

Advantage Merlot

When Miles announced in the oft-quoted scene from the film *Sideways*, “If anyone orders Merlot, I’m leaving. I am not drinking any f—ing Merlot,” sales of the varietal plummeted throughout the US. Or so the wine press would have you believe. Suddenly, America’s favorite red wine is also its most uncool. The reality (as is often the case with wine) is quite a bit different.

Even in the 90s—during the heyday of California Merlot—there were many involved in spreading misinformation. Despite the fact that Merlot is by far the most widely planted varietal in Bordeaux, the lie circulated then was that the grape was used typically as a “blending” grape in order to “soften” Cabernet Sauvignon. Other lies? Merlot was “fruitier” than Cabernet, “lighter” than Cabernet, “sweeter” than Cabernet. All lies.

The Merlot boom created a backlash of Merlot haters. Since the marketplace was screaming for Merlot, acres of the varietal were planted where they shouldn’t be. The grape can be quite vigorous, but over-production translates into insipid wine. So thousands of gallons of dull, forgettable Merlot were being produced every year. The (false) marketing message of a softer-, fruitier-, and sweeter-than-Cab wine had producers trying to make it so. They failed. And finally, many despised Merlot simply because of its popularity.

The truth is that Merlot is a very close cousin to the regal Cabernet Sauvignon. While it can be slightly less acidic than Cab, due to its thinner skin, it often competes very nicely, *mano a mano*, in blind tastings. It’s the basis of some of the most esteemed wines in the world. Pétrus? 90% Merlot. Pavie? 55% Merlot. Palmer? 60% Merlot. LaFleur? 60% Merlot. L’Évangile? 65% Merlot. Clos L’Église? 60% Merlot. And, according to ACNielsen, in December 2005 Merlot sales were up 4.5 percent by volume over the past year. Take THAT, Miles! (Uh, another fact: the wine that Miles most treasures in *Sideways*, Château Cheval Blanc, is a blend of Merlot and another varietal he slams, Cabernet Franc.)

People drink Merlot because it tastes good, not because of what it’s not. Big, ripe, juicy, friendly Merlots are easy to like. Structured, tannic, age-worthy Merlots can be delightful, even when young. Some Merlots are great. Some suck. Ditto every wine in the world. No single grape holds the exclusive on “bad wine.”

Let’s face it—we’re all a little new to wine. We have a tendency to “discover” a new wine and then, perhaps, over do it. Before we know it, that wine that we used to love to distraction is old hat, passé, yesterday’s news. But before you dump all your Merlot, ask yourself one question: Does it *taste* good? [PW]

**2001 Paul Hobbs Merlot
“Michael Black Vineyard”
Napa Valley, California
Reg. Price: \$74.99
Wine Source Price: \$59.99**

To those who suggest that Merlot is merely some junior-level Cab for the faint of heart, I offer the Hobbs “Michael Black Vineyard” Merlot as exhibit one. Dense, chewy, chocolately, and rich, this Merlot will bury many a Cab. Add in espresso and black cherry notes and a firm tannic structure and you get a wine that is far more complex, age-worthy, and a damn sight more interesting than most. Of course, it’s made by Paul Hobbs—one of the most talented winemakers in California—from an old vine Merlot vineyard in Coombsville. Go ahead; tell me that THIS wine is softer than Cabernet! [PW]



Merlot is NOT a dirty word!

Free Weekend Wine Tasting

Friday, January 13, 4 to 7 pm

Saturday, January 14, 1 to 5 pm

2003 Pierre Henri Merlot

Languedoc, France

Reg. Price: \$8.99

Wine Source Price: \$6.99

A common wine myth is that good, cheap Merlot is an oxymoron. This wine will change your mind about that one! Ripe, fresh, smooth and easy...I'm not sure what is better about this wine, the incredible price or the incredible flavor. OK, so it's not age-worthy, but you need to drink *something* while you wait for the Paul Hobbs and Hugh Hamilton to come around! [PW]

2002 Clos Du Val Napa Valley Merlot

Napa Valley, California

Reg. Price: \$24.99

Wine Source Price: \$19.99

Founded in 1972 as a venture between an American businessman and a French winemaker, Clos Du Val is a winery with a sense of history. The wines produced by this Stag's Leap District-based operation are staggeringly powerful yet simultaneously elegant. The 2002 Napa Valley Merlot features ripe blackberry fruit both in the nose and on the complex, structured palate, alongside pretty, herbal components. The wine possesses a long, strong finish. Return to the olden days of Napa Valley winemaking with this gem. [IAS]



2003 Elena Walch Merlot

Alto Adige, Italy

Reg. Price: \$18.99

Wine Source Price: \$14.99

It is time for me to admit some hard truths: I am a complete sucker for cool climate Merlot. So what if it doesn't have the intensity of ripe, fatter styled New-World Merlot? And who cares if it doesn't have the same age-worthiness of more traditional left bank Bordeaux? What can I say—love is blind. This particular example from the North Italian outpost of Alto Adige is simply brilliant. What at first seems like a straightforward light wine expands to reveal all kinds of pleasant vegetal and herbal notes not always found in an under-\$20 bottle. If you're looking for a whole different kind of Merlot experience, this is your wine. [IAS]

2003 Château Marjosse Bordeaux Rouge

Bordeaux, France

Reg. Price: \$17.99

Wine Source Price: \$13.99

The wines of Château Marjosse are made south-east of Bordeaux proper in the Entre-Deux-Mers region, which means "between two seas" and signifies the location of Marjosse's vineyards between the mighty rivers Garonne and Dordogne. The '03 Bordeaux Rouge—a Merlot-based blend—is made by Pierre Lurton, the famous winemaker at illustrious 1st Growth Château Cheval Blanc in St. Emilion. While this wine is not quite as complex as its legendary cousin, it is nonetheless compelling, offering a superb balance between bright fruit and expressive earthiness. An impressive entry-level Bordeaux and a fine example of Merlot from the land where it is perhaps most at home. [IAS]

**Wine had such ill effects on Noah's health that it was all he could do to live 950 years.
Show me a total abstainer who ever lived that long.**

--Will Rogers

2002 Andrew Will Merlot "Cuvée Lucia"

Washington State

Reg. Price: \$29.99

Wine Source Price: \$14.99

Washington State wines are still under appreciated by the masses; this wine will go a long way towards opening people's eyes. Owner Chris Camarda, whose primary focus has always been the vineyard, makes the "Cuvée Lucia" Merlot from four acclaimed sites in the Columbia Valley: the Ciel du Cheval, Champoux, Klipsun, and Sheridan vineyards. The wine offers a full spectrum of berry and floral scents followed by a rich mouthful of blackberries, plums, and herbs. Bold, dense, yet accessible...drink this wine now. Tonight. [PW]

2003 Falesco Pesano Merlot

Umbria, Italy

Reg. Price: \$14.99

Wine Source Price: \$11.99

At some point a meeting must have been held where it was decided that Merlot was to be made in a full bodied, inky style that stained your teeth and overwhelmed the food on your table. Well, Falesco was absent that day. Instead, this acclaimed Italian producer makes a soft, light, friendly wine that pairs extremely well with a wide variety of foods. We prefer to describe this wine as easygoing and stop there. After all, we spend enough time overanalyzing wine. [IAS]

2003 Hugh Hamilton "The RatBag" Merlot

McLaren Vale, Australia

Reg. Price: \$19.99

Wine Source Price: \$15.99

Hugh Hamilton is one of those irrepressible Aussie characters you've probably heard about. The self-proclaimed "black sheep" of a longtime farming family, he has given interesting names to all his wines. I'm not exactly sure what a "ratbag" is, nor am I sure I want to know, but the wine behind the label is outstanding. Big and gutsy, it's typically Australian, but it's also a serious wine that would well accompany any good meal. You could cellar it for years if you like, but this is one "ratbag" you'll love to have at almost any occasion. It's also packaged with a screw-cap for guaranteed quality and longevity. [PW]

Drink Local!

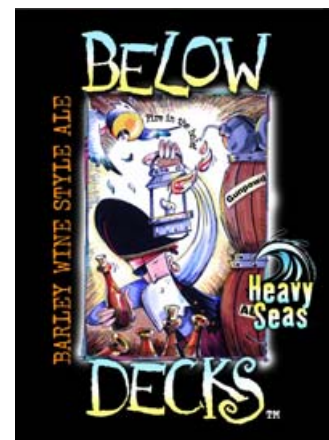
**Clipper City Brewing Company
Below Decks Barley Wine Style Ale
Baltimore, Maryland**

\$6.99 per 4-pack

\$38.99 per case

Drinking local beer can be a lot like pulling for the local sports teams; civic pride demands that you stay with them even if they're not very good. Fortunately for Baltimore beer drinkers, the local breweries are doing a lot better than most of the sports teams. One shining example of this is Clipper City's Heavy Seas line of beers, and specifically, the *Below Decks Barley Wine Style Ale*.

Brewed to celebrate Clipper City's tenth anniversary, *Below Decks* is the second winter seasonal along with their *Winter Storm*. With its roasted amber color and fruity malt character, *Below Decks* has all the kick of a barley wine (11% ABV) while retaining a light touch in the finish. The result is an ale that is rich enough to be consumed as a dessert beer and fresh enough to be consumed earlier in the evening without fear of falling asleep on the couch. Get while the getting is good; *Below Decks* is available in limited quantity. [Bear]



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January 2006 Calendar

FREE WEEKEND WINE TASTING

Merlot is NOT a dirty word!

Friday, January 13, 4 to 7 pm
Saturday, January 14, 1 to 5 PM

BIG RED Wine Dinner **at Abacrombie**

Wednesday, January 18, 6:30 pm
\$95 per person
For reservations, call 410.467.7777

FREE WEEKEND WINE TASTING

What's Up in Bordeaux? The Left Bank

Friday, January 27, 4 to 7 pm
Saturday, January 28, 1 to 5 PM



LAST SUNDAY SUPPERS AT IGGIES

Sunday, January 29, 5:30 pm
\$40 per person

For reservations, call 410.467.7777

The Wine Source has partnered up with Iggies, the new gourmet Neapolitan-style pizzeria in Mount Vernon, to present ***Last Sunday Suppers at Iggies***, a casual evening of wining and dining the last Sunday of every month. Please join us on January 29th at 5:30 pm for our inaugural Sunday Supper! Menu includes appetizer, family style salad, pizzas, and dessert, paired with six wines.

THE WINE SOURCE
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The Cheese Cave

Just Arrived!

A selection of Goat's milk cheeses from Capriole Farm in Greenville, Indiana. For a limited time only!

The artisan cheese revolution in America couldn't have happened without cheesemakers like Judy Schad, owner of Capriole Farm. Over twenty years ago Judy and her husband moved from their suburban lives in Louisville, Kentucky to a rundown old farmhouse in Greenville, Indiana just over the state line. Since comfort was never a priority in Judy's life, she decided to start working the land and bought her first goat. She says her first goat was so hateful she is surprised she kept acquiring them, but today she has 400. Catch phrases like "sustainable," "natural," "value-added," "humane animal management," "free-farmed," "terroir," and "artisan" are not marketing tools for Judy Schad. They're what she lives each day. We are proud to feature these cheeses from Capriole:

Piper's Pyramid: These flat-topped pyramids are Judy's version of the French cheese, Valencay. Each piece of tangy goat cheese is dusted with a touch of paprika, in honor of Piper, her red haired granddaughter. *\$10 each*

O'Banon: Another fantastic cheese with French roots. Judy wraps each 6oz. disc with chestnut leaves that have been soaked in Woodford Reserve Bourbon. The leaves lend a woody, boozy kick to this rich cheese. The longer you age them the stronger they get. *\$8 each*

Mont St Francis: This is a raw milk cheese made with a washed rind and aged for up to eight months. Mont St Francis has a big, beefy flavor and a strong, pungent aroma. *\$18 per pound*

Old Kentucky Tomme: Another raw milk cheese, Old Kentucky Tomme is a mold ripened cheese with a pale grey rind. Aged for five to six months, this semi-soft cheese develops a buttery, mushroomy flavor not unlike Tomme de Savoie. *\$18 per pound.*

Coming in February...Soup and Cheese!

Join us every Thursday in February from 5:30-7:30 p.m. for a soup and cheese tasting. Cynthia Shea from *Soup's On* in Hampden will be sampling a new soup each week, which we will pair with a cheese from The Wine Source Cheese Cave. Just think...a quart of soup, a hunk of cheese and a bottle of wine...you may never have to cook again!