

RHÔNE VALLEY STARS • MERLOT VALUES • EMERIL'S HOLIDAY FEAST

# Wine Spectator

www.winespectator.com



## CORINNE MENTZELOPOULOS

THREE DECADES AT  
THE HELM OF  
CHÂTEAU MARGAUX

PLUS:  
AN EXCLUSIVE TASTING  
SPANNING MORE THAN 40 VINTAGES

NOV. 30, 2014  
\$5.99 US



# Tim Fish's Recommended California Merlots

More than 130 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at [www.winespectator.com/113014](http://www.winespectator.com/113014). WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

## TOP WINES

| WINE   | SCORE | PRICE |
|--|-------|-------|
| <b>DANCING HARES</b> Napa Valley 2011  | 93    | \$150 |
| Dense and decadent, with rich, mocha-covered currant and blackberry flavors, showing fresh black licorice, cedar and dried herb notes. Finishes with tight, gripping tannins, but the flavors push through.        |       |       |
| <b>PAHLMAYER</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2012   | 93    | \$85  |
| An unapologetically plump and flamboyant style that offers pure pleasure. Blackberry and spicy toast aromas lead to rich, complex flavors of black cherry and mocha, with a hint of dry herb.                      |       |       |
| <b>TERRA VALENTINE</b> Merlot Spring Mountain District 2011  | 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.  |       |       |
| <b>LEWIS</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2012   | 92    | \$75  |
| A rich and plush Merlot, with lovely black cherry and mocha aromas that lead to ripe, well-structured flavors of blackberry and vanilla, finishing with polished tannins.  |       |       |
| <b>PALOMA</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2010  | 92    | \$54  |
| Plush, with red currant and toasty oak aromas and rich black cherry, mocha and olive flavors that finish with supple tannins.  |       |       |
| <b>REALM</b> The Tempest Napa Valley 2011  | 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.                              |       |       |
| <b>SHAFFER</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2012   | 92    | \$52  |
| Sleek and supple, this is exactly the style of Merlot that made the wine so popular. Floral red currant and cinnamon spice aromas lead to rich, ripe flavors of black cherry and toasty oak, with a hint of earth. |       |       |
| <b>CHIMNEY ROCK</b> Elevage Stags Leap District 2011   | 91    | \$95  |
| Dense and layered, this is built for the cellar. Bold black currant aromas combine with rich, muscular flavors of black cherry, mineral and pencil lead, framed by firm tannins.                                   |       |       |
| <b>DUCKHORN</b> Merlot Napa Valley Three Palms Vineyard 2011   | 91    | \$95  |
| Impressively structured, with floral aromas of black cherry, toasty spice and cedar, and dense, layered flavors of red currant, dried herb and spice. An excellent Merlot in a tough vintage.                      |       |       |
| <b>ROBERT FOLEY</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2011  | 91    | \$52  |
| Sleek and fleshy, with vibrant black cherry and toasty oak aromas and soft but well-structured flavors of red currant, herb and mocha. An excellent Merlot in a challenging year.                                  |       |       |
| <b>FROSTWATCH</b> Merlot Bennett Valley 2011   | 91    | \$30  |
| Combining finesse and structure, this sleek red offers floral black cherry and toasty spice aromas, with layered flavors of red currant, dusty herb and mineral.   |       |       |
| <b>PRIDE</b> Claret Reserve Sonoma-Napa Counties 2010  | 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.   |       |       |
| <b>RUTHERFORD HILL</b> Barrel Select Napa Valley 2011  | 91    | \$35  |
| Sleek and well-structured, no easy feat for 2011. Aromas of black cherry, tomato leaf and mocha open to fleshy flavors that wrap around a core of balanced tannins and acidity.                                    |       |       |

## TOP WINES (continued)

| WINE   | SCORE | PRICE |
|--|-------|-------|
| <b>TURNBULL</b> Merlot Oakville Fortuna Vineyard 2010  | 91    | \$55  |
| Features a firm backbone wrapped in a supple package. Aromas of black cherry are followed by rich flavors of currant, herb and mocha, tightening up on the finish, with dusty tannins. |       |       |
| <b>NICKEL &amp; NICKEL</b> Merlot Oakville Harris Vineyard 2010  | 90    | \$53  |
| Tightly focused and well-balanced, with appealing red currant and tomato leaf aromas and trim flavors of cherry, cedar and herb.   |       |       |
| <b>WHITEHALL LANE</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2012  | 90    | \$28  |
| Soft and supple, with floral and toasty black cherry aromas and easygoing red currant and spicy vanilla flavors.   |       |       |

## TOP VALUES

| WINE  | SCORE | PRICE |
|---|-------|-------|
| <b>MARKHAM</b> Cellar 1879 Blend Napa Valley 2012   | 90    | \$25  |
| A supple but zesty blend, offering black cherry and spice aromas and softly layered flavors of ripe blueberry, chocolate and orange zest. |       |       |
| <b>GOLDSCHMIDT</b> Merlot Alexander Valley Chelsea Goldschmidt 2012   | 89    | \$18  |
| Bright cherry aromas lead to crisp, lively flavors of red currant, mineral and dusty herb.  |       |       |
| <b>MARKHAM</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2012  | 89    | \$25  |
| Supple and zesty up front, with aromas and flavors of ripe red currant and toasty spice that take on structure and tannins on the finish. |       |       |
| <b>BOGLE</b> Merlot California 2012   | 88    | \$10  |
| Supple, with appealing flavors of black cherry, oak and herb.   |       |       |
| <b>HESS SELECT</b> Treo Winemaker's Blend California 2010   | 88    | \$17  |
| Delivers appealing notes of red currant, tomato leaf and caramel.   |       |       |
| <b>CHARLES KRUG</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2011   | 88    | \$25  |
| Sleek and well-focused, with easygoing red currant and spice flavors.   |       |       |
| <b>OBERON</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2012   | 88    | \$22  |
| Soft and easy-drinking, with notes of red currant and toasty spice.   |       |       |
| <b>ST. FRANCIS</b> Merlot Sonoma Valley 2011  | 88    | \$20  |
| Aromas of currant, cedar and tomato lead to cherry and herb flavors.  |       |       |
| <b>TRIG POINT</b> Merlot Alexander Valley Diamond Dust Vineyard 2012  | 88    | \$19  |
| Lively and well-focused, with red currant flavors and a zesty backbone.   |       |       |
| <b>ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS</b> Merlot Alexander Valley 2011  | 87    | \$20  |
| Currant and tomato leaf aromas lead to flavors of cherry, cedar and herb.   |       |       |
| <b>DECOY</b> Merlot Sonoma County 2012  | 87    | \$25  |
| Rather plush and jammy, with notes of cherry pie and caramel.   |       |       |
| <b>PEDRONCELLI</b> Merlot Dry Creek Valley Bench Vineyards 2012   | 87    | \$16  |
| Offers easygoing flavors of cherry, spice and sweet, ripe tomato.   |       |       |
| <b>ROOTS RUN DEEP</b> Merlot Napa Valley Educated Guess 2012  | 87    | \$20  |
| An easygoing quaff, with ripe cherry, dried herb and spice flavors.   |       |       |
| <b>BENZIGER</b> Merlot Sonoma County 2011   | 86    | \$19  |
| Soft and easygoing, with appealing cherry and herb flavors.   |       |       |
| <b>FIDELITY</b> Crazy Creek Estate Alexander Valley 2012  | 86    | \$15  |
| Features a firm backbone, with notes of cherry, chocolate and herb.   |       |       |
| <b>IRONSTONE</b> Obsession Red California 2011  | 86    | \$15  |
| Ripe and zesty, with soft, modest red currant and herb flavors.   |       |       |