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## **MASON: Great Wines, Exceptional Prices**

Pierce Carson, Napa Register

Randy Mason has been crafting outstanding Napa Valley wines for more than three decades. While he's made excellent wines for others-such as Chappallet, Lakespring and Napa Wine Company - it's the sauvignon blanc from Mason Cellars that has given Mason a leg up on the trade.

Mason has always gotten high marks for his sauvignon blanc. His first release of the varietal from the 1993 harvest received a 91 rating in Wine Spectator- unheard of at the time for a sauvignon blanc.

Not only did the media correctly point out that Mason is one of the best sauvignon blanc producers in the country, the wine press also lauded him for keeping his prices down.

Well, nothing's changed over the years – save for the fact that Mason has now developed a small collection of sauvignon blanc offerings - adding another brand, Pomelo, and a reserve wine to the mix.

And his products are more visible than ever, with the recent opening of the new Mason Cellars Tasting Room at Oxbow, just west of Copia at 714 First Street, a stone's through from downtown Napa.

We stopped by the new tasting room earlier this week to see what Mason's been up to of late. All Mason wines are 100 percent varietal, including all three sauvignon blanc bottlings and a pair of excellent reds from the 2001 harvest.

**Pomelo 2005 Lake County Sauvignon Blanc (\$10):** This wine is one of the best bargains available today. It's an outstanding sauvignon blanc, with inviting citrus aroma, even a hint of sour lemon found in herbaceous lemongrass, and a refreshing mouthful of grapefruit. The wine almost jumps out of the glass and, with such an attractive finish, invites the consumer to have a second glass. It's a clean, attractive wine, ideal to pair with Asian food (like the outstanding Vietnamese cuisine at Annalien in downtown Napa) and surely an exceptional buy. Available in screwtop bottles, this is a wine you need to introduce to your friends and an ideal aperitif. Production is 15,000 cases, and will increase to 40,000 with the release of the 2006 vintage.

**Mason 2005 Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$16):** This one has the typical grassy varietal nose, more subtle aromas than the Pomelo. Left on the lees for more than three months to enhance mouth feel, this is a wine with staying power, evident in its pleasing long finish. It offers citrus on the entry, melon on mid-palate and a delightfully almost sweet pineapple flavor on the finish. It's a balanced wine ideally paired with seafood, spicy Asian fare and raw oysters. Current production is 16,000 cases. The wine will be offered in screw top bottles with the 2006 release.

**Mason 2005 Reserve Sonoma Sauvignon Blanc (\$35):** Made from grapes grown in the Russian **River** appellation, this is a very special wine made from fruit harvested in a 34-year-old vineyard. Aged in stainless steel barrels, where the lees were stirred up to five times a week for four months, the wine is elegant – a rich, satiny sauvignon blanc with great acid, perfumy nose and wonderfully long grapefruity finish. This is sauvignon blanc for Saturday night. Only 570 six-packs were produced. Offered with a screw cap, the wine was just released Dec. 1. This is Mason's first reserve sauvignon blanc and it's a doozy.

**Mason 2001 Napa Valley Merlot (\$15):** When's the last time you bought an Oakville merlot for 15 bucks? Well, the stock is running low on this one, so I'd advise you to drop by the tasting room, make sure you like it and stock up while you can. Mason hasn't made a red under his own label since 2001, so you'll have to wait a couple of years from now for one or two that he has in barrel from the last harvest. The nose of this 2001 is typical of the varietal, with fresh, juicy plums prevalent in both aroma and taste, and a hint of blackberry on the long finish.

**Mason 2001 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (18):** A blend of cabernet from Rutherford and Chiles Valley, this wine was barrel aged for 22 months in French and American oak. A big, beautiful cab, it offers the perfume of summer gardens and lovely ripe fruit, with a long finish that tastes of both black plums and cassis. And how long has it been since you picked up a choice aged cab for 18 bucks?