



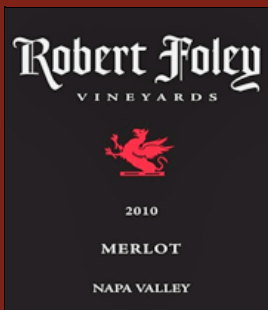
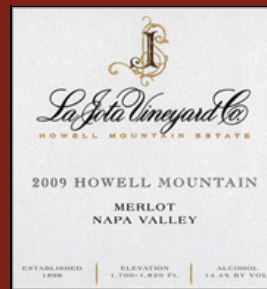
ABOUT

Top 2012 Pinot Noir Results

# Top Merlots of 2012

by [KEN & THERESA](#) on NOVEMBER 7, 2012 · [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

We found some terrific Merlot that you will want to try this fall. The best offerings are not inexpensive, but if you love the grape, you will certainly be quite satisfied with our top recommendations. We start with an Excellent offering from **La Jota**. This winery was taken over by the Jackson Family in 2004. Chris Carpenter of Cardinale fame, took over the winemaking and has slowly been rebuilding this program. This year he hit a home run with his **2009 "Howell Mountain" Merlot**. We scored it **94 points**. It is made up of 100% Merlot grapes and sells for **\$55**. It opens with a fragrant blueberry bouquet with hints cranberry and tangerine. I loved its nice balance and its delicious blueberry flavors with notes of ripe black currant. I also detected hints of old oak and black licorice. The finish is dry and its dusty fine tannins are pleasant and stick around for a while. This Merlot is very food-friendly and would be terrific with shepherd's pie. It is a worthy first place finisher.



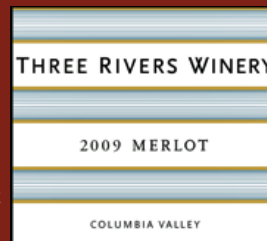
Our two runner ups are both from the **2010** vintage and are from top Merlot producers. The first one is from perennial favorite **Robert Foley**. His **2010 Merlot** for **\$52** was awarded **93 points**. This wine was by far the best Merlot from one of our mini-tastings. It is full-bodied, smooth and elegant. We loved its delicious blueberry and vanilla oak flavors with hints of acai berry, coffee and a dash of pepper. It finishes with dry fine tannins that drift away nicely. The panel suggested pairing this top shelf Merlot with a filet mignon at your favorite steak house. Equally as good is the **2010 Plumpjack Merlot** also from Napa Valley. This wine also costs **\$52** and was awarded **93 points**. It opens with a fragrant and very inviting black cherry and boysenberry bouquet. On



the palate, it was full-bodied, nicely balanced and very flavorful. Those flavors were very tasty ripe black plum with notes of black pepper and hints of black currant. This offering would go best with a pepper encrusted NY strip steak.



Our four **92 pointers** are also a great collection of Merlot. We will start with the best deal of our top finishers. The **2009 Three Rivers "Columbia Valley" Merlot** for **\$19** is an absolute steal. This wine is medium-bodied balanced and smooth. The panel really enjoyed its pleasant plum and black cherry flavors with a hint of cedar plank and spice. It finishes with dry and mild tannins that are rather sticky. The panel suggested pairing this Merlot with roast beef au jus or bacon burger with Great Hill blue cheese. It was clearly the best value to emerge from our big blind tasting when the wines were unveiled.



The **2009 Sebastiani "Alexander Valley" Merlot** for **\$24** is another very good value. It opens with a fragrant and inviting black cherry bouquet with a hint of black pepper and vanilla oak. On the palate, this wine is medium-to-full-bodied, balanced and rather smooth. The panel loved its tasty gentle blueberry and plum flavors with a delicate hint of dried cherry and oak in the background. It displays fine tannins that are friendly and make it an elegant, drink-now Merlot that would perfectly with Stuart's yummy steak appetizers. (Feel free to post you EM in the comments if you want Stuart's recipe)

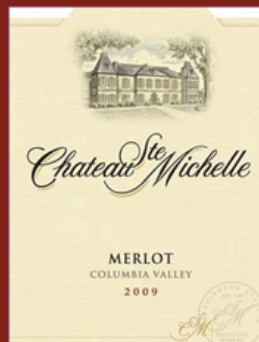


Our final **90 pointer** is the **2010 Shafer "Napa Valley" Merlot** for **\$56**. It is not quite as good as 2009 highlighted above. It is medium-bodied, balanced, and easy going. Its flavor profile is a menthol driven wine with notes of black cherry and plum with hints of cassis and old oak. I suggest pairing this hearty Merlot with a NY strip steak.

**Our five 89 pointers** also warrant your attention. We will give you a quick hint on each. Check out the full reviews on the website.

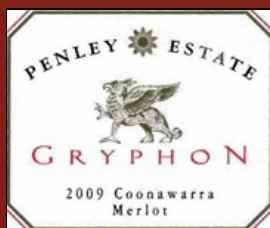
**Chateau Ste Michelle 2009 Merlot "Columbia Valley" (WA) \$16 (89)**

This is one of the best Merlot deals we discovered. It is medium-bodied, balanced, silky and very easy to drink. I really liked its tasty black cherry flavors with nicely integrated old vanilla oak with a hint of blueberry. This is a very good everyday wine to pair with beef bourguignon or linguini alla puttanesca.



**Buena Vista 2009 Merlot "Carneros" (CA) \$19 (89)**

This Merlot is medium-bodied, balanced, plush and juicy. Its flavor profile is a rich blackberry with notes of spice, anise, plum and vanilla oak. It finishes with mild tannins are a tad dusty and linger for a little while. This wine would pair best with winter comfort food like shepherd's pie.



**Penley Estate 2009 Merlot "Gryphon" (Coonawarra, Australia) \$20 (89)**

This Merlot from down under is medium-bodied, balanced, and juicy. The panel liked its unique flavor profile of a mineral-infused black plum with hints of cedar plank, mulberry, and rhubarb. The panel suggested serving this Aussie Merlot with coq au vin or tea smoked duck.

**Concha y Toro 2010 Merlot "Marques de Casa Concha" (Peumo, Chile) \$22**

**(89)**

This Merlot from Chile opens with a lead pencil and old leather bouquet with a hint of black cherry cola. It is medium-bodied, balanced, and juicy with mineral-infused plum and mild black raspberry flavor profile. Its mild dry tannins are subtle. The panel suggested pairing this Merlot with lasagna or wild mushroom ravioli.

**Kendall Jackson 2009 Merlot "Grand Reserve" (Sonoma County, CA) \$26 (89)**

This mid-tier Merlot from KJ is medium-bodied, slightly acidic and juicy. The panel enjoyed its black raspberry flavors with notes of oak, dark chocolate and black plum. It finishes dry and with mild tannins that are slightly prolonged. They suggested pairing this wine with braised short ribs.

**Finally, a few Very Good 88 pointers and a couple of Good Value 85 point offerings.**

**Chateau Ste. Michelle 2009 Merlot "Canoe Ridge" (Horse Heaven Hills, WA) \$22 (88)**

**Aquinas 2009 Merlot "Napa Valley" (CA) \$22 (88)**

**Merryvale 2009 Merlot "Starmont" (Napa Valley, CA) \$26 (88)**

**Skylite Cellars 2008 Merlot "Estate" (Walla Walla, WA) \$27 (88)**

**Gundlach Bundschu 2009 Merlot "Sonoma Valley" (CA) \$30 (88)**

**Smoking Loon 2010 Merlot "California" \$8 (85)**

**Tin Roof Cellars 2009 Merlot "California" \$11 (85)**

We hope you enjoy these Merlots as much as we did. As you can see Merlot is on a comeback. It is easy to drink and quite enjoyable when well made. Some of the top wines are high level wines that do not cost nearly as much as the top Cabernets and Pinots. Please share your favorite Merlots with us by posting below in the comments section.

Cheers – Ken

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