

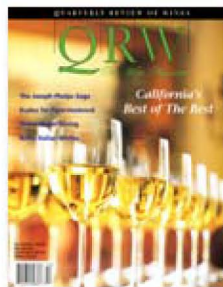
# Quarterly Review of Wines' 21st Annual California Best of The Best

After eight months of blind tasting, after tasting all the major varietals, and after more than 800 wines, QRW's 21st Annual Best of The Best in California was completed. We tasted what we feel are most of The Best wines available retail and in restaurants. The singular purpose of the tasting is to offer readers The Best wines (and the latest releases) that they can actually purchase. This means "trophy wines"—those fine but expensively unavailable wines, except by private subscription—were not tasted. Invariably we get e-mails protesting this, claiming that, since we have not tasted the trophies, we have not tasted the best. But to us, the argument is still specious. If you pay a lot for a bottle of wine (you grossly over pay for trophies), then suddenly it gets more precious to you. You start fantasizing over it. If you rate your "best" by "price," you're an investor, not a taster. Further, most know the auction game that trophies prompt. Buyers will get their hands on two bottles of Screaming Eagle, drink one and offer the second to eBay, usually returning to them the money they laid out for the two. So much for wine appreciation.

The Cabernet Sauvignon 2001 is spectacular. Buy all you can. And speaking of spectacular, you have to know the 2001/2002 Syrah and the 2002/2003 Zinfandel: never before have we seen so much quality from these varietals at one tasting. Of the 2002 Chardonnay, much of the same can be said: it was a splendid year. Merlot 2001/2002 and Pinot Noir 2002 as an aggregate were not quite as impressive, but nonetheless very fine. The point is to buy quality — our Best of The Best — Beringer, Caymus, Peter Michael, Phelps, Rosenblum, Shafer... Even in less than fine vintages, great wine houses can deliver superior wines.

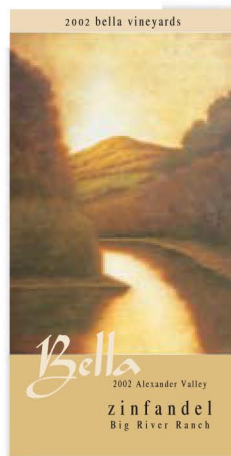
QRW designates its very best wine in each varietal category with a Best of Show title. This is followed by our Best of The Best/5-Star selections (the high '90s for those needing numbers). A definition of what constitutes 5-Stars follows. Only wines meeting this designation appear in this article. Tasting notes for wines receiving 5- and 4-Stars follow this article, except Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Sparkling Wine, which appeared in our Winter and Spring issues.

— RICHARD L. ELIA



*"Full, firm,  
deep, rich,  
well-knit,  
wild cherry,  
chocolate and  
roasted nut  
flavors."*

— QRW TASTING PANEL



## 5 - STAR WINES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Best of The Best:  
Eight Top California Zinfandels.  
(87 wines tasted blind)

Wines of such remarkable  
character and quality as to be  
in a class by themselves.

### BEST OF SHOW

2003 Ridge, Paso Robles, \$26

...

2002 Bella Vineyards,  
Big River Ranch,  
Alexander Valley, \$34

...

2000 Gallo of Sonoma,  
Frei Ranch Vineyards,  
Dry Creek Valley, \$24

...

2002 Quivira Vineyards,  
Anderson Ranch,  
Dry Creek Valley, \$30

...

2003 Quivira Vineyards,  
Dry Creek Valley, \$20

...

2002 Ridge, Lytton Springs, \$30

...

2002 Rosenblum Cellars,  
Annette's Reserve,  
Redwood Valley, \$30

...

2002 Rosenblum Cellars,  
Hendry Vineyard, Napa Valley, \$40