



Get 1 year of
Wine Spectator
Magazine...



Give Yourself a Gift You'll Use Year Round.
Become a **WINESPECTATOR.com** Member Today!

Home > Blogs > Exploring Wine with Tim Fish

 e-mail
  print
  save
  share

exploring wine with tim fish

12 California Merlots for \$20 or Less

Good quality comes at a fair price if you shop wisely

Posted: Oct 23, 2013 10:40am ET

 64
  7
  7

 Like
  Tweet
  +1

Snidely debating what wine is "in" and what wine is "out" is a favorite pastime of industry insiders. First, Merlot was in, and then it was out. In and out, in and out-you get whiplash after a while. How much of that trickles down to consumers is hard to say. I'm not sure they care.

The 2010 vintage in California certainly didn't show Merlot at its best, and it's too early to call the 2011s, which are just being released. For my annual Merlot report, I tasted more than 180 wines, and I offer my take in the Nov. 30 issue.

Despite the challenges of recent vintages, there is a solid selection of California Merlots on the market that sell for \$20 or less. These are wines that can compete with values from Argentina, Portugal and Washington state.

At this price point, you don't expect a lot of complexity. These are Tuesday night wines, or wines you buy for a party. They're generally soft, juicy Merlots that offer just enough depth to keep them interesting.

But buy carefully—the retail shelves are stocked with dreck Merlots that carry a generic "California" designation. Here are a dozen wines priced at \$20 and below that I recommend, and you'll notice that most of them come from a specific region like Sonoma County.

My favorite in the category now is [Kendall-Jackson Merlot Sonoma County Vintner's Reserve 2010](#) (90 points, \$19) which is zesty and polished and has well-structured dark cherry, caramel and herb flavors.

[Bogle](#) is a reliable source for good value Merlot, which the [California 2010](#) (88, \$10) demonstrates. Another standby for me is [Alexander Valley Vineyards](#) with its [Alexander Valley 2010](#) (88, \$20), which has winning flavors of dried cherry, underbrush and roasted spice. Another best buy is the Merlot-based [Kirkland Signature Meritage Napa Valley 2010](#) (87, \$11), which has mocha and cherry aromas and easygoing plum, spice and herb flavors.

Eight other well-priced Merlots you can look for in my report:

[Ancient Peaks Merlot Paso Robles 2011](#) (88, \$17)



Tim Fish

[About Me](#)

[My Main Blog Page](#)

[Archive](#)

Most Recent Posts:

Oct 16, 2013
[Are You a Consumer, Collector or Absolutist?](#)

Oct 9, 2013
[Buddy, Can You Spare 10 Bucks for a Good Wine?](#)

Sep 11, 2013
[No Rest for the Weary Winemaker](#)

See Also:

[Featured Blogs](#)

[Complete Blog Index](#)

Member Quick Links

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Personal Wine List | My Library |
| Wine Ratings Search | Value Wines |
| Vintage Charts | Top 100 of 2012 |
| Insider | Advance |
| Wine Spectator School | My Courses |
| Customer Care | Logout |



FREE Trial Issue
Plus the ABC's of Whisky
[CLICK HERE](#)

Whisky
ADVOCATE

Most Emailed

Most Commented

1. [Are You a Consumer, Collector or Absolutist?](#)
2. [Liberté, Egalité, Sobriety](#)
3. [Is Snobbery Dead?](#)
4. [30 Vintages of Shafer Hillside Select: The Evolution of a Classic Napa Cabernet](#)
5. [Nuking Your Pinot Noir](#)

Free Email Newsletters

[Sips & Tips](#) | [Wine & Healthy Living](#)
[Video Theater](#) | [Collecting & Auctions](#)

- » [View samples](#)
- » [Or sign up now!](#)
- » [Manage my newsletter preferences](#)

Classifieds

The marketplace for all your wine needs, including:

- [Wine Storage](#) | [Wine Clubs](#)
- [Dining & Travel](#) | [Wine Auctions](#)



[Wine Shops](#) | [Wine Accessories](#)

[Benziger Merlot Sonoma County 2009 \(88, \\$19\)](#)

[Buena Vista Merlot Carneros 2011 \(87, \\$20\)](#)

[Clos LaChance Merlot Central Coast 2009 \(87, \\$15\)](#)

[Ghost Pines Merlot Sonoma-Napa Counties Winemaker's Blend 2010 \(88, \\$20\)](#)

[Kenwood Merlot Sonoma County 2010 \(86, \\$14\)](#)

[Kunde Estate Merlot Sonoma Valley Kinneybrook 2009 \(88, \\$20\)](#)

[Toasted Head Merlot North Coast Barrel Aged 2010 \(86, \\$15\)](#)

WineSpectator.com members can read the full reviews by clicking on the review links, but this free chart gives you a taste of [all my reviews in the annual Merlot report](#).

Do you drink value Merlot? What's your favorite?

Member comments [2 comment\(s\)](#)

Ted Hudgins — Naples, FL — October 23, 2013 3:00pm ET

My 2 current QPR favorites right now are the Cameron Hughes Chalk Hill 2011 (~\$15 @ Costco) and the 2010 (if you can find it) or the 2011 Markham. Great, easy drinking varietally correct wines that remind us of why we liked Merlot so many years ago.

[Report a problem with this comment](#)

Tim Fish — Sonoma County — October 23, 2013 6:19pm ET

Good advice, Ted, thanks.

[Report a problem with this comment](#)

Submit your comment

Note: Your real name will be shown with each comment submitted.

Your Name:

Your City, State, Country:

Industry Affiliation:

Please enter your plain text comment below. Limit is 5000 characters.

Your comment:

WineSpectator.com encourages you to add a comment to this discussion. Comments are moderated, in accordance with our [Comment Policy](#), and may be edited for clarity or accuracy, or removed if deemed inappropriate.