


MERLOT

of proportion and balance. Sturdy, but never hinting at toughness, the wine will tempt early drinking but should be kept for at least a few years as it expands and deepens yet.

   \$16.00

 **TRUCHARD VINEYARDS** 1993 Carneros Napa Valley. Proving that extract need not be equated with toughness, this rich, solidly packed young wine is long on fruity density, yet retains the uniquely supple nature of fine Merlot. Its aromas and flavors alike are filled out by an attractive sweep of rich oak, and the tasty union of fruit and wood extends well into a lengthy finish. Nicely balanced and somewhat deceptive with respect to its aging potential, it should be cellared for a few years at the least and might grow for six or seven.


   \$20.00

VICHON WINERY 1993 Napa Valley (8% Malbec; 2% Cabernet Sauvignon). Somewhat stunted in aroma and surprisingly light in fundamental fruit, this tough, oak-laden Merlot falls considerably short of the winery's past achievements. Slightly soft and fairly dry on the palate, it is burdened with a half decade's worth of tannins yet has neither the depth nor basic substance to suggest that age will bring admirable beauty or charm.


   \$21.00

VICHON WINERY 1992 Napa Valley (3.3% Malbec; 0.5% Cabernet Sauvignon). Always pleasant, but never quite outgoing in fruit, this handsomely oaked Merlot comes across as firm and somewhat raw-edged on the palate. Its muted cherry-like qualities develop only with some reluctance and are diminished slightly by crisp acidity at the finish. Worth a few years of cellaring in hope of finding a smoother stance, it will never rank among the more generous wines of the vintage.

   \$20.00

 **VOSS VINEYARDS** 1993 Napa Valley Sweet oak is piled high atop nicely stated cherryish scents in the medium-intense aromas and continues on as a hallmark component of the wine's rich, slightly fleshy fruit flavors. If ultimately a touch coarse and oriented to oak, the wine earns recommendation for its unabashed richness and should serve quite well with savory lamb stews or osso bucco.

   \$16.00

 **WILDHURST VINEYARDS** 1994 Clear Lake (15% Cabernet Sauvignon). If favoring a brushy, faintly herbal element in its lightly creamy, cherry-like aromas, this nicely crafted Merlot homes in on solid varietal fruit in its intense, moderately energetic flavors. For the nonce, it is a bit overly directed by slightly gripping tannins and a fair degree of finishing astringency, but it retains the required fruitiness for optimistic aging. Try three years at a minimum, but expect improvement for twice that long.

   \$12.00

 **ST CLEMENT VINEYARDS** 1993 Napa Valley

Here is one that goes for ripeness and succeeds nicely. A substantial wine, it marries dense, black cherry fruit with sweet oak spice, and, for all of its ample size, it never falls to excess heat or toughness. More rustic than refined, it does finish with a little warmth poking through its rounded tannins and is just the ticket for pairing with hearty dishes such as braised ribs of beef.

   \$21.00

STERLING VINEYARDS 1993 Napa Valley

Three Palms Vineyard. 12% Cabernet Franc. Quiet suggestions of oak and ripeness emerge from the low-keyed aromas, but neither here, nor in the increasingly dry flavors that follow, does fruit find more than the faintest voice. Phenolic toughness and tea-bag bitterness come on strong, however, and leave behind drying astringency that is the wine's most lasting legacy.

   \$22.00

STERLING VINEYARDS 1993 Napa Valley

19% Cabernet Sauvignon; 3% Cabernet Franc. Muddling elements of tea-leaf, dried bark and olives mask a lesser underlying note of fruit in the nose, and a mix of forest-floor brushiness works to similar effect in the ripe but slightly drying flavors. A little tougher than Merlot ought to be, the wine is shy on fruity flesh, and its tannic bones become all the more obvious.

   \$14.00

 **STERLING VINEYARDS** 1992 Napa Valley

Three Palms Vineyard. 25% Cabernet Franc. Lots of woody spice shares the stage with a subtle bit of cherries in the complex aromas here, and, like the nose, the wine's nominally fruited flavors are heavily seasoned with spicy oak. Showing a bit of plumpness and the attractive suppleness inherent to Merlot, the wine is balanced and moderately weighty with a persistent finish. A few tannic edges remain at present, but three or four years of cellaring should bring the needed polish it now is missing.

   \$22.00

STONY RIDGE Limited Release 1993 North Coast

While ripe and fairly substantial, this peculiar bottling is driven wide of the classic mark by an invasive, high-toned piney streak that takes precedence over fruit, oak or any other more positive trait. Ample in feel, yet finished with a twist of errant sourness, this one is hard to recommend.

   \$12.50

 **STORRS WINERY** 1993 San Ysidro District

Equally rich in both fruit and oak, this most generous offering delivers the goods at every turn. From its concentrated aromas of sweet cherries to its lengthy, optimally ripened flavors, the accent is on fruity precision, and its complexing elements of spice and cream are interwoven with a fine sense