

# California's Best of Best Bargains \$12 And Under Gems

*Here, from our 13th annual tasting, are 32 unbeatable values.*

QRW STAFF

**K**now any good wines cheap? To the age old question we answer: Plenty! It took us several months of blind tasting, and herein our **13th Annual Best of The Best in California \$12 and Under**.

As we often do for this annual article we concentrated on Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, and Chardonnay and a few interesting whites we came across. We didn't taste Pinot Noir because we feel good Pinot Noir cannot be found in this price range.

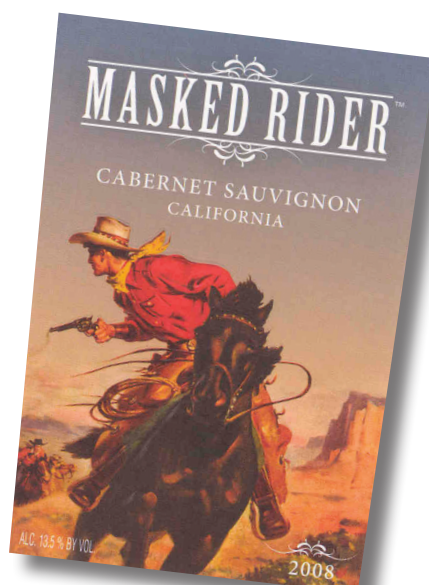
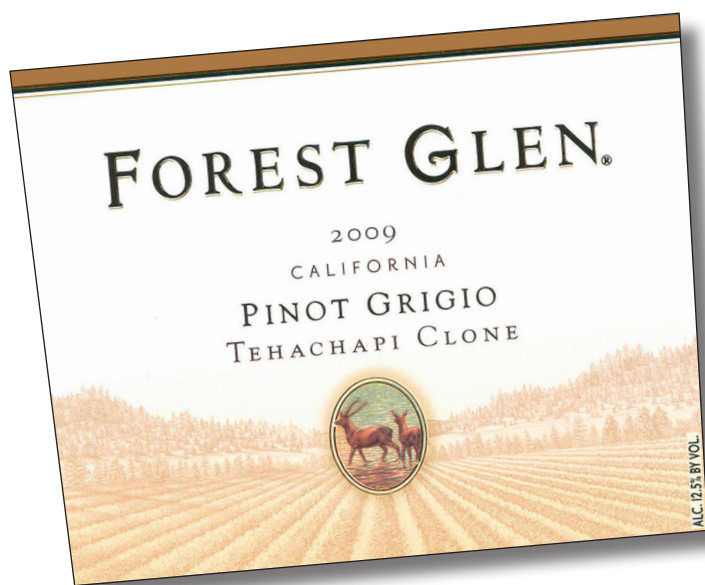
As to vintage, we try to keep up with current releases, but these wines sell fast and vintages quickly change. Vintages don't matter much with these wines because their success is based on consistency. People return to these wines because they have a good idea of what to expect.

Our selection this year comes largely from volume based producers, like Bronco, DFV Wines, Firestone, Gallo, Round

Hill, and The Other Guys (Sebastiani). They've been producing solid value wines for years and these producers know what they're doing. They know how to source wines; they have their favorite growers; they know the vineyards; and they know the market. It's folly to ignore them.

We don't offer tasting notes. All you need to know is this: they are balanced bistro "everyday wines"; they have rounded fruit, some spice and a touch of oak. There are no fruit bombs on our lists, nor any oak bombs (these wines just try to mask their inferiority). In judging wine, we favor finish, and the wines below offer a smooth, fairly full and satisfying one. Also, they have easy flavors upfront and invite a second glass.

**Note:** We blind tasted 110 wines. Prices may vary from region to region.



## CABERNET SAUVIGNON (10)

- 2008 FAT CAT CABERNET SAUVIGNON CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2008 FIRESTONE VINEYARDS (DISCOVERY) CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CALIFORNIA \$10
- 2008 FOREST GLEN CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CALIFORNIA, \$11
- 2008 GNARLY HEAD CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2008 HARLOW RIDGE, CABERNET SAUVIGNON, LODI, \$10
- 2007 IRONY CABERNET SAUVIGNON, NAPA VALLEY, \$10
- 2008 MASKED RIDER CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CALIFORNIA, \$11
- 2007 NAPA RIDGE CABERNET SAUVIGNON, NAPA VALLEY, \$12
- 2008 REDWOOD CREEK (FREI BROTHERS) CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2008 ROUND HILL CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CALIFORNIA, \$9

## MERLOT (7)

- 2008 COASTAL RIDGE MERLOT, CALIFORNIA, \$7
- 2006 FAT CAT MERLOT, CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2007 GALLO FAMILY VINEYARDS MERLOT, SONOMA COUNTY, \$12
- 2007 IRONY MERLOT, NAPA VALLEY, \$10
- 2007 MONTPELLIER MERLOT, CALIFORNIA, \$7
- 2008 MOTOS LIBERTY MERLOT, CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2007 ROUND HILL MERLOT, CALIFORNIA, \$8

## SHIRAZ/SYRAH AND ZINFANDEL (5)

- 2007 BONNY DOON VINEYARD SYRAH, LE POUSSEUR, CENTRAL COAST, \$10
- 2006 FORESTVILLE ZINFANDEL, CALIFORNIA, \$6
- 2007 MASKED RIDER ZINFANDEL, CALIFORNIA, \$11
- 2007 MONTPELLIER SYRAH, CALIFORNIA, \$7
- 2005 NAPA RIDGE SYRAH, NAPA VALLEY, \$12

## CHARDONNAY AND OTHER WHITES (10)

- 2008 FIRESTONE VINEYARDS (DISCOVERIES) CHARDONNAY, CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2009 FOREST GLEN PINOT GRIGIO (TEHACHAPI CLONE), \$11
- 2008 GNARLY HEAD CHARDONNAY, CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2008 HARLOW RIDGE CHARDONNAY, LODI, \$10
- 2006 IRONY CHARDONNAY, NAPA VALLEY, \$12
- 2008 LOREDONA VIOGNIER, LODI, \$11
- 2009 MIRASSOU PINOT GRIGIO, CALIFORNIA, \$12
- 2008 MONTPELLIER CHARDONNAY, CALIFORNIA, \$7
- 2008 MOTOS LIBERTY CHARDONNAY, CALIFORNIA, \$10
- 2007 ROUND HILL CHARDONNAY, CALIFORNIA, \$9