



**Written by**  
Elaine Chukan Brown  
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## Napa Merlot - the Cinderella grape



*See also [Napa Valley Cabernets - depressing?](#) and [Napa Valley sub-appellations - heartening?](#)*

With its diversity of soils and mesoclimates, Napa Valley is well suited to growing a range of varieties including each of the five primary grapes of Bordeaux. In the Napa Valley region, Cabernet Sauvignon has been king now for decades. Still, Merlot has had a home alongside its more celebrated blending partner as long as Cabernet has been grown in Napa Valley. It's an ideal foil. At the same time, in soils where Cabernet is less likely to prosper – clay-rich soils, for example – the wise farmer has found Merlot does well.

While portions of Napa Valley are well suited to growing Merlot successfully, in recent decades the variety has been relegated to a mere blending grape filling in the gaps in Cabernet Sauvignon bottlings, or showing up as part of a **Meritage** blend. In many ways, the variety here in the United States is still recovering from the *Sideways* effect. Producers throughout California

and other regions where Merlot has been grown affirm that Miles' famous quotation from the film, 'If anyone orders Merlot, I'm leaving', tanked Merlot sales even as the movie instigated a nationwide obsession with Pinot Noir. It can be difficult to sell varietal Merlot from anywhere. In Napa, with the high cost of farming thanks to land prices, few producers can afford to devote themselves to a variety that might lag in the market place. Merlot from Napa Valley, as a result, remains barely a category. Bottles of Napa Valley Merlot sell from as little as \$24 to well over \$200 with no obvious correlation to quality. As a result, while fine examples of the variety do exist, it can be difficult for consumers to find them.

The following tasting of 70 current-release Napa Valley Merlot wines reflects the challenges of the category. Some less successful examples drink as though they are second-thought efforts, made to mimic the winemaking of Cabernet with a focus on barrel flavours and sweet fruit but with less structure to support such an approach. There is also a strong trend among some producers to focus on creating plush, rich, dense flavours in the cellar, creating ample presence on the palate. A focus on heft can succeed in the glass but can also readily lose its charm when it begins to feel as if the wine is more about heft for its own sake than the Merlot it claims to be. In many cases the cocoa and toast notes of the barrel made it difficult to find the varietal or site expression in the wine.

That said, there are exceptions.

Though challenges with Merlot in the United States persist, dedicated producers of the variety report that with effort they have been able to build a fan base for it. Even with the variability in quality, the finer examples are a good reminder of what Merlot can offer. At its best, Merlot provides finesse, complexity and subtlety with wonderful power on the mid palate. Producers devoted to the variety are showing the range it can offer from Napa Valley's diversity of subzones. While Merlot is often suited to clay-rich soils at lower elevations, some vintners in the region's mountain climes have reliably delivered quality with the unique characteristics of high-elevation sites.

Standouts from the tasting include the following.

For value, **Truchard** offers a fresh and mouth-watering example from Carneros at only \$30. It will do a nice job at the table and offers a friendly style on its own. At only \$35, **Farella** delivers an ageworthy example from Coombsville that brings together herbal and earth notes with the steely fruit of the subzone for a nicely focused example that continues to improve with air. In a recent tasting, examples going back to the mid 1980s still showed wonderful freshness. For those wanting a bit more ripeness and flavour, still well balanced and focused, **Flora Springs** offers a flavourful example with layers of flavour from dark fruit to tobacco to earth and herbs for \$30.

There were several standout wines in the higher price range as well. From Mt Veeder the iconic mountain site **Mayacamas** has consistently delivered one of the finest examples of Napa Valley Merlot, with a nice focus on purity and length. **Matthiasson** bottles a single-vineyard Merlot tucked against the foot of Mt Veeder in the Oak Knoll District. With a focus on freshness, the wine brings together the mouth-watering, open weave of flavour that the couple's wines are known for, with refreshing structure and distinctive site expression. From Oakville, **Venge** delivers power and tons of length with a nice balance of varietal character, site expression and amplitude. For those that enjoy mountain character with chiselled restraint, **Keenan** gives mountain tannins to Merlot in a style that has consistency across vintage variation.

My photographs show (above right) the view from a lake, looking into vines post-harvest last year at Truchard in Carneros, and (below) the slope of a hillside vineyard in Calistoga just before harvest.



The following 70 wines were primarily submitted in response to an all-call invitation asking for current-release Merlot bottlings from Napa Valley in a similar manner to how the wines for my two Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon articles wines were assembled. A few of the following wines were gathered separately but tasted at the same time and are included below.

They are grouped by AVA with the over-arching Napa Valley AVA at the end, and then listed in alphabetical order by producer (sur)name.

## **CARNEROS**

- **Clos Pegase, Mitsuko's Vineyard Merlot 2013 Carneros** Cedar and iron on the nose turn into iron on blackberries and black plum on the palate. Lots of dark flavours and concentration still married to freshening acidity and supple tannins. (ECB)14.9% Drink 2016-2022  
\$35 RRP 15.5
- **Rombauer Merlot 2012 Carneros** 92% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot. Spicy, lightly herbal aromatics with back notes of blue and purple fruit. Flavours of cocoa and liqueur in a field of dried herbs. Quick burst of upfront flavour with not a lot of concentration on the palate. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$35 RRP 15
- **Truchard Merlot 2013 Carneros** Fresh mixed fruits on the nose followed by nice freshness with herbal and light cocoa accents on the palate. Delicious and mouth-watering. Will do well alongside food. **GV** (ECB)14.2% Drink 2016-2022  
\$30 RRP 16.5

## **COOMBSVILLE**

- **Coho, Michael Black Vineyard Merlot 2012 Coombsville** 95% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Petit Verdot. Notes of olive cured in Provençal herbs mix with forest notes and a gunmetal, coffee, black fruit and olive palate. Intriguing. Mouth-watering. (ECB)14.8% Drink 2016-2023  
\$55 RRP 16
- **Farella Merlot 2012 Coombsville** Nicely lifted, fresh, herbal nose and palate with notes of

tobacco, tree bark, plum skin and hints of greenery. A richly flavoured mid palate with lightly tactile tannins and persistent acidity. A long, spiced plum finish. **GV** (ECB)14.2% Drink 2016-2025

\$35 RRP 16.5+

- **Hagafen, Prix Merlot 2010 Coombsville**Aromatics of ripe plum and a palate of spiced plum and cocoa. Rich mid palate with a persistent finish. A crowd-pleaser with a focus on generosity. (ECB)13.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$55 RRP 15.5
- **Holman, Uncharted Merlot 2013 Coombsville**A pop of fresh red and black plum on the nose with fresh plum leaf and nice herbal accents throughout the palate. Lightly tactile tannins and a persistent, long finish sprinkled with cracked pepper and chocolate. Plenty of concentration here. (ECB)14.2% Drink 2016-2023  
\$65 RRP 16
- **Silverado, Mt George Merlot 2012 Coombsville**95% *Merlot*, 5% *Cabernet Sauvignon*. Fresh wild berries and bramble on the nose and palate mixed through with tree bark and crushed rocks and a chocolatey finish. Tactile tannins and a persistent finish with both concentration and freshness. (ECB)14.6% Drink 2016-2023  
\$35 RRP 16

## WILD HORSE VALLEY

- **Leaf and Vine, Thomson Vineyard Merlot 2012 Wild Horse Valley**Neutral oak allows the fruit to show through here. A pop of fresh berries, currants and plum accented by bramble and good sapidity carrying through into a long finish. (ECB)14.8% Drink 2016-2023  
\$45 RRP 16

## OAK KNOLL DISTRICT

- **Hill Family, Beau Terre Merlot 2013 Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley**80% *Merlot*, 20% *Cabernet Sauvignon*.  
Dense, dark palate of coffee, dusty earth, toasted baking spice on black plum skin. Powdery, dense tannins and balancing acidity carry into a long finish. This wine carries a focus on jammy flavours and intensity. (ECB)14.8% Drink 2016-2022  
\$40 RRP 15.5
- **Materra Merlot 2010 Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley**97% *Merlot*, 1% *Cabernet Sauvignon*, 1% *Petit Verdot*, 1% *Malbec*.  
Herbal amaro-like nose and palate with mixed black fruits and a toasty liqueur finish. Lightly tactile tannins and a long finish. (ECB)13.8% Drink 2016-2022  
\$42 RRP 15
- **Steele Canyon, J McClelland Merlot 2013 Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley**Notes of chalky cherry on the nose are followed by sweet cherry and plum skin on the palate. Notes of cocoa throughout close with a toasted finish. (ECB)14.9% Drink 2016-2021  
\$35 RRP 15
- **Trefethen Merlot 2013 Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley**95% *Merlot*, 4% *Malbec*, 1% *Cabernet Sauvignon*.  
Chocolatey plum notes carry nose to palate with sweet fruit through the mid palate and a coffee finish. Dense powdery tannins and a dry finish. (ECB)14.8% Drink 2016-2022  
\$40 RRP 15.5

- Crosby Roamann Merlot 2012 Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley Dark concentrated aromatics and palate of coffee, spice and toast mixed through with herbs and tree bark. Dark fruit shows through in the long finish. Tactile tannins and a persistent finish of balancing acidity. American oak creates a sense of density and concentration in the flavours here. (ECB)15.3% Drink 2016-2022  
\$45 RRP 15.5

## YOUNTVILLE

- Bell Merlot 2013 Yountville 95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Ripe plum sprinkled with baking spice carry nose through palate with dried cocoa through the finish. Powdery tannins with a very light, almost watery finish. (ECB)14.3% Drink 2016-2021  
\$65 RRP 15
- Rocca Family Vineyards, Grigsby Vineyard Merlot 2013 Yountville Cedar and amaro-like herbs fill the nose and mid palate with tree bark, cocoa and witch hazel. Dense, powdery tannins with a dry finish. Moderate acidity. (ECB)14.7% Drink 2016-2022  
\$55 RRP 15

## OAKVILLE

- Cornerstone Merlot 2012 Oakville Black plum, plum skin and plum tree (tree branch) aromatics are followed by a chocolatey palate and a long tactile finish. Plenty of richness here without being heavy. A bit hot through the finish. (ECB)14.9% Drink 2016-2021  
\$75 RRP 16
- Gibbs Merlot 2012 Oakville Dusty cedar on the nose becomes chocolate and cedar on the palate. Dusty, tactile tannins and balancing acidity. Dense and dark notes throughout here with a focus on rich flavour. For those who want power there is plenty of wine here for one of the lowest prices in the region. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$24 RRP 15
- Turnbull, Fortuna Vineyard Merlot 2013 Oakville Concentrated and dense with notes of baking spice, chocolate and plum skin and a herbal finish. A bit blunt. (ECB)14.9% Drink 2016-2022  
\$75 RRP 14.5
- Venge Merlot 2013 Oakville Mixed fruits - plum and dark berries - mixed through with cherry bark, baking spice and dusty iron accents. Plenty of concentration and presence here with mouth-watering length providing interest. A nice example of deft heft with the mineral and mouth-watering qualities to keep it moving through the palate with pleasure. (ECB) 14.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$68 RRP 17

## RUTHERFORD

- Jon Nathaniel, Windfall Vineyard Merlot 2013 Rutherford Dusty mixed berries with accents of sweet Italian herbs, cocoa and spice. A long, chocolatey finish, tactile tannins and mouth-washing acidity. (ECB) 14.2% Drink 2016-2022  
\$75 RRP 16

## ST HELENA

- Pellet Estate, Henry's Reserve Pellet Vineyard 2013 St Helena 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon.  
Herbs, gunmetal and red berries on the nose also lift the palate from a body of cocoa, ginger and earth. Supple tannins balanced by mouth-watering acidity and length. A bit of peppery heat through the finish. (ECB) 14.7% Drink 2016-2023  
\$125 RRP 16
- Tate, Spring Street Merlot 2013 St Helena Ripe purple and black berries with hints of bramble carry nose to palate with mouth-watering fresh plum sprinkled with spice and cocoa. Lengthy acidity here keeps the wine flowing across the palate. Supple tannins. (ECB) 14.2% Drink 2016-2022  
\$50 RRP 16

## CALISTOGA

- Coup de Foudre, Cuvée 37.2 2013 Calistoga 83% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot.  
Ferric/iron dust carries the nose and palate here. The palate opens up to include concentrated cocoa powder spiced by ginger and nutmeg. Dusty tannins and persistent mouth-watering acidity wash through a long finish. Chocolatey. (ECB) 14.5% Drink 2016-2023  
\$75 RRP 15.5

## MT VEEDER

- Mayacamas Merlot 2012 Mount Veeder Lovely purity throughout. Notes of ripe berries, crushed rocks, with a mix of fresh herbs and exotic spices. Nicely focused, mouth-watering and lengthy. Delicious. (ECB) 12.5% Drink 2016-2025  
\$50 RRP 17.5
- Mt Brave Merlot 2012 Mount Veeder Aromatics of cherry and plum followed by a palate of mixed forest – forest floor, evergreen and pine – and a cocoa-earth finish. Persistent firm tannins and balanced acidity carry into a long finish. (ECB) 15% Drink 2016-2023  
\$85 RRP 16

## SPRING MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

- Juslyn Merlot 2012 Spring Mountain District 88% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon.  
Black olive and gunmetal carry into a persistent finish. Dusty cocoa-powder mouthfeel with supple tannins and balancing acidity. Long finish sprinkled with cracked pepper. (ECB) 14.9% Drink 2016-2023  
\$150 RRP 16

## HOWELL MOUNTAIN

- La Jota Merlot 2012 Howell Mountain Dusty coffee and cocoa powder carry nose through palate into a body of dense, powdery tannins and tobacco. Notes of mountain berry and wild plum peek through. Earthy and structured with still plenty of sweet fruit here. (ECB) 14.8% Drink 2018-2025

\$80 RRP 15.5

- **O'Shaughnessy Merlot 2013 Howell Mountain** Aromatics of graphite and fir. A palate of iron, herbs and spiced black plum. Tactile tannins and a long peppery finish with plenty of sapidity. A rounder palate here and plenty of palate-cleansing tannins. (ECB)14.8% Drink 2016-2025  
\$68 RRP 16

## CHILES VALLEY DISTRICT

- **Nichelini Merlot 2012 Chiles Valley District**95% *Merlot*, 5% *Cabernet Sauvignon*.  
Aromatics of concentrated chocolate liqueur, dusty potpourri and dried red berries. Cedar and chocolate accents through the palate with a body of sour plum. Tactile tannins and balancing acidity. Plenty of richness integrated with oak presence. (ECB)14.3% Drink 2016-2022  
\$33 RRP 15.5

## ATLAS PEAK

- **Antica Antinori Merlot 2013 Atlas Peak**Potpourri and green-olive nose. Gunmetal and cocoa with a finish of nutmeg sprinkled on plum skin. Persistent tannins follow a sweet-fruit mid palate and a long sweet finish. Sweet oak presence throughout. (ECB)14.1% Drink 2016-2023  
\$42 RRP 15

## NAPA VALLEY

- **Amuse Bouche 2013 Napa Valley**96% *Merlot*, 4% *Cabernet Franc*.  
Potpourri and gunmetal aromatics. A dense palate with plenty of dusty, tactile tannins followed by a sweet finish. (ECB)14.6% Drink 2016-2022  
\$225 RRP 15
- **Arietta, Hudson Vineyard Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Ripe blackberry and dripping-ripe plum served in a metal bowl and sprinkled with cocoa, nutmeg and a bit of clove. Tactile tannins and a shantung-silk mouthfeel. Balancing acidity. All chocolate and black pepper with accents of tar through the finish. Dense. (ECB)14.9% Drink 2016-2022  
\$75 RRP 15.5
- **Ballentine Merlot 2014 Napa Valley**89% *Merlot*, 6% *Cabernet Franc*, 5% *Petit Verdot*.  
Toasted black bark and pine tar carry from nose through to palate accented by gunmetal. Tactile tannins and a mouth-watering finish of sweet fruit and cocoa. (ECB)14.6% Drink 2016-2022  
\$32 RRP 15.5
- **Behrens Family, Frontman Merlot 2012 Napa Valley**91% *Merlot*, 9% *Cabernet Sauvignon*.  
Earthy and cocoa aromatics. Gunmetal, plum skin and dark chocolate on the palate. Tactile tannins. A bit simple with a focus on richness. (ECB)14.8% Drink 2016-2020  
\$80 RRP 15
- **Ca' Momi Merlot 2014 Napa Valley**Fresh black plum with cocoa aromatics turn to cooked black plum stirred through with cocoa and ginger on the palate. There is a core of kirsch and blackberry here that comes out more through the finish. Palate-cleansing tannins and mouth-washing acidity. **GV** (ECB) 13.9% Drink 2016-2022  
\$22 RRP 16
- **Duckhorn, Three Palms Vineyard Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**89% *Merlot*, 8% *Cabernet Sauvignon*,

2% Malbec, 1% Petit Verdot.

Gunmetal and graphite on the nose carry into the palate with cooked plum skin. A bit muted, toasty and tight in the mouth currently. Dusty, firm tannins and moderate acidity. Not clear whether it will open more. (ECB)14.9% Drink 2016-2023

\$95 RRP 15

- **Erba, Marcella's Blend Merlot 2011 Napa Valley**93.1% Merlot, 6.9% Cabernet Franc.  
Plum skin and reduced-beef-stock aromatics and palate dusted by pencil shavings and dark spice on the palate. Tactile tannins and moderate acidity. Lots of concentration through the mid palate. (ECB)14.2% Drink 2016-2022  
\$70 RRP 15.5
- **Flora Springs Merlot 2014 Napa Valley**Muted aromatics but a nicely juicy palate. Dark plum with cocoa accents and a bit of tobacco. Supple tannins. Has persistence and balancing acidity. Barrel notes are well integrated here still allowing the Merlot to show. **GV** (ECB)14.2% Drink 2017-2023  
\$30 RRP 16.5
- **Franciscan, Reserve Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**93% Merlot, 6% Syrah, 1% Cabernet Sauvignon.  
Ripe berries and plum lift from the glass. Lots of concentration through the mid palate carrying ripe plum and spiced cocoa with a tobacco and pepper finish. Firm tannins and a persistent finish. Gets a bit hot at the close. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2017-2023  
\$45 RRP 15.5
- **Peter Franus Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Dusty spice and toast aromatics with notes of cedar. Cedar and ripe plum mixed with blackberries and spice on the palate. Finishes with oak spice. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$36 RRP 15
- **Freemark Abbey, Bosche Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Aromatics of coffee, currant and fresh herbs. A dusty-earth, dried-tobacco palate finishes with baking spice, cocoa and ripe sweet fruit. (ECB)14.7% Drink 2016-2021  
\$60 RRP 15
- **Goosecross Merlot 2012 Napa Valley**Dusty coffee, cocoa and notes of cedar close with sweet plum and a pop of berry. (ECB) 14.1% Drink 2016-2021  
\$52 RRP 15
- **Grgich Hills Merlot 2012 Napa Valley**95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon.  
Toast and mixed herbs on the nose turn to spiced fruit with herbal accents on the palate. A dry finish and persistent tannins cleanse the palate through a mouth-watering finish. While there is still clearly barrel presence here, you can taste Merlot character in the wine as well. I might prefer a bit less coffee and cocoa presence but the mouth-watering finish does well for this wine. (ECB)14.9% Drink 2018-2024  
\$43 RRP 16.5
- **Havens Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Ripe aromatics and palate. Candied plum covered in thin dark chocolate. A plush mid palate and a persistent dry finish with peppery accents. A balanced expression of its style. (ECB)14.2% Drink 2016-2022  
\$35 RRP 16.5
- **Judd's Hill, Swig Vineyard Merlot 2012 Napa Valley**Muted aromatics. A bit more rough-tannin presence here than many of the other Merlots tasted from Napa. The tannins themselves are nice to find but the wine is a bit disjointed. Finishes with sweet fruit and a peppery accent. Sweet but not overly expressive currently. (ECB)13.7% Drink 2016-2023  
\$42 RRP 14.5+
- **Keenan Merlot 2012 Napa Valley**More tactile tannin presence here with a persistent finish. Lots of concentration through the mid palate but dry with a focus on herbs, earth and just a hint of plum. A distinct expression of mountain Merlot. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2017-2025

\$40 RRP 16.5+

- **Kitchak, Mozart Merlot 2012 Napa Valley** Musky perfumed aromatics and a mid palate of sweet plum with hints of tobacco. Finishes sweet. Difficult, especially considering the price. (ECB)14.8% Drink 2016-2022  
\$130 RRP 14.5
- **Lateral Merlot 2012 Napa Valley**66% Merlot, 34% Cabernet Franc.  
Wet tobacco and dusty earth with herbal accents throughout. A bit of sweet plum pops through into the mid palate. Dusty tannins and a persistent finish. (ECB)14.1% Drink 2016-2025  
\$54 RRP 15.5+
- **Lewis Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Mocha notes throughout with accents of tobacco and dried plum on the palate. Powdery, persistent tannins and a wash of flavour. Finishes sweet. (ECB) 15.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$80 RRP 15
- **Long Meadow Ranch Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Musky aromatics of mint, plum and cherry leaf move to the palate with cherry bark and hints of cocoa and a lightly chocolatey finish. Dried plum peeks from the mid palate. Nice balance here of plenty of amplitude through the mid palate tightening into a clean, juicy finish. May integrate further with a bit of time in bottle. (ECB)13.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$35 RRP 16
- **Matthiasson, Red Hen Vineyard Merlot 2012 Napa Valley**Aromatics of cherry bark and crushed rock. A concentrated palate of ripe cherries sprinkled with cocoa powder and mint leaf followed by a fresh, mouth-watering finish. Lightly tactile, palate-cleansing tannins and a wash of acidity give balance to ripe flavours with lots of concentration and still a refreshing finish. (ECB)13.9% Drink 2016-2023  
\$80 RRP 17+
- **Napa Cellars Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Musky and leafy aromatics with notes of potpourri and plum blossom throughout. Plenty of dry tannins and a sweet finish. Made for affordability. (ECB)14.2% Drink 2016-2022  
\$24 RRP 14.5
- **Newton, Unfiltered Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**88% Merlot, 8% Malbec, 3% Petit Verdot, 1% Cabernet Sauvignon.  
Herbal and toasty, this is a dark, brooding Merlot with a sweet-fruit finish. Rich and with dense and sweet flavours. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$60 RRP 15
- **Pahlmeyer Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**95% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Petit Verdot.  
Brooding aromatics. Sweet, concentrated palate. There is plenty of density, concentration and richness here but not a lot of interest. (ECB)15.2% Drink 2016-2020  
\$85 RRP 15
- **Peju Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Toasty aromatics with bramble and berry. Coffee and cocoa on the palate. Lightly grippy tannin and oak presence. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$35 RRP 15
- **Pope Valley, Eakle Ranch Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**Musky with notes of forest floor and rose potpourri. Persistent with a lightly peppery finish. (ECB)14.3% Drink 2016-2022  
\$32 RRP 15
- **Rutherford Hill Merlot 2013 Napa Valley**79% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Syrah.  
Aromatics of fresh-cut cedar shift to cigar box and fresh plum on the palate. A persistent, peppery finish with tactile tannins and sweet fruit through the close. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$30 RRP 15

- **Seavey Merlot 2012 Napa Valley** Distinctive. Notes of mint, golden currant and redcurrant, fresh cedar and crushed rock. Mouth-watering palate full of fine tannins and juicy length. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2025  
\$45 RRP 16+
- **Silenus Merlot 2012 Napa Valley** Musky aromatics and palate. Ripe-plum mid palate through to the finish with dusty cedar accents on the close. Mouth-watering length and persistent fine tannins with a finish of cracked pepper and chocolate. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$36 RRP 15.5
- **Somerston, Stornoway Estate Merlot 2013 Napa Valley** Hints of eucalyptus, earth and ripe plum nose carrying through to the palate with cocoa powder and a bit of heat through the finish. (ECB)15.4% Drink 2016-2020  
\$90 RRP 14.5
- **St Supéry, Rutherford Estate Vineyard Merlot 2013 Napa Valley** 94% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Cabernet Franc. Notes of green tea and mint in the nose carry to sweet plum and cocoa on the palate. Full, ripe mid palate and a sweet finish. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$50 RRP 14.5
- **Swanson Merlot 2012 Napa Valley** 83% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Cabernet Franc. Notes of fresh-cut cedar and light toast on the nose move to dark, sweet plum and baking spice on the palate. A long, sweet finish. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$50 RRP 14.5
- **Switchback Ridge Merlot 2013 Napa Valley** 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Raspberry leaf and green tea accent a brooding palate of dark fruit, cedar and rose potpourri. Long oak-spice finish. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2022  
\$58 RRP 15
- **Tedeschi Merlot 2012 Napa Valley** Fresh red fruit lift the nose and turn towards cocoa and cherry soda on the palate. A bit short through the finish. (ECB)13.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$46 RRP 15
- **Textbook Merlot 2014 Napa Valley** Aromatics of raspberry-leaf tea carry to the palate mixed with dark chocolate and dried Bing cherry. There is a lot of dense flavour here. A bit disjointed. (ECB)13% Drink 2016-2020  
\$25 RRP 15
- **Trincherio, Vista Montone Vineyard Merlot 2012 Napa Valley** Sour-fruit aromatics. Chocolate-covered cherry-drop-candy palate. Difficult. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2020  
\$50 RRP 14
- **Twomey, Soda Canyon Ranch Merlot 2012 Napa Valley** Musky aromatics and palate. Short coffee-note finish. Not a lot of interest. (ECB)14.6% Drink 2016-2020  
\$60 RRP 14.5
- **Waterstone Merlot 2013 Napa Valley** Cherry, mint and cocoa. Sweet finish. Not a lot of complexity here. (ECB)14.5% Drink 2016-2019  
\$18 RRP 14
- **Whitehall Lane Merlot 2013 Napa Valley** 80% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Syrah. Musky, cedar and toast aromatics carry into the palate accented there by black-plum skin and cracked pepper. A persistent finish washed with acidity and sweet fruit. (ECB)14.2% Drink 2016-2022  
\$28 RRP 15.5