

Kim Marcus' Recommended Merlots From California

More than 130 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at WineSpectator.com/113018. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
LA JOTA Merlot Howell Mountain 2015 Pure and refined, this offers savory richness to the dried red fruit and spice flavors. The tannins are firm but well-honed.	93	\$85
VENGE Merlot Oakville Oakville Estate Vineyard 2015 Big, rich and full of lusciously ripe flavors of blackberry, roasted plum and dark cherry, swathed in Asian spice notes.	93	\$70
LUNA Merlot Howell Mountain 2015 Rich and fine-grained, with plenty of snappy red fruit and spice flavors that are well-proportioned.	92	\$85
DARIOUSH Merlot Napa Valley Signature 2014 A rich and finely honed red, with sandalwood, cedar and lively spice notes that enrich the dark fruit flavors.	92	\$58
STEWART Tartan Napa Valley 2015 Offers rich flavors of red berry, cherry and currant that are layered with plush spice and cocoa powder accents. Merlot blend.	92	\$45
FLORA SPRINGS Merlot Napa Valley 2014 Silky tannins support concentrated and vibrant flavors of plum tart, cherry and raspberry. Creamy midpalate, with a spiced finish.	92	\$30
DUCKHORN Merlot Napa Valley Three Palms Vineyard 2015 Powerful and rich-tasting, with a flush of red fruit flavors that quickly fill with sweet tobacco and sanguine notes.	91	\$98
PAHLMAYER Merlot Napa Valley 2015 A decadently ripe aroma leads to flavors of green olive, dried cherry and raspberry that are vibrant and well-spiced.	91	\$90
MT. BRAVE Merlot Mount Veeder 2015 Offers a refined texture, with well-knit flavors of dried berry, plum tart and dried blackberry, accented by a layer of raspberry ganache.	91	\$80
LEWIS Merlot Napa Valley 2015 Ripe, rich and full of well-spiced flavors of dark plum, olive, currant and red berry. The finish is packed with mocha and cocoa notes.	91	\$80
BERINGER Merlot Napa Valley Bancroft Ranch Vineyard Single Vineyard 2015 A fresh and mineral red, with dark plum and roasted cherry flavors that feature some tarry notes.	91	\$80
DUCKHORN Merlot Napa Valley Carneros 2015 Floral and spice accents flank the ripe dark plum and dark cherry flavors. A deep well of baker's chocolate notes extends with savory hints.	91	\$75
MATANZAS CREEK Merlot Bennett Valley Jackson Park Vineyard 2015 Concentrated hot stone and mulled spice notes accent the chiseled red plum, raspberry and cherry flavors.	91	\$60
DARIOUSH Merlot Napa Valley Signature 2015 Rich, with good cut to the lively blend of dried red fruit and cedar flavors. The mineral finish features hints of dried green herbs and spice.	91	\$58
ST. FRANCIS Merlot Sonoma Valley Reserve 2015 Concentrated flavors of dark cherry, blackberry and plum pudding are rich and well-structured. Creamy finish.	91	\$52
PRIDE Claret Reserve Sonoma County 2015 Notes of hot stone accent the richly textured red fruit and wild berry flavors. Long finish. Merlot blend.	91	\$145

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
SAN SIMEON Merlot Paso Robles Estate Reserve 2014 Big, rich and spicy red, with lots of loamy accents to the ripe plum and dark cherry flavors.	90	\$22
GOLDSCHMIDT Merlot Dry Creek Valley Chelsea Goldschmidt Salmon's Leap 2015 Well-structured, showing concentrated flavors of dried raspberry, mocha, red currant and dark plum.	90	\$20
FERRARI-CARANO Merlot Sonoma County 2015 A bright red, with snappy flavors of red plum, currant and cherry that mix easily. Finishes with hints of dark chocolate.	89	\$21
RODNEY STRONG Merlot Sonoma County 2014 This offers flavors of plum, dark cherry and dried raspberry that are well-rounded and amply spiced.	89	\$20
FREI BROTHERS Merlot Dry Creek Valley Sonoma Reserve 2015 Fruit-forward and offering well-structured flavors of dark plum and boysenberry that are flanked by forest floor notes.	89	\$20
FABIO VIVIANI Fatty Pope Paso Robles 2015 A richly spiced version, featuring flavors of cherry and elderberry. Merlot blend.	89	\$20
GOLDSCHMIDT Fidelity Nick Goldschmidt Crazy Creek Estate Alexander Valley 2016 Zesty and brambly, with red berry, plum and red currant flavors. Merlot blend.	89	\$17
KIRKLAND SIGNATURE Meritage Napa Valley 2014 Rich dark plum and red berry flavors give this red a juicy character, with creamy accents. Merlot blend.	89	\$11
DECOY Red Sonoma County 2015 Robust, with flavors of dark plum, spiced cherry and mulberry that are supported by fresh acidity. Merlot blend.	88	\$25
PEDRONCELLI Sonoma Classico Barrel Select Dry Creek Valley 2016 Ripe and filled with roasted plum and dark currant flavors that are well-spiced. Merlot blend.	88	\$19
MADDALENA Merlot Paso Robles 2014 Lots of fresh-crushed berry and red plum flavors show in this mineral style. Zesty finish.	88	\$18
KENWOOD Merlot Sonoma County 2014 A brambly red, offering accents of green olive to the luscious dark cherry and plum tart flavors. Fresh acidity keeps this lively.	88	\$15
PURPLE HEART Sonoma County 2015 A fruity style, with red berry flavors that are fresh and engaging. Balsa wood and cedar accents show on the finish. Merlot blend.	87	\$20
ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS Merlot Alexander Valley 2015 Cherry and dried currant flavors dominate this crisp red. Dried savory details emerge on the firm finish.	87	\$20
TOAD HOLLOW Merlot Sonoma County Richard McDowell's Selection 2016 A brambly red, with hints of smoke to the cherry and cigar box flavors. Black olive accents linger on the finish.	87	\$16
PEDRONCELLI Friends Red Sonoma County 2016 This has a firm core of dried berry and cherry flavors, supported by chewy tannins. Savory finish. Merlot blend.	87	\$13