

# Atlas Peak Wines

BY ELISABETH FRATER

When I recently followed up an invitation to taste mountain grown wines, I came away impressed. For such a small sub-appellation, Atlas Peak wines loom large on the palate. Geographically, Atlas Peak is the highest peak in its mountain range, standing at 2663 feet. Through the work of its members, the Atlas Peak area received its American Viticultural Area (AVA) status in 1992 and accolades have been rolling in ever since. These growers and vintners have done well by capitalizing on the area's unique microclimate. Over time it has become clear that the grapes thrive in the volcanic soils and the low relative humidity, cool and stable temperatures, and the scarce fog, wind, and rain. Most are small producers (500 cases or less) who sell almost exclusively to their mailing list and direct to the consumer. Since we live nearby we should take advantage of this fact.

It is important for wine lovers to know that there are two roads that reach the Atlas Peak Appellation-Soda Canyon Road and Atlas Peak Road. But, with elevations between 1400 and 1800 feet high, and narrow, winding roads, the area is not the site of grand wineries spilling open to the general public. Instead, the wineries are tucked into the rocky landscape, hidden within Foss Valley and Atlas Peak. But, I know from experience that the Atlas Peak members love to share their wines and stories, and with a little advance notice are more than happy to schedule a private tour and tasting.

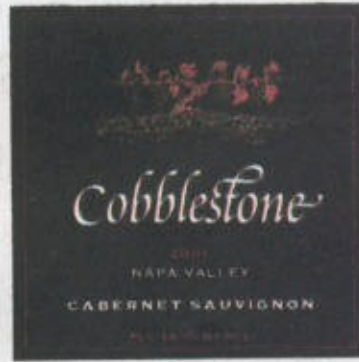
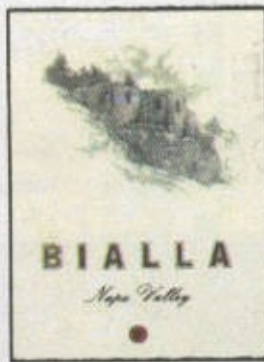
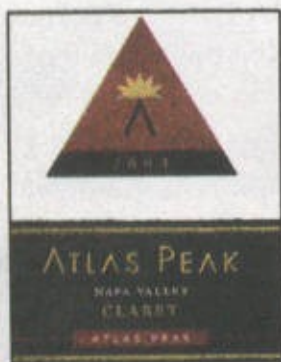
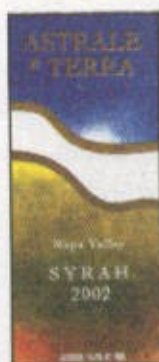
Historically, Atlas Peak was planted to Zinfandel. Now cabernet sauvignon is its predominant grape. Many vintners are producing Bordeaux style wines and so are growing other varieties including cabernet franc, petite verdot, malbec and merlot, and smaller lots of syrah, marsanne, sangiovese, chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. Atlas Peak growers like Soda Canyon Ranch Vineyard's Rick and Gail Thornberry supply fruit to wineries in Napa and Sonoma counties. The Atlas Peak wineries featured below produce their own labels.

One of these vintners, Dr. Jan Krupp, describes his wines as coming from a rocky sun-drenched terroir and terrain. Elan's founder, Patrick Elliott-Smith agrees that the terrain is rugged, and is enthusiastic about the ability to grow small amounts of intense fruit.

Because these wines are from mountain-produced grapes, they have a unique character, namely they are elegant, full-bodied, and display pronounced, bold tannins and a deep, concentrated color. These wines just seem to resonate with the palate, with vibrant intensity of tannins and dark fruit.

## TASTING NOTES:

**2002 Astrale e Terra Napa Valley Syrah (\$28):** A beautifully polished syrah with ripe boysenberry jam flavors and supple tannins. A limited production wine made with 81% syrah and 19% cabernet sauvignon.



**2003 Atlas Peak Claret (\$85):** One of the best known from this AVA, this wine is made from fruit grown at an elevation of 1,000 feet. It displays subtle blueberry fruit, dried herbs, and pronounced oak flavors.

**2004 Biella Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (\$93):** Exquisite gripping tannins balanced with acids lends itself to elegance. Outstanding dried fruit flavors, and apple texture.

**2003 Cobblestone "Cobblestone Vineyard Reserve" Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$69):** Rich fruit with a lot of character, impressive on the nose, great middle palate, round balanced flavors of ripe blackberry and black pepper.

**2002 Dominari Cabernet Sauvignon (\$75):** Sophisticated bouquet of smoke and spice draws you into the rich blueberry and cherry flavors. A robust structure, wonderful mouth feel, and plum and chocolate on the finish.

**2004 The Doctor, Krupp Vineyard, Atlas Peak (\$75):** The blend of Tempranillo, Merlot, Cabernet

Sauvignon and Malbec is a crowd pleaser, as a substantial and flavorful, dark ruby hued fruit-forward wine that is fun to drink.

**2002 Elan Vineyards Napa Valley Atlas Peak Cabernet Sauvignon (\$50):** The pronounced elegance and suppleness is enhanced by dark berry flavors, pronounced soft tannins, and a focused finish.

**2005 Barrel sample of Hill Family Estates Cabernet Sauvignon (the 2003 is \$38):** This was fruit forward, with a good mid palate, cherry, lavender, cola and raspberry flavors. Check out the new tasting room in Yountville.

**2004 Jocelyn Lonen Reserve Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$60):** Lighter bodied and elegant, the subtle fruit spice on the nose counterbalances the nut and dried berry on the finish.

**2004 Vin Roc Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$95):** Round with dried cherry, and cedar, underscored with a smooth finish of cola and leather, and a slight bell pepper edge.

#### Contact Information:

www.atlaspeakappellation.com

#### Astrale e Terra

707-255-1134

www.astraleeterra.com

#### Atlas Peak

www.atlaspeak.com

707.226.1094

#### Biella Vineyards

415-606-6629

www.biellavineyards.com

#### Cobblestone Vineyards

707-259-1110

www.cobblestonewine.com

#### Dominari

707-226-1600

www.dominari.com

#### Elan Vineyards

www.elanvineyards.com

707) 252-3339

#### Hill Family Estate

707-944-9580

www.hillfamilyestate.com

#### Jocelyn Lonen Winery

707-257-2821

www.jocelynlonen.com

#### Krupp Brothers Estates

707-226-2215

www.veraison.net

#### Vin Roc

707-265-0943

www.vinrocnapa.com

#### Soda Canyon

Ranch Vineyards

707-252-7623

