



Robert M. Parker, Jr.'s

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# The WINE ADVOCATE®

The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine

ANDREW MURRAY VINEYARDS	1997	ESPERANCE	SANTA BARBARA	(\$18.00)	RED	88
ANDREW MURRAY VINEYARDS	1998	ROUSSANNE	SANTA BARBARA	(\$25.00)	WHITE	89
ANDREW MURRAY VINEYARDS	1997	SYRAH LES COTEAUX	SANTA BARBARA	(\$20.00)	RED	90
ANDREW MURRAY VINEYARDS	1997	SYRAH ROASTED SLOPE VINEYARD	SANTA BARBARA	(\$22.00)	RED	92
ANDREW MURRAY VINEYARDS	1998	VIOGNIER	SANTA BARBARA	(\$25.00)	WHITE	90

Andrew Murray Vineyards is one of the shining stars in the Santa Barbara firmament. Extremely low yields (one-half to three-quarters tons of fruit per acre for the Viognier and Roussanne in 1998), and a dedication to hillside vineyards, ripe fruit, and non-interventionalistic wine-making have combined to propel this estate to the top echelon of the Rhône Ranger hierarchy. Production is small (300 cases for the Roussanne, 500 for the Viognier, 600 for Esperance, 600 for Syrah Roasted Slope, and 1000 for the Syrah Les Coteaux), but these wines are well-worth seeking out.

When a local wine retailer told me how difficult California Viognier is to sell, I found it hard to understand given the quality of such wines as the **1998 Viognier**. Stunning aromatics of peach, apricot, and honeysuckle soar from a glass of this full-bodied example. Dry, with enough acidity to provide vibrancy, and a rich, textured finish, this stunning Viognier is one of the **finest** being produced in California. Drink it over the next 1-2 years. The less ostentatious **1998 Roussanne** offers an exotic, complex, interesting rose petal and Chinese spice-like nose. It does not possess as much volume and intensity as the Viognier, but it is more classically structured. Dry, long, and impressive, it should be consumed over the next 2-3 years.

Readers looking for a terrific red wine value should check out Andrew

Murray's **1997 Esperance**, a blend of Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvèdre. It is a rustic, exuberant, rich, dark ruby/purple-colored wine with full body, plenty of pepper, black fruits, earth, and spice. Although the tannin is slightly elevated, it is well-balanced by the gorgeous fruit, mouth-filling texture, and complete personality of this gutsy red wine. Moreover, it will soften and improve over the next 5-8 years. The black/purple-colored **1997 Syrah Les Coteaux** is a rich wine with copious extract and tannin, and gorgeously sweet cassis fruit intermixed with pepper, licorice and floral scents. The tannin level is elevated, but this full-bodied, layered wine will only improve over the next 7-8 years. It should keep for a decade or more. The saturated black/purple-colored **1997 Syrah Roasted Slope Vineyard** is a field blend of 95% Syrah and 5% Viognier, both harvested and fermented together. It reveals jammy, syrupy, black raspberry and cherry flavors combined with a floral note and a touch of honey. Full-bodied, expansively-textured, and pure, with less aggressive tannin than Les Coteaux, this sweet (from ripe fruit, not sugar), rich, long wine should drink well for 10-12 years.

At a time when many California wines seem to be priced proportionally to their producers' egos, Andrew Murray's offerings are a breath of fresh air given their exceptionally high quality and realistic prices – readers take note. Tel. (805) 686-9604