

## WINES MADE USING THE MERLOT GRAPE

Merlot is, by far, the most widely planted red grape in France. It is in fact the most widely planted grape in Bordeaux, which many people think of as Cabernet Sauvignon territory. Merlot is California's second most-planted red grape, and is also planted to substantial acreage in Washington, and appears in New York, Michigan, Idaho and, of course, Texas. Over the world, Merlot is widely planted in Italy, and has significant presence in Australia, Spain, South Africa and Chile.

For a variety of reasons, demand for Merlot "took off" in the 1990s. Those reasons were probably rooted in the marked increase of interest in red wine after Ed Bradley's *60 Minutes* piece on the "French Paradox." Merlot benefited from being easy to pronounce, easier to drink young than Cabernet Sauvignon, and less costly to produce as a varietal since it could be drunk young. However, as producers sought to meet rising demand, quality did drop and fairly quickly much really bad Merlot was sold in the late 1990s. Enough time has passed to achieve equilibrium of supply and demand now, so the "true" level of quality is what is now available. That quality is quite high for the price, as Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir took the (U.S.) varietal spotlight for a decade. Some brilliant, and costly, Merlot is made around the world.

The most expensive Bordeaux wine label contains about 95% Merlot: **Petrus. Le Pin** is 100% Merlot. In addition, these great Bordeaux estates use mostly Merlot in the blend: **Clinet, L'Eglise-Clinet, Pavie, Magdelaine, Canon, Certan de May**. Italy's Tuscany produces three fabulous wines using (usually) 100% Merlot: Fattoria [Petrolo Galatrona](#) (WA95), Tenuta dell'[Ornellaia Masseto](#) (WA99) and [Tua Rita Redigaffi](#) (WA97) (with scores by *Wine Advocate* for the 2006 vintage in parentheses – click on the links and see the difference in price of wines with 95, 97 and 99 points).

[Catalan](#) has this Merlot I recommend: 2007 **Plumpjack** Napa California \$79; [Block 7](#) has one 48% Merlot I really recommend: 2006 **Cadence Winery** "Bel Canto" Columbia Valley Washington \$63; at *Spec's*: 2006 **Chateau Ste Michelle Canoe Ridge** Columbia Valley Washington \$22, 2005 **Pahlmeyer** Napa California \$80, 2004 **Craneford** Merlot Barossa Valley South Australia \$28, 2006 **Neyers Merlot Neyers Ranch** Conn Valley California \$36, 1998 **Clos L'Eglise** Pomerol Bordeaux France \$125, 1999 **Pavie** Pomerol Bordeaux France \$145; at *Houston Wine Merchant*: 2006 **Anderson's Conn Valley Right Bank** Red Napa California \$60, 2006 Chateau **Hosanna** Pomerol Bordeaux France \$150, 2006 Château **Pipeau** St. Emillion Bordeaux France \$35.

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