



BLACKBIRD
VINEYARDS

A Blackbird Takes Wing

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by Ray Isle

Every few years a flock of new, would-be cult wines appears in Napa Valley. Most of them are turkeys; a few soar like eagles. One of the more impressive newcomers has been a merlot-dominated blend from Blackbird Vineyards (\$80, blackbirdvineyards.com). Combining the lush, inviting, dark-fruit characteristics that Napa is known for with complex aromatic notes of dark chocolate, violets and cherry liqueur, it's the kind of wine that could make the most die-hard pinot noir fan convert to merlot.

Unfortunately—and not all that surprisingly—Blackbird is hard to come by. One way to get some is through the winery's mailing list; another, should you be playing golf in Northern California's wine country, is to include a round at **Meadowood** (meadowood.com), a resort in Napa Valley. The nine-hole walking course there is short enough to follow a round with a leisurely afternoon of wine tasting. Meadowood also offers the uncommon pleasure of taking an imaginative trip back to the early days of golf by playing with authentic hickory-shafted clubs and replica gutta-percha balls, or "gutties." Used until the early 1900s, gutties were made from the sap of Malayan gutta trees and were hard as rocks.



After your round back in time, step to the present day by ordering a bottle of Blackbird at the Restaurant at Meadowood. If you want to venture beyond the resort, Blackbird will also be poured at its maker Michael Polenske's latest venture, a tasting room named **Ma(i)sonry**. Situated in a stone house built in 1904, Ma(i)sonry opens in August in Yountville, down the road from the famed French Laundry restaurant. The new space will sell antiques and art made between the sixteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, along with contemporary pieces. More crucially for wine collectors, it will offer tastings of other high-end artisanal wines in addition to Blackbird's bottlings.

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