

Wine

Great values

1 Columbia Crest
8 Walnut Crest



Merlot

Our Ratings of merlot, still one of the biggest-selling red wines, serve to bust two persistent myths about buying everyday wines. The first myth is that vintage matters much for bottles in the \$20-and-under price range. Several of our recommended Quick Picks, including Yellow Tail and Bogle, have been repeat high performers in our tests over the years, illustrating their typical dependability.

The other myth is that you need to spend a lot of money to get a good wine. All of our Quick Picks are CR Best Buys, exceptional values that cost \$10 or so a bottle. Notice that some \$20 and \$30 merlots scored comparably to the bargain bottles, or even below some of them.

All of the Quick Picks, like most better merlots, are rich wines. They pair especially well with meats such as char-grilled steak, shish kebab, barbecued ribs, and roasts, and with other rich, fatty foods, including lasagna and cheese.

QUICK PICKS

1 Columbia Crest \$11, CR Best Buy

Rich, full flavors. Good structure—balancing of fruit, acid, tannin, and alcohol—with fuller body and a longer finish than most.

5 Yellow Tail \$8, CR Best Buy

Intense fruit, with some wood notes and solid structure. Fuller bodied.

6 Bogle \$9, CR Best Buy

Nice assortment of fruit and spice flavors, with a solid structure.

8 Walnut Crest \$6, CR Best Buy

Clean, very noticeable acidity and a nice expression of fruit. Lacks the vanilla and licorice notes of most of the others, but adds a smoky/char element.

11 Delicato \$18, CR Best Buy

With most samples, mouth-filling fruit flavors well integrated with oaky flavors. On the simple side; it lacks the vanilla and licorice notes of most of the other picks, for example. One sample had some off-notes. In 3-liter, vacuum-sealed box with spigot; cost is the equivalent of \$4.50 per 750-ml bottle.

Ratings

Ranked in descending order of quality. Blue key numbers indicate Quick Picks.

	Wine & vintage	Price	Style	Notable aromas				
Key number	Availability Some wines will come out in a new vintage as we publish. Try the new vintage if you can't find the tested one.							
			Fruity	Woody	Black fruit	Smoky/char	Tobacco/leather	
		EXCELLENT Quite well balanced, and more complex than others.						
	1	Columbia Crest Grand Estates Columbia Valley (WA) 2004	\$11	•	•	•	•	•
		VERY GOOD Balanced, but a bit less complex.						
	2	Casa Lapostolle Cuyee Alexandre Apalla Vineyard (Chile) 2005	23	•	•	•	•	•
	3	Sebastiani Sonoma 2003	17	•	•	•	•	•
	4	Swanson Vineyards Oakville Napa 2003	34	•	•	•	•	•
	5	Yellow Tail (Australia) 2006	8	•	•	•	•	•
	6	Bogle Vineyards 2005	9	•	•	•	•	•
	7	Clos du Bois Reserve Alexander Valley 2004	22	•	•	•	•	•
	8	Walnut Crest Rapel Valley (Chile) 2005	6	•	•	•	•	•
	9	Concha y Toro Marques de Casa Concha (Chile) 2004	19	•	•	•	•	•
	10	Gallo Family Vineyards Reserve Sonoma 2003	15	•	•	•	•	•
	11	Delicato Bota Box 2005	18	•	•	•	•	•
	12	Yellow Tail The Reserve (Australia) 2005	10	•	•	•	•	•
	13	Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo (Chile) 2005	9	•	•	•	•	•
	14	Casa Lapostolle Rapel Valley (Chile) 2005	12	•	•	•	•	•
	15	Clos du Bois North Coast 2004	18	•	•	•	•	•
		GOOD Generally a little less balanced, complex, and/or intense.						
	16	Bella Sera Delle Venezie (Italy) 2005	8	•	•	•	•	•
17	Robert Mondavi Private Selection 2005	11	•	•	•	•	•	
18	Black Box 2004	18	•	•	•	•	•	
19	Montes Montes Classic Series (Chile) 2005	12	•	•	•	•	•	
20	Jacob's Creek (Australia) 2005	8	•	•	•	•	•	
21	Chateau Ste. Michelle Columbia Valley (WA) 2003	16	•	•	•	•	•	

1. Price is for a 3-liter box, the equivalent of four 750-ml bottles.

Riesling

If you think wine must be dry to be sophisticated, try a good bottle of Riesling. In the first CONSUMER REPORTS test of this increasingly popular white wine, practically all of the bottles were off-dry or moderately sweet. None rated excellent overall, but a dozen qualified as very good.

Those wines that Rated very good are less complex than the best chardonnays, but they are well balanced despite their often-intense fruit

flavors, and they offer superb value. Half of the better Rieslings cost under \$10.

With their combination of fruit notes and pleasing acidity, Rieslings can go well with spicy Asian dishes, especially those with a sweet or sweet-and-sour component; roast chicken and pork loin; grilled sausages and seafood; seafood in cream sauce; and fruit and cheese plates. They're also fine choices as an aperitif.



1 Covey Run
3 Columbia Crest

QUICK PICKS

- 1 Covey Run** \$8, CR Best Buy
A nice range of classic Riesling (stone fruit and citrus) flavors and an exceptional value.
- 3 Columbia Crest Two Vines** \$8, CR Best Buy
Sweet, dessert-style wine with fruit balanced by acid.
- 6 Hogue** \$9
Sweet, ripe fruit flavors with enough acid to provide balance. You could try this as a dessert wine.
- 7 Chateau Ste. Michelle** \$9
Vibrant acidity, with a nice array of fruit flavors.

Ratings

Ranked in descending order of quality. Blue key numbers indicate Quick Picks.

Key number	Wine and vintage	Price	Sweetness			Notable aromas		
			Dry	Off-dry	Moderately sweet	Tropical fruit	Citrus	Stone fruit/peach
<i>VERY GOOD</i> Generally well balanced, with the highest fruit intensity and some distinctive Riesling notes.								
1	Covey Run Columbia Valley (WA) 2005	\$ 8	*	*	*	*	*	*
2	St. Urbans-Hof (Germany) 2005	12	*	*	*	*	*	*
3	Columbia Crest Two Vines Columbia Valley (WA) 2005 Columbia Valley	8	*	*	*	*	*	*
4	Columbia Winery Cellarmasters Columbia Valley (WA) 2005	12	*	*	*	*	*	*
5	Chateau Ste. Michelle & Dr. L Eroica (WA) 2005	22	*	*	*	*	*	*
6	Hogue Columbia Valley (WA) 2005	9	*	*	*	*	*	*
7	Chateau Ste. Michelle Columbia Valley (WA) 2005	9	*	*	*	*	*	*
8	Snoqualmie Vineyards Winemaker's Select Columbia Valley (WA) 2005	7	*	*	*	*	*	*
9	Willamette Valley Vineyards (OR) 2005	12	*	*	*	*	*	*
10	Cavit (Italy) 2005	9	*	*	*	*	*	*
11	Dr. L Loosen Bros. (Germany) 2005	12	*	*	*	*	*	*
12	Kendall-Jackson Vintner's Reserve 2005	10	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>GOOD</i> Generally less complex, with less fruit intensity, and more generic fruit notes.								
13	Beringer 2005	7	*	*	*	*	*	*
14	Hogue Late Harvest White (WA) 2005	9	*	*	*	*	*	*
15	Blue Fish (Germany) 2005	10	*	*	*	*	*	*
16	Jacob's Creek (Australia) 2005	8	*	*	*	*	*	*
17	Lindemans Bin 75 (Australia) 2005	8	*	*	*	*	*	*
18	Yellow Tail (Australia) 2005	7	*	*	*	*	*	*
19	Schmitt Sohne Relax (Germany) 2005	10	*	*	*	*	*	*
20	Schmitt Sohne ObA (Germany) 2005	9	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>FAIR</i> Simple, low intensity with some off-notes.								
21	Jacob's Creek Reserve (Australia) 2004	13	*	*	*	*	*	*
22	Trimbach (France) 2004	17-19	*	*	*	*	*	*

Prosecco

This Italian sparkling wine is to champagne what a top-notch Italian family-style restaurant is to a fancy French one: a simpler, less austere, and more relaxed experience. Compared with champagne, prosecco has softer bubbles and is generally more fruity, less dry, and less complex. Like champagne, it usually lacks a vintage year, because it may blend wines from several harvests. It pairs well with many foods, including finger foods and sushi.

None of the five proseccos we tested was excellent overall, but two stood out for a pleasing fruit character.

QUICK PICKS

- I Nino Franco Rustico Brut** \$18
Very good; the best prosecco we tested. Crisp/tart and refreshing with a nice array of fruit.
- II Prosecco** \$10
Shown above, it's the best value among the four good proseccos we tested. A little less bubbly, crisp, and tart than the Nino Franco, but with flavorful fruit notes and smoothness on the palate. Some bottle-to-bottle variation in quality; try to buy it in stores where bottles are more likely to be sold quickly.

Sauvignon blanc

All the best sauvignon blancs in our Ratings are from New Zealand. That demonstrates how what wine types call a "new world" country can take a varietal that Europeans or Americans once dominated and do it better, at least at prices below \$20.

This white wine is on the tart, acidic side. It's generally dry and has herb flavors and notes of tropical and citrus fruits such as banana, melon, and mango. It pairs well with poultry dishes, including roasted chicken and turkey with herbs; pasta in cream sauce; baked fish; and grilled shrimp, raw bar, and steamed clams and mussels. It also works well with spicy Asian food and Spanish tapas, or as an aperitif.

All of the excellent sauvignon blancs in our Ratings are sealed by screw caps, which eliminates "corkiness," a musty off-taste a wine can acquire when it's sealed with a wood cork.

QUICK PICKS

1 Mud House \$14, CR Best Buy

Full, complex, and intense New World style with classic tropical fruit and herb notes, and mouth-watering acidity.

2 Kim Crawford \$17

Complex, intense aromas—including grapefruit—with distinctive varietal notes, and very crisp acidity.

3 Coopers Creek \$13, CR Best Buy

Delivers a punch with spicy full flavors; crisp acidity, and intense aromas, including grapefruit.

4 Drylands \$15

Intense aromas of a variety of fruits, including grapefruit, along with herbal flavors and crisp acidity.

7 Shepherds Ridge \$11, CR Best Buy

Classic sauvignon blanc components, with fruit-salad flavors, including grapefruit. This wine has an herbal edge and a lively acidity.

8 Matua Valley \$12, CR Best Buy

Crisp acidity. Tart with attractive fruit aromas and flavors, though it could use a bit more intensity to balance the acid.

11 Monkey Bay \$11, CR Best Buy

Ripe tropical fruit and wood notes, with honey-like finish. We found some quality variation among bottles.

Guide to the Ratings

Ratings are based on each wine's quality, defined largely by its adherence to the classic attributes that define excellence for its varietal. Wines were judged by two experts in blind tastings of multiple bottles of each wine. Wines were made in California unless otherwise noted. **Vintage** is the year, as listed on the label, when at least 95 percent of the grapes were harvested. All the wines can be consumed now but should also keep well for a couple of years. **Style** delineates a taste profile; a dot in more than one column indicates the wine mixed both styles. **Sweetness**, in Riesling and sauvignon blanc, can range from bone dry to off-dry (slightly sweet) to cloyingly sweet. **Notable aromas** are aromas that may distinguish one wine from another. **Price** is manufacturer's suggested retail price for a 750-ml bottle, except as noted. Wines may sell for somewhat less.

Ratings

1 Mud House
3 Cooper's Creek



Ranked in descending order of quality. Blue key numbers indicate Quick Picks.

	Wine & vintage	Price	Sweetness	Notable aromas				
	Availability Some wines will come out in a new vintage as we publish. Try the new vintage if you can't find the tested one.							
Key number			Dry	Off-dry	Tropical fruit	Citrus	Herbaceous/grassy	Gooseberry
	EXCELLENT Moderately complex, well balanced. Distinctive sauvignon blanc character and crisp acidity (tartness).							
1	Mud House Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	\$14	•••••	•	•	•	•	•
2	Kim Crawford Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	17	•	•	•	•	•	•
3	Coopers Creek Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	13	•	•	•	•	•	•
4	Drylands Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	15	•	•	•	•	•	•
	VERY GOOD Less complex and less balanced, with fewer sauvignon blanc characteristics.							
5	Cloudy Bay Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	26	•	•	•	•	•	•
6	Villa Maria Private Bin Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	15	•	•	•	•	•	•
7	Shepherds Ridge Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	11	•	•	•	•	•	•
8	Matua Valley (New Zealand) 2006	12	•	•	•	•	•	•
9	Babich Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	14	•	•	•	•	•	•
10	Jackson Estate Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (New Zealand) 2005	19	•	•	•	•	•	•
11	Monkey Bay Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	11	•	•	•	•	•	•
	GOOD Less balanced, often with less intensity of flavor. Lower-rated wines are on the simple side.							
12	Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo (Chile) 2006	9	•	•	•	•	•	•
13	St. Supery Napa Valley 2005	20	•	•	•	•	•	•
14	Allan Scott Marlborough (New Zealand) 2005	14	•	•	•	•	•	•
15	House of Nobilo Regional Collection Marlborough (New Zealand) 2006	12	•	•	•	•	•	•
16	Fetzer Vineyards Valley Oaks 2005	9	•	•	•	•	•	•
17	Shaw and Smith Adelaide Hills (Australia) 2005	21	•	•	•	•	•	•
18	Beringer Napa Valley 2005	15	•	•	•	•	•	•
19	Sterling Vineyards Napa Valley 2005	14	•	•	•	•	•	•
20	Chateau Ste. Michelle Columbia Valley (WA) 2004	10	•	•	•	•	•	•
21	Veramonte Casablanca Valley (Chile) 2005	10	•	•	•	•	•	•
22	Snoqualmie Columbia Valley (WA) 2005	7	•	•	•	•	•	•
23	Blackstone Monterey County 2005	12	•	•	•	•	•	•
24	Covey Run Columbia Valley (WA) 2004	9	•	•	•	•	•	•
25	Groth Napa Valley 2005	18	•	•	•	•	•	•
26	Columbia Crest Two Vines Columbia Valley (WA) 2004	8	•	•	•	•	•	•