: Red

**93**

Drinking Window: 2024 – 2034

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Red Wine Attente is a blend of Grenache and Syrah from the estate. It's also one of the most potent wines in the range. Inky blue/purplish fruit, lavender, sage, mint, licorice, incense and chocolate all power through. There a touch of whole clusters, but the Attente is more of a fruit driven wine.

### **2020 Pinot Noir El Jabali**

Color: Red

**92**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Pinot Noir El Jabali offers terrific freshness and aromatic lift. Bright red/purplish fruit, cinnamon, blood orange, mint and rose petal all grace the 2020. It's one of the more refined wines in this range. The 2020 is a standout.

### **2020 Pinot Noir Bentroek**

Color: Red

**91**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Pinot Noir Bentroek is bright and punchy, with good complexity from the floral and savory overtones that develop in the glass. Overall though, the Bentroek is pretty impenetrable today, as the searing tannins are pretty hard to get past.

### **2020 Pinot Noir La Encantada**

Color: Red

**91**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Pinot Noir La Encantada is a potent, driving wine. There's quite a bit of depth and intensity. The tannins are pretty imposing too, though, so some cellaring is a must. Black cherry,

plum, chocolate, cloves and lavender are all front and center. It would be nice to see bit more finesse, but this is nicely done just the same.

**2020 Pinot Noir (Sta. Rita Hills)**

Color: Red

**90**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Pinot Noir (Sta. Rita Hills) is a soft, supple wine to drink now and over the next few years. Inky dark red/purplish fruit, rose petal, spice and lavender are front and center. This juicy, open-knit Pinot is terrific. Most of the fruit is from the estate, with a touch of Bentrack blended.

**2020 Chardonnay Sta. Rita Hills**

Color: White

**90**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

The 2020 Chardonnay Sta. Rita Hills is rich, creamy and super-expressive wine that captures the style of the year. Orange peel, hazelnut, spice and a touch of new French oak shape this decidedly extroverted, sumptuous appellation-level Chardonnay. This is a pretty overt style, but it works well.

**2020 Grenache El Jabali**

Color: Red

**90**

Drinking Window: 2022 – 2030

Antonio Galloni, June 2022

Bright and punchy. There's good depth and verve here, but the 2020 is also a bit reticent, perhaps because of the coolness of this specific block. It would be nice to see a bit more mid-palate depth here.