

Wine Spectator

LEARN MORE, DRINK BETTER

17 California Red Values

Pinot Noirs, Syrahs, Zinfandels and more, each for \$30 or less

James Laube, Tim Fish

January 4, 2010

We kick off the new year with a resolution to support those vintners who place an emphasis on value, and in that spirit, here's our first mixed case of red wines, each for \$30 or less. Need Zin, or Syrah, or Pinot? They're all represented.

Included in this week's list are three Zinfandels that hail from different corners of California. Paso Robles winery Adelaida has been producing solid Zins for years, but its Michael's Estate Vineyard 2007 is the best yet. With only a handful of vintages to its credit, Mendocino producer Dogwood Cellars shows that Sonoma's neighbor to the north can make Zinfandel with the best of them. Joseph Swan is one of the oldest names in California Zin, and the 2005 Russian River Valley Lone Redwood Ranch is a classically old-school style, sleek yet briary.

The Syrahs (or blends thereof) in our list take us first to Bennett Valley, that small Sonoma appellation quickly making a name for high-quality wines, led this time by Baldassari. Then there's Clavo's Reckless Moment, a Paso Syrah; Kaimie, also from Paso, with the clever R'Own Style blend; and Kunin, also with a catchy name, Pape Star, bearing a Central Coast appellation. Finally, longtime Sonoma vintner Joseph Swan spreads its wings, so to speak, with a pair of Russian River Syrahs.

It's interesting to note as well that proven producers such as Carpe Diem, JC Cellars, Landmark, Siduri, Navarro, Landmark and Truchard are on this list of sub-\$30 wines, which bodes well for the intersection of quality and price in California.

TRUCHARD Syrah Napa Valley Carneros 2006 *Score: 88 | \$28* Marked by a pleasantly earthy edge. Medium-bodied, with dried berry, plum, mineral and sage, ending with fine-grained tannins and loamy clay flavors. Drink now through 2015. 1,652 cases made. —*J.L.*