

aftertaste. 13.5% alcohol; 25,500 cases; blended with 9% CF, 3% Merlot, and 1% PV; released September 2000. (Group Score: 15.0, 0/0/0; My Score: 15.5 [78/100], twelfth place)

True Ranking: [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8] [9, 10, 11, 12]

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## MERLOT

### New Releases

1. **1998 Niebaum-Coppola**, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$40) Medium ruby color; attractive, floral, cedary, spicy, sweet red cherry fruit aroma with a hint of lead pencil and vanilla; medium-full body; rich, fleshy, cedary, concentrated, ripe plum, blueberry, and red cherry fruit flavors with overtones of creamy oak; medium-full tannin; lingering aftertaste. Highly recommended. 14.1% alcohol; 1,622 cases; blended with 10% Cabernet Sauvignon (CS); released January 2001. (Group Score: 15.7 of 20 points, 4 of 13 first-place votes/2 seconds/2 thirds; My Score: 16.5 [87 of 100 points], fourth place)
2. **1997 Hanna**, "Bismark Ranch," Sonoma Valley (\$50)–Medium to medium-dark ruby; attractive, forward, intense, smoky, cedary, very ripe cherry fruit aroma with hints of coffee, chocolate, tobacco, and leather; medium-full to full body; rounded, cedary, chalky, sweet red cherry and berry fruit flavors; medium-full tannin; lingering aftertaste. Shows appealing fruit. Highly recommended. 15.0% alcohol; 1,474 cases; 100% Merlot; released July 2000. (Group Score: 15.7, 4/0/2; My Score: 16.5 [87/100], fifth place)
3. **1997 Artesa**, Sonoma Valley (\$24) – Medium brickish ruby; attractive, forward, herbal, plummy, sweet cherry fruit aroma with overtones of toasty oak; medium to medium-full body; forward, rich, supple, cherry fruit flavors; medium to medium-full tannin; lingering aftertaste. Easy to drink now. Highly recommended. 14.2% alcohol; 3,150 cases; 100% Merlot; released October 2000. (Group Score: 15.6, 2/3/1; My Score: 16.5 [88/100], second place)
4. **1997 Sterling Vineyards**, "Reserve," Napa Valley (\$70) Medium to medium-dark ruby; forward, spicy, herbal, plummy, cherry and raspberry fruit aroma with overtones of vanilla and a hint of coffee; medium-full body; rich, textured, toasty, plummy, ripe black cherry and raspberry fruit flavors with good depth and a hint of chocolate; medium-full tannin; lingering aftertaste. Highly recommended. 13.5% alcohol; 1,900 cases; 100% Merlot; released September 2000. (Group Score: 15.6, 0/1/3; My Score: 16.5 [88/100], third place)
5. **1997 Artesa**, Napa Valley (\$24)–Medium brickish ruby; attractive, forward, toasty, spicy, green olive and sweet cherry fruit aroma; medium-full body; rich, moderately concentrated herbal, cherry, and berry fruit flavors; medium-full tannin; slightly dry and tarrish on the finish; lingering aftertaste. Shows more concentration than their Sonoma Valley bottling but also is harsher. Highly recommended. 14.6% alcohol; 1,500 cases; 100% Merlot; released October 2000. (Group Score: 15.5, 0/0/0; My Score: 16.5 [87/100], sixth place)
6. **1998 Truchard**, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$32)–Medium-light to medium ruby; attractive, forward, spicy, sweet cherry and blueberry fruit aroma with notes of vanilla, green olive, and eucalyptus; medium-full body; forward, rich, ripe black cherry fruit flavors; medium to medium-full tannin; lingering aftertaste. Controversial with some tasters noting a slight barnyard-y, vegetal character with a hint of brett, though still

enjoyable to drink now. Highly recommended. 14.2% alcohol; 3,244 cases; blended with 24% CF; released February 2001. (Group Score: 15.5, 1/1/3; My Score: 16. [88/100], first place)

7. **1998 Blackstone**, Napa Valley (\$18)–Medium-light to medium ruby; pleasant, floral, earthy, cedary, plummy, cherry fruit aroma with overtones of charred oak; medium-full body tight, herbal, chalky, berry fruit flavors; medium-full tannin dry, rough finish; slightly lingering aftertaste. Recommended 13.5% alcohol; 18,900 cases; a blend of 88% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc (CF), and 3% CS; released May 2000 (Group Score: 15.5, 2/2/0; My Score: 16 [80/100], tenth place)
8. **1998 de Lorimier**, Alexander Valley (\$18) – Medium ruby; pleasant, floral, simple, cedary, spicy, sweet cherry fruit aroma; medium-full body; forward, cherry fruit flavors medium-full tannin; tart, dry finish; slightly lingering aftertaste. Recommended. 14.1% alcohol; 2,200 cases; 100% Merlot; released October 2000. (Group Score: 15.2, 0/1/0; My Score: 16 [82/100], ninth place)
9. **1998 Albini Family Vineyards**, Russian River Valley (\$25)–Medium ruby; pleasant, forward, floral, herbal, cherry fruit aroma with notes of tobacco and charred oak; medium-full body; tight, tart, herbal, briary, toasty, cherry fruit flavors; medium-full tannin; hard, tight, tart, herbal finish; slightly lingering aftertaste. Recommended. 13.8% alcohol; 420 cases; 100% Merlot; released November 2000. (Group Score: 15.2, 0/2/0; My Score: 16 [84/100], seventh place)
10. **1998 Hagafen**, Napa Valley (\$27)–Medium-light ruby; pleasant, floral, earthy, black cherry fruit aroma with hints of charred oak; medium-full body; tight, tart, herbal, cedary, green olive flavors; medium to medium-full tannin; dry finish; lingering aftertaste. Recommended. 12.5% alcohol; 1,450 cases; blended with 5% CS and 5% CF; released July 2000. (Group Score: 15.1, 0/0/0; My Score: 16 [83/100], eighth place)
11. **1998 Vine Cliff Winery**, Napa Valley (\$35)–Medium to medium-dark ruby; forward, earthy, stemmy, slightly plummy, red cherry fruit aroma with notes of bell pepper and charred oak; full body; big, moderately concentrated, high-extract, cedary, herbal, slightly vegetal, ripe red currant flavors; medium-full tannin; slightly bitter on the finish; lingering aftertaste. Recommended. 14.2% alcohol; 2,975 cases; 100% Merlot; released January 2001. (Group Score: 15.1, 0/0/1; My Score: 16 [80/100], eleventh place)
12. **1998 Decoy**, "Migration," Napa Valley (\$20)–Medium-dark ruby; forward, floral, spicy, toasty, sweet red berry fruit aroma; medium-full to full body; dense, cedary, leathery, chalky, slightly port-like, creamy, very ripe grape flavors that are lacking a bit in structure; lingering aftertaste. 14.7% alcohol; 1,658 cases; blended with 11% CS and 7% CF; released September 2000. (Group Score: 15.0, 0/1/1; My Score: 15.5 [78/100], twelfth place)

True Ranking: [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7] [8, 9, 10, 11, 12]

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## MOVING?

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