

Napa Cabernet 2022: Top wines from Howell Mountain

Situated above the fog line and planted on mountainous slopes the Cabernets from Howell Mountain tend to show those mountain tannins and structure combined with a freshness produced by the temperature shifts. Jonathan Cristaldi offers his top 2022 selections from the AVA.

Jonathan Cristaldi June 20, 2025



The 2022 vintage from Howell Mountain delivered wines that reflect the AVA's signature power, structure and high-altitude freshness, yet with a notable degree of elegance and accessibility, despite the challenges of the vintage.

These included the significant heat dome that settled over Napa for a week from Labor Day on – many wines benefited from the higher elevation above the fog line.

There, longer days of sunlight and warmer nights helped vines ripen at an even-keeled pace, and temperatures never reached the soaring levels as that of the valley floor below.

Howell Mountain wines in 2022 lean towards a dark, mineral-rich fruit profile, with dominant notes of blackberry, blackcurrant, cassis and spiced plum, often accented by blueberry, redcurrant and cherry pit.

Many wines reveal a distinct mountain herbal quality, with nuances of bay laurel, sagebrush, unsmoked tobacco and wild thyme, as well as earthy elements like loamy soil, graphite and ironstone.

The spice spectrum is broad and engaging, featuring white pepper, cedarwood, allspice, cinnamon and espresso bean, often layered with florals like violets, lavender and pine resin.

Tannins remain a key defining trait of Howell Mountain wines, with most expressions exhibiting firm, mineral-rich, and structured tannins that contribute to serious ageing potential.

Wines that underwent extended maceration tend to feature mocha-rich, chocolatey tannins, reinforcing Howell Mountain's signature grip.

Acidity remains bright and energetic, providing lift and ensuring these wines stay fresh despite the warmth of the vintage.

The most structured wines, particularly those from estate sites with deep volcanic soils and extended ageing in new oak, will benefit from long-term cellaring (10- 20+ years). These often showcase a tightly wound, coiled power that will unfurl beautifully over time.

Wines like Ink Grade's The Prophet's Water, Ipmensata's Las Posadas Vineyard red, and Cade Reserve Cabernet stand out for their firm, age-worthy mountain tannins and mineral depth.

Some wines, especially those showcasing more red fruit, higher acidity and gentler tannins, are beautifully balanced for near-term drinking (up to 8 years). Examples include Nickel & Nickel's Hawk's Cradle Cabernet and Ink Grade's Third Circle.

If you prefer opulent, instantly plush Napa Cabernets, Howell Mountain's profile remains firmly structured, savoury and mineral-driven – more about power and restraint than lush fruit-forwardness.

Whether drinking now or laying down for the long haul, these wines represent some of the most complex, terroir-driven expressions of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

Howell Mountain 2022: The top-scoring Cabernets



Almacerro, Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley, California, USA 2022

95 Points

This 100% Cabernet Sauvignon was aged in 70% new French oak for 22–23 months. It hails from the winery’s estate vineyard on Howell Mountain, where vines thrive in rugged volcanic soils. Almacerro’s winemaking team is led by Winemaker Matilda Scott, with Françoise Peschon as Consulting Winemaker and Mike Wolf as Vineyard Manager. A ripe, lifted red wine with powerful mountain tannins framing its structure, it opens with alluring notes of baked cherry fruit, nuanced by graphite and sandalwood. Medium- to full-bodied on the palate, the soaring tannins come together beautifully after a moment, revealing a cocoa powder character so classic to Howell Mountain. The finish is bone-dry, marked by perfumed red florals and ironstone minerality. While the lavish nose suggests opulence, the palate showcases a savoury and structured profile. Best enjoyed from 2026, with ageing potential for at least a decade.