

# The Oregonian

## Two great wines from Mount Eden at the peak of perfection

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By Matt Kramer

It's a rare occurrence in the column to see two wines from the same producer. And it's rarer yet for those two wines to ask what is a relatively high price. After all, like Warren Buffet, this space is all about "value investing."

Value has two components: quality and asking price. On the quality side, these two wines from Mount Eden Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains south of San Francisco are indisputably among the finest examples of cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay grown in California -- never mind the price.

That said, let's do mind the price. Mount Eden Vineyards has long offered its wines at lower prices than its quality competitors from Napa or Sonoma counties. But the current economy has taken its toll. By the winery's own admission, sales have been slow. So the winery has lowered its prices, slicing off 10 bucks a bottle on each of these wines. That's quite a drop. I'd call that value, especially considering the superb quality.

Mount Eden Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains "Estate Bottled" Cabernet Sauvignon 2005: Few wineries in California have a more illustrious history than Mount Eden Vineyards. Located 2,000 feet above the Santa Clara Valley (aka Silicon Valley), it was founded by Martin Ray, one of those irascible yet visionary California winegrowers who wanted to equal or beat Bordeaux and Burgundy at their renowned games.

The roots of Mount Eden's cabernet really date to well before Martin Ray. Back in 1890 yet another ambitious California winegrower, Emmett Rixford, obtained cuttings from Château Margaux in Bordeaux. When, in the late 1940s, Martin Ray planted his own cabernet vineyard at what is now Mount Eden, he used cuttings from Rixford's then-famed La Questa Vineyard. This is the genetic heritage of Mount Eden's "Estate" cabernet. Yields are very low, typically one to two tons per acre. (A low yield in Napa Valley is four tons an acre.)

But let's cut to the chase: This is a flat-out great cabernet. Forget all about those inky, tannic, almost syrupy California blockbuster cabs. This blend of cabernet sauvignon (75 percent), merlot (22 percent) and cabernet franc (3 percent) has a float-like-a-butterfly elegance

Mount Eden Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains "Estate Bottled" Chardonnay 2006: It seems preposterous that the same vineyard can issue not just one of California's finest cabernets, but also what many California wine lovers consider the state's single greatest chardonnay. Taste this 2006 Mount Eden Vineyard "Estate" chardonnay, you'll understand why in a single sip.

This is stunning chardonnay: dense, luscious, utterly dry and brimming with a rich lemon-and-mineral quality that only the best white Burgundies can equal. The density comes from the exceptionally low yield, just one to two tons an acre. (Many chardonnays are cropped at triple that figure.) The beyond-the-fruit minerality comes from the stony, high-elevation site.

Worth noting: Mount Eden "Estate" chardonnay is famous for aging and improving for upward of two decades, should you be so inclined. But it tastes awfully good right now. This is one of the finest chardonnays made anywhere in the world -- including hallowed Burgundy itself.

Matt Kramer: 1320 S.W. Broadway, Portland, OR 97201 Matt Kramer is a Portland wine critic and author.