

The 9 Best Merlots From Around the World to Buy in 2024

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The word Merlot is derived from the word *merle*, which translates from the original French to describe the common blackbird. The grapes are very dark in color while ripening and maturing, and it's not known for sure whether the variety was named for the color of the blackbird or that it may have been one of its favorite snacks. Merlot is the second most widely cultivated red grape in the world and the number one grape grown in France. The main variety in the St. Émilion and Pomerol appellations, on the right bank of the Garonne River in Bordeaux, it is vinified there either as the major grape in blends or as a single varietal.

Merlot has softer tannins than many red grapes including [Malbec](#), [Carmenere](#), or [Cabernet Sauvignon](#), so although it will age well for decades, it is usually very drinkable shortly after release. Bottlings from Bordeaux can have a more pronounced floral aroma than you may find elsewhere, but well-made Merlot from around the globe usually have aromas and flavors of blueberry, black cherry, black currant, and vanilla. We would typically describe the tannins as velvety or suede-like, and you can expect soft leather or earthy notes in the palate. Outside of Bordeaux, Merlot thrives around the globe, but some of the best bottles on the market hail from Bolgheri, Napa, Sonoma, and [Washington State](#). Here are nine to drink now.

- [Best Overall Merlot: PlumpJack 2021 Merlot Napa Valley, California](#)
- [Best Sonoma Merlot: Verite 2019 La Muse Merlot Sonoma California](#)
- [Best Napa Merlot: Duckhorn Vineyards 2020 Three Palms Merlot Calistoga Napa Valley California](#)
- [Best Washington Merlot: Leonetti Cellars 2022 Merlot Walla Walla Valley Washington](#)
- [Best Australian Merlot: Hickinbotham 2016 The Revivalist Merlot McLaren Vale Australia](#)
- [Best French Merlot: Chateau Belair Monage 2016 Saint-Emilion Bordeaux France](#)

- [Best Merlot from Lazio, Italy: Cotarella 2018 Montiano Lazio Italy](#)
- [Best Tuscan Merlot: Tenuta Montebello 2018 Picconero Tuscany Italy](#)
- [Best Merlot Under \\$75: Chappellet 2021 Merlot Napa Valley California](#)



Best Overall Merlot: PlumpJack 2021 Merlot Napa Valley, California

PlumpJack's original winery dates to the 1800s and today it is surrounded by more than 40 acres of land planted with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot vines. Winemaker Aaron Miller started his university career with the dream of becoming a doctor but fell in love with winemaking after earning a Bachelor of Science in Neurobiology, Physiology, and Behavior from the University of California at Davis. He is assisted by winemakers Danielle Cyrot and Andrew Haugen. PlumpJack 2021 Merlot opens with aromas of black cherry, red raspberry, and dried savory herbs that lead to flavors of brown baking spices, blackberry, mocha, and red plum cloaked in a sheath of feathery tannins.

[Buy Now: \\$80](#)



Best Sonoma Merlot: Verite 2019 La Muse Merlot Sonoma California

Pierre Seillan began making wine at his family's estate in Gascony, France and after 20 years in Bordeaux he was persuaded to make wine in Sonoma by the founder of Jackson Family Wines. Pierre reports the 2019 Verite growing season had abundant winter rainfall, April budbreak, and a hotter than average summer. His 2019 La Muse combines 90 percent Merlot, 5 percent Cabernet Franc, and 5 percent Malbec with deep ruby-garnet hues and aromas of Bing cherry, dried Mediterranean herbs, and red raspberry. It has bright acidity and silky tannins on the palate with flavors of red plum, red currant, and dark cherry.

[Buy Now: \\$580](#)



Best Napa Merlot: Duckhorn Vineyards 2020 Three Palms Merlot Calistoga Napa Valley California

Margaret and Dan Duckhorn founded their eponymous winery in 1976 and have been making quality wines for over four decades. Although Margaret passed away in 2022, she is remembered for her contributions to the wine industry and her deep commitment to the production of quality American Merlot. Duckhorn's Three Palms is 98 percent Merlot with 2 percent added Malbec. It has aromas of pomegranate, rose hips, and red raspberry that transform on the palate to flavors of cranberry, Mission fig, and a touch of dark chocolate, all wrapped up in a smooth tannic sheath.

[Buy Now: \\$110](#)



Best Washington Merlot: Leonetti Cellars 2022 Merlot Walla Walla Valley Washington

While Leonetti Cellars was founded by Gary and Nancy Figgins in 1977 and was one of Walla Walla's first commercial wineries, the family can trace their Washington roots back more than 100 years to Gary's grandparents Francesco and Rosa Leonetti. Today, winemaking is headed by Chris Figgins who continues to craft exquisite wines. His 2022 Merlot is garnet colored with aromas of mocha, freshly baked black berry pie, and red plum. Slightly chewy tannins pave the way for flavors of ripe red raspberry, black currant, and dried rose hips.

[Buy Now: \\$120](#)



Best Australian Merlot: Hickinbotham 2016 The Revivalist Merlot McLaren Vale Australia

Alan David Hickinbotham first planted vines in McLaren Vale, Australia in 1971 and the estate remained under family ownership until it was sold in 2012. It's interesting to note that the estate never produced wines under its own name until after the sale because prior to that grapes were purchased by numerous Australian wineries such as Penfolds and Hardys for their premium wines including Grange and Eileen Hardy Shiraz. The 2016 Revivalist is garnet colored with aromas of crushed violet petals, red plum, and a whiff of shale. It has bright acidity and plush tannins with flavors of red currant, pomegranate, and cranberry.

[Buy Now: \\$72](#)



Best French Merlot: Château Bélair Monange 2016 Saint-Emilion Bordeaux France

Château Bélair Monange is located at one of the highest points of the Saint Emilion appellation. The land it sits on dates back to the Roman era and is considered to be one of the region's best crus. The Chateau was purchased by Jean-Pierre Moueix in 2008 and he added "Monange" to the original name Château Bélair to honor his mother Anne-Adèle Monange. The 2016 is matured in 50 percent new French oak barrels and has aromas of cassis, olive tapenade, and lavender. Flavors of blackberry preserves, black currant, violet, flint, and dried Mediterranean herbs are sheathed in silky tannins.

[Buy Now: \\$275](#)



Best Merlot from Lazio, Italy: Famiglia Cotarella 2018 Montiano Lazio Italy

This estate in picturesque Montiano, Lazio, was once called “Falesco,” but when three Cotarella sisters—Enrica, Marta, and Dominga—took over, they decided to honor their father’s family and changed the name to Famiglia Cotarella. Now in its third generation, the family continues to make quality wines from both indigenous and international varieties. Their 2018 Merlot is garnet colored with aromas of black plum, ripe cherry, and fennel frond. It is full bodied on the palate with flavors of dried plum, brown baking spice, and black currant.

[Buy Now: \\$80](#)



Best Tuscan Merlot: Tenuta Montebello 2018 Picconero Tuscany Italy

In the late 1990s Pierluigi Tolaini returned to his native Italy and purchased land in Tuscany with the intention of building a world class winery. He planted vines, built from the ground up, and hired Michel Rolland as a consultant. The team has produced consistently well-crafted wines from the onset but their 100 percent Merlot from 2018 is exceptional. It is garnet colored with aromas of red raspberry, black cherry, and cherry vanilla. Full bodied yet balanced, it has rounded tannins and flavors of anise, red fruits, and brown baking spices.

[Buy Now: \\$145](#)



Best Merlot Under \$75: Chappellet 2021 Merlot Napa Valley California

Molly and Donn Chappellett purchased their Pritchard Hill estate in 1967 and dreamed of making quality California wines. They consulted with winemaking legend André Tchelistcheff, planted vines, and became one of the first families in Napa Valley to cultivate grapes at high altitude. Known primarily for their highly rated Cabernet Sauvignons, the Chappellett family also crafts this amazing Merlot. It opens with aromas of ripe cherry, black raspberry, graphite, and mocha that lead to silky tannins and flavors of ripe black plum, red currant, and roasted coffee bean.

[Buy Now: \\$64](#)



Photo : Fox Searchlight/Courtesy of Everett Collection

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the differences among Merlot wines from various regions?

While different soil types, climate, and winemaking team have a strong effect on Merlot's qualities, you can generally expect blueberry, black cherry, black currant, and vanilla flavors with velvety tannins and soft leather or earthy notes. Outside of Bordeaux, Merlot grows around the globe, but some of the best bottles on the market come from Australia, Napa, Sonoma, Italy, and Washington State. While Bordeaux has long been considered a cold weather region because of its damp maritime climate, most of its vineyards are at sea level, so warming temperatures there can add to a sense of over-ripeness if grapes are not picked early enough. Australia and Italy's vineyards are generally close to sea level as well. In contrast the Napa AVA's known for Merlot are mainly on mountainsides and hillsides high above the valley floor. These altitudes contribute to large swings in day-to-night temperatures, which aid in maintaining freshness and acidity in the grapes. Different soil types contribute to the flavor profile; volcanic soils or those with high mineral content can add traces of salinity, smoke, or what is simply known as minerality.

How should you drink Merlot?

Merlot should be served in a large wine glass, that is often called a Bordeaux glass. A large, deep bowl allows for more airspace above the wine and offers the best conditions for aromas to be released and appreciated and for allowing the wine to open. It should be served at a temperature between 55° and 65° F; if you store your bottles in a temperature-controlled cooler or cellar, they should be perfect when removed. Decanting before serving can also bring out the best in your Merlot.

How did we choose the nine Merlot wines on this list?

We took many elements into consideration when making our choices, and the most important is taste, but how a wine actually "tastes" involves a variety of impressions, including flavor, texture, tannins, acidity, and finish. We also considered ability to age and a combination of rarity and accessibility: We sought out wines that are made in relatively small quantities but at the same time are available to purchase without having to join a winery club or allocation list. The majority were tasted blind in comparative tastings with similar wines, but some were enjoyed at dinner with winemakers or opened by friends.

Why should you trust us?

Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen, Robb Report's wine editors, have been writing about wine for two decades, have visited wine regions and wineries around the world, and have tasted wine with the people who make it. Last year they tasted over 6,000 wines and are on target to sample more than 7,000 in 2024. They are judges for the internationally renowned

Concours Mondial de Bruxelles wine competition, and their work has appeared in Wine Spectator, Forbes, Wine Enthusiast, Huffington Post, Saveur, and books published by Oxford University Press. They have been featured for their expertise in wine on The Today Show, The Martha Stewart Show, CNN, CBS, Fox, WGN, WPIX and NBC. Known as the World Wine Guys, they are the authors of six wine books which have received various accolades and awards including “Best Wine Book in the World” from Gourmand International.

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Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen, also known as the World Wine Guys, are wine, spirits, food, and travel writers, educators, and hosts. They have been featured guests on the Today Show, The Martha...

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