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WINE OF THE WEEK

This rich, fruity \$25 Sonoma Cabernet tastes a lot more expensive than it is

In the latest Wine of the Week, critic Esther Mobley tastes an overperforming Cab



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Olema's 2018 Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon, a great value at \$25.

Amazing, high-quality Cabernet Sauvignons from Napa and Sonoma are a dime a dozen. But that deliciousness often comes with a high price.

That's part of the reason why I was impressed with the 2018 Olema Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon. At \$25 a bottle, it's a textbook example of modern California Cabernet, with all the hallmarks of rich mouthfeel, firm structure and ripe fruit that often come in Cabs that are several times as expensive.

Olema is the value-priced spinoff brand of Calistoga's Amici Cellars. The Amici Cabs are mostly single-vineyard expressions of famous Napa sites like [To Kalon](#) and Oakville Ranch, ranging from \$100-\$200. For the Olema Cab, winemakers Jesse Fox and Tony Biagi (also the winemaker for Patria and [Hourglass](#)) blend grapes from several different vineyards on the Sonoma County side, in the Cabernet-friendly subregions of Rockpile, Dry Creek Valley and Alexander Valley. Future vintages will include Sonoma Mountain fruit too, Fox said.

The '18 Olema has a classic Sonoma Cabernet profile, which to my palate often shows a little more rustic fruit character than many Napa Valley versions. It tastes like mocha and blackberries, building to a sweet, gratifying fruitiness that stops short of tasting overripe. The blend in this vintage is 86% Cabernet, with the balance composed of the other four Bordeaux grape varieties — Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot.

Overall, the wine strikes a nice middle ground between the two extremes of California Cabernet today: At one end, Cabs can taste jammy and saccharine; at the other, they can be herbal and austere. The Olema is none of the above. That makes it a great choice for someone who wants to drink something dependably Cab-like with a burger, a steak — or sandwiches made with leftover Thanksgiving turkey.

Like many winemakers, Biagi and Fox severely reduced their production in 2020 due to wildfire smoke's impact on wine grapes. [They made no red wine](#) for either the Olema or Amici brands, which means this Olema Cabernet will skip a vintage. But it will still be at least a year before any wine drinkers notice it's missing, with the 2018 vintage still available in stores and the 2019 yet to come.