

# Decanter

'I tasted over 300 wines in August, these were my top 10 bottles'

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## 'I tasted over 300 wines in August, these were my top 10 bottles'

Is August merely the hush before summer's song ends, or the beginning of something altogether new? You can certainly make your own decisions but for North American Editor Clive Pursehouse, it was a busy month of work, travel and tasting.



Clive Pursehouse  
September 11, 2025



I didn't even get to use the swimming pool. Credit: Clive Pursehouse

Faulkner said that: 'Some days in late August at home are like this, the air thin and eager like this, with something in it sad and nostalgic and familiar.'

That struck a chord in me as a frenzied August saw me packing in a few days on the road, including a trip home, a trip that definitely struck me as sad, nostalgic and familiar.

Somehow, between it all, I found the time to taste more than 300 wines. It was a whirlwind.



Me and the wildly talented Jeff Brinkman of Rhys Vineyards.

## Santa Cruz Mountains

Prior to my visit to the **Santa Cruz Mountains** in August, I had made the pilgrimage to Montebello, but hadn't ventured beyond those hallowed grounds at Ridge.

On this August visit, hosted by the Wines of the Santa Cruz Mountains regional body, I was able to get a more holistic picture, including visits to Rhys, Mount Eden and a new to me producer, Thomas Fogarty, as well as a return trip to Montebello.

On my last day, I sat down to a broader appellation tasting and left there having tasted over 120 wines in just three days. I also had one of the best burritos of my entire life.

While this is where American Pinot Noir first got its start, thanks to Paul Masson in the early 1900s, it was actually the **Chardonnay** and Syrah which blew me away.

The beautifully rugged region, with its enchanting, unique garrigue-scent filling the air at nearly every turn, is home to incredible wines. High elevation, steep slopes, and cool air from the Pacific, combined with fog from the San Francisco Bay, all come together to create something truly exceptional.

One of California's original wine regions remains far too under the radar, despite the success of Ridge, but look for more coverage from me later this fall.



## Thomas Fogarty, Damiana Chardonnay, Santa Cruz Mountains, California, USA 2023

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

Tremendous complexity from this mountain Chardonnay from Santa Cruz, plonked into a towering forested area along the ridges at Thomas Fogarty. Coming from the first vineyard planted on the Fogarty estate ...

Points 97



## Madson Wines, Chardonnay, Ascona Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains, California, USA, 2023

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The Ascona Chardonnay from Madson is among the top white wines of the region. A reductive approach, the brilliant winemaking of Cole Thomas has rendered the Ascona Chardonnay as a dazzling, mineral-...

Points 96



## Rhys Vineyards, Horseshoe Vineyard Syrah, Santa Cruz Mountains, California, USA 2013

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At 12 years tasted in August of 2025, this wine showcases the character of mountain Syrah, with floral, salty, and concentrated notes of crunchy, early-season blackberries. The delicate florals balance with...

Points 99



## Kathryn Kennedy, Cabernet Sauvignon, Santa Cruz Mountains, California, USA, 2022

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A dazzling purity of red berries and spice, this Kathryn Kennedy bottling shows the stuffing of this estate, which sits just outside the town of Saratoga. It's a captivating tale of one of California's wine...

Points 97



## Sandar & Hem Wines, Pinot Noir, Mindego Ridge Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains, California, USA, 2023

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Mindego Ridge is on the western end of Alpine Road, a perfectly exposed south-facing slope in a cool site, a mix of 777, 667 and 115. This wine is a savoury melange of spice and beautiful red fruits. Juicy...

Points 96

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