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## 9 Tempting California Merlots

New reviews of Golden State reds that have plenty of appeal

Tim Fish

Posted: January 27, 2014



Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

California Merlot is a wine Rodney Dangerfield could relate to: It doesn't get a lot of respect these days. Still, consumers continue to drink a lot of it, and wineries feed that demand, even if it has dwindled over the years.

Napa Valley, it should be no surprise, produced the top wines of this collection of new releases. You will find familiar names such as Paloma, Realm and Pride, which technically blends grapes from Napa and Sonoma.

While 2010 was a difficult year for Merlot—it was a cool and rainy vintage, and quality varied widely—there are some fine wines to be had. Fans of Old World Merlot who prefer bright acidity and structured tannins will find more to love than those who like ripe and plush wines.

For those of us who find pleasure on both sides of the spectrum, the 2010s offer plenty of opportunity, as long as you're a smart shopper.

### TERRA VALENTINE Merlot Spring Mountain District 2011 **Score: 93 | \$50**

Rich, plush and well-structured, with briary currant aromas that open to layered black cherry, dark chocolate and dried herb flavors. Finishes with supple tannins. Drink now through 2019. 95 cases made. —T.F.

### PALOMA Merlot Napa Valley 2010 **Score: 92 | \$54**

Plush and sexy, with red currant and toasty oak aromas and rich black cherry, mocha and olive flavors that finish with supple tannins. Drink now through 2019. 2417 cases made. —T.F.

### REALM The Tempest Napa Valley 2011 **Score: 92 | \$85**

Plush and rather showy, with rich, decadent flavors of kirsch and toasty vanilla, opening to supple and ripe black cherry, mocha and baking spice notes, revealing a hint of tannins. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. Drink now through 2019. 310 cases made. —T.F.

### PRIDE Claret Reserve Sonoma-Napa Counties 2010



Kent Hanson

From Paloma's Napa vineyards comes a plush 2010 Merlot.

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**Score: 91 | \$135**

Deep and densely structured, with toasty red currant and dried herb aromas, leading to deep flavors of cherry, cedar and mocha. Finishes with dusty tannins. Needs time. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. Best from 2016 through 2021. 569 cases made. —*T.F.*

Sonoma Coast, Albariño, Lake County

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**TERLATO Episode Napa Valley 2010 Score: 90 | \$180**

Dense and powerful, rustic and tannic, offering a core of dark berry, mocha, cedar and tobacco, marked by chewy, grainy tannins that give the flavors traction. Needs time. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. Best from 2015 through 2028. 1,000 cases made. —*JL*

**BODEGA DE EDGAR Mis Pasos Central Coast 2010 Score: 87 | \$37**

Zesty but angular, with aromas of prune and tar and flavors of smoky cracked pepper. Merlot, Syrah and Tempranillo. Drink now through 2018. 110 cases made. —*T.F.*

**LONGBOARD Merlot Russian River Valley Dakine Vineyard 2010 Score: 87 | \$29**

Tightly wound, this version has yet to show all its card, but nonetheless offers appealing notes of boysenberry, pencil lead and cedar. Best after 2015. 450 cases made. —*T.F.*

**ST. FRANCIS Merlot Sonoma Valley 2009 Score: 87 | \$20**

Appealing, with moderate complexity and notes of cherry and herb. Drink now through 2017. 29,000 cases made. —*T.F.*

**RAYMOND Merlot Napa Valley Reserve Selection 2010 Score: 86 | \$24**

Offers straightforward red currant, herb and cedar flavors. Drink now through 2018. 3,900 cases made. —*T.F.*

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