

# Forget snobbish 'Sideways' — merlot hasn't died, after

THE WINE GUY

able among "serious" wine drinkers to disparage merlot as an easygoing drink for beginners, an argument reinforced in the movie.

The darling of the wine industry suddenly bottomed in popularity, and sales stagnated. It seemed like every industry publication ran an article on the rise and fall of merlot. But reports of merlot's death have been greatly exaggerated. It now appears that consumers are still enthusiastic about merlot, particularly those under \$20, according to the "Wine Opinions" Survey. In fact, the survey concluded that stagnation in merlot sales might have had as much to do with the wine industry's marketing practices as with consumer preference. And sales data show that



**RICH MAURO**  
Gazette wine columnist

merlot is still the most popular red wine in America.

Truthfully, much of the merlot on the market in the '90s was lackluster and uninteresting. Mostly, this was the result of attempts to capitalize on consumer interest with mass plantings in poorly suited sites and with industrial production. Of course, quality merlot always has been available from responsible producers who focused on the best sites to plant the grape, as well as careful growing and winemaking techniques. Don't forget, merlot is the dominant grape in the Bordeaux wines from Pomerol and St. Emilion, where it is responsible for countless great wines. Some recommendations:

matches with food.

- 2002 B&G St. Emilion (\$15)
- 2003 Christian Moueix Bordeaux Merlot (\$15)
- 2003 J.P. Moueix St. Emilion (\$15)
- 2001 Chateau la Grave a Pomerol (\$42)

## WASHINGTON WINES

In the U.S., Washington State built much of its skyrocketing reputation in the 1990s on merlot. In my tastings, five out of five made the cut, including a 1999 Seven Hills Columbia Valley Klipsun Vineyard, which was included as a ringer (and is no longer available). The Leonetti was the top wine of the tasting.

- 2003 Covey Run Columbia Valley (\$9)
- 2002 Foolish Oak Columbia Valley (\$11)
- 2002 Canoe Ridge Columbia Valley Estate Grown (\$20)
- 2004 Leonetti Columbia Valley (\$60)

## CALIFORNIA WINES

California, not surprisingly, supplied the vast majority of the wines tasted over the past several months. I found 17 out of 40 worth recommending.

Great for everyday drinking:

- Expect smooth texture, medium body and forward fruit. The Bonterra was a lot of wine for the money — pure cherry and currant, with depth and smooth tannins — and one of the stars of the tasting at any price.
- 2003 Sterling Vinthner's Collection (\$15)
- 2002 Bonterra Mendocino County Organic (\$15)
- 2001 Grand Archer Sonoma County (\$16)
- 2002 Sebastiani Sonoma County (\$17)
- 2002 Napa Cellars Napa Valley (\$20)

A lot of wine for a little more money:

Expect more fruit and character from all these wines, but especially the full-bodied Kenwood, from a winery better known for its cabernet, and the Dashe, from a winery better known for its zinfandel.

- 2003 Sterling Napa Valley (\$22)
- 2003 Clos du Val Napa Valley (\$25)
- 2002 Kenwood Sonoma Valley Reserve (\$25)
- 2003 Kendall-Jackson Grand Reserve (\$26)

● 2002 Dashe Iron Oak Vineyard  
Higher prices are justified:

When done right, yields a rich wine with fruit, layers of complexity and a structure and a bite that, say cabernet than, say cabernet some can age 10-plus years, though this comes in, such as a wine that combines these qualities in a balanced whole.

- 2002 Proven Valley Oak Knoll ar (\$35)
- 2001 Mayace Valley (\$35)
- 2002 Grigich Valley Estate Grown
- 2001 Arrowood County Unifined & (\$42)
- 2002 Steriti Palms Vineyard (\$55)
- 2002 HDV Carr Valley Red Wine (\$66)
- 2002 Duckhorn Palms Vineyard (\$86)

Contact Rich Mauro or write to him  
The Gazette, P.O. Box  
Colorado Springs

## Fibromyalgia

RESEARCH STUDY at the LYNN INSTITUTE

Do you have certain tender points on your body? Do you toss and turn at night and then wake up feeling tired and stiff? If so you may suffer from Fibromyalgia.

The Lynn Institute is conducting a research study of an investigational medication for the treatment of Fibromyalgia. Qualified participants who are between the ages of 18 and 70 years old will receive study-related exams, study medication free of charge plus financial compensation for travel.

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