

## THE CHRONICLE'S WINE SELECTIONS

### NAPA VALLEY MERLOT

*Wine consumers know what they want, and they want Merlot. Bright berry flavors, lush texture and a seductive softness make it the red wine to love. Some of the best Merlots come from the Napa Valley.*

Wine	Price	Rating	Body	Dryness	Comments & Food Suggestions
1992 Beaulieu Vineyard Napa Valley Beataour Merlot	\$8.25	***	Medium	Dry	Black cherry-plum nose, hint of toasty oak; concentrated flavors, layered fruit, mint note; good length; great value! Good match with filet mignon, chicken stew, roast lamb.
1991 Beringer Vineyard Howell Mountain Bancroft Ranch Merlot	\$28.50	** ½	Medium-Full	Dry	Slightly herbal nose with berry backnotes; lush flavors, ripe cherry-berry notes, big tannins, good length. Good choice for beef Burgundy, oxtail soup, lamb with thyme.
1992 Freemark Abbey Napa Valley Merlot	\$16	** ½	Medium	Dry	Plum-berry aroma, chocolate note; bright fruit flavors, smoky note; good length, firm tannins. Try with pork with cranberries, roasted white meats with mild herbs.
1992 Markham Vineyards Napa Valley Merlot	\$16	***	Medium	Dry	Deep blackberry/cherry aroma, smoky oak note; big, fine tannins, layers of fruit; rich and complex; good length. Nice with steak, rare prime rib, assorted cheeses
1992 Pine Ridge Napa Valley Selected Cuvee Merlot	\$17.50	***	Medium	Dry	Lush berry nose, herbal accent, spicy oak notes; delicious berry flavors, green olive note; firm tannins; an attractive wine. Try with veal, Moroccan chicken with couscous.
1992 Rombauer Vineyards Napa Valley Merlot	\$23.50	***	Medium-Full	Dry	Concentrated blackberry nose, spicy oak notes; rich texture; good tannins and acidity; long fruity finish. Good with mixed grill, lamb with mint, roast chicken with herbs.
1992 Shafer Napa Valley Merlot	\$21	****	Medium-Full	Dry	Dense, fruity nose, herbal notes, smoky oak; rich palate texture, deep structure, firm tannins; a complete wine. Perfect with chicken with sage, rabbit stew, mixed grill.
1992 Silverado Vineyards Napa Valley Merlot	\$17.50	** ½	Medium	Dry	Hint of herbs under cherry-mint nose; bright fruit flavors, slightly herbal, cassis notes; big, soft tannins; firm finish. Good with beef fajitas, lamb kabobs, pork stew.
1992 Swanson Napa Valley Merlot	\$16	** ½	Medium	Dry	Plummy nose with spicy oak accents; rich texture, deep fruit flavors, touch of oak; full, soft tannins, good length. Good with lamb with rosemary, beef with peppercorns.
1992 Truchard Napa Valley Carneros Merlot	\$16	***	Medium-Full	Dry	Blackberry aroma with hint of mint; big, fruity flavors; rich palate texture, integrated tannins, long finish. Good with roast lamb and rosemary, steak with red peppers
1991 Vichon Napa Valley Merlot	\$16	** ½	Medium	Dry	Plummy nose with toasty oak notes; smoky, plum flavors with chocolate note; big tannins; good length. Perfect with lasagna, marinated beef with grilled mushrooms.

### ALTERNATIVE WHITE BARGAINS

*These California Rieslings and Chenin Blancs, described in a previous tasting, are good values at \$10 and less.*

1993 Alexander Vly Vnyds Alexander Valley Johannisberg Riesling	\$8	**	Medium	Semidry	Delicate floral-spicy aroma; ripe fruit flavors; medium intensity, good balancing acidity; short-medium finish. Try with chicken salad and raisins, tropical fruit salad.
1993 Beringer Napa Valley Chenin Blanc	\$7.50	**	Medium	Semidry	Sweet, spicy nose with ripe melons and peaches dominating; peachy flavors; good fruit-acid balance, round finish. Good with smoked fish, pate, picnic fare.
1993 Kendall-Jackson California Vintner's Reserve Riesling	\$9.50	** ½	Medium	Semidry	Ripe, fruity aroma, apricot-vanilla notes; spicy flavors, full fruit on palate, rich texture, balanced sweetness and acidity. Perfect with fruit, chicken curry, hard cheeses.
1993 Pine Ridge Napa Vly Yountville Cuvee Chenin Blanc	\$7.50	** ½	Light-Medium	Dry	Spicy aroma with subtle mineral accent; citrus, ripe pear flavors; balanced acidity, good texture and length. Try with smoked salmon, fruit and cheese, chicken salad.

*Panelists for the Napa Merlots were: Gerald D. Boyd, Chronicle wine-tasting coordinator; Michael Bauer, Chronicle food editor; Peter D. Granoff, M.S., wine consultant, Square One, San Francisco; Rebecca Murphy, executive director, AWARE; Wilfred Wong, wine consultant, Tower Market, San Francisco.*

#### RATING KEY

★★★★ Extraordinary ★★★ Excellent ★★ Good ★ Fair