

TOP VALUES – DOMESTIC WINES

by Robert M. Parker, Jr.

While many would argue that much of my career and reputation has been based on the evaluation of high quality, expensive wines (which is true up to a point), I do not believe any other wine publication or writer has committed as much time, money and effort to ferret out top wine bargains from around the world. Two years ago, along with my Wine Advocate colleagues, I published a large pocketbook about wine bargains which today is the definitive source for the best estates and wine values in the world. Following is a look at some of my favorites tasted

over the last few months whose value is unmistakable.

One thing that has been on a clear upward trajectory over the last three decades has been the increasing number of interesting wines that can be found for under \$25, some at remarkably low price points of \$8-\$15. Such bargains rarely existed years ago, but today they are abundantly available. If you want to prove their value, insert one in a blind tasting against wines made from the same grape or grapes that cost five to ten times more per bottle and see what the results are in your tasting group.

ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS	2009	CABERNET FRANC ESTATE	ALEXANDER VALLEY	(\$24.00)	RED	87
ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS	2009	CHARDONNAY ESTATE	ALEXANDER VALLEY	(\$18.00)	WHITE	87
ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS	2008	MERLOT ESTATE	ALEXANDER VALLEY	(\$20.00)	RED	85
ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS	2010	ROSE OF SANGIOVESE	ALEXANDER VALLEY	(\$14.00)	ROSE	88
ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS	2009	SIN ZIN	ALEXANDER VALLEY	(\$20.00)	RED	87
ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS	2008	ZINFANDEL REDEMPTION	ALEXANDER VALLEY	(\$25.00)	RED	87

A big-time winner is Alexander Valley's **2010 Rosé of Sangiovese**. This varietal, which reaches its pinnacle in Italy, has been largely a failure for California red wines, but rosés made from this grape have been much more successful. This offering reveals excellent strawberry and cherry fruit intermixed with earth, spice and tobacco leaf notes in a medium-bodied, dry format. With abundant perfume as well as flavor, this light to medium salmon-colored rosé is best consumed over the next 6-12 months. Exhibiting little oak, the **2009 Estate Chardonnay** (100% Chardonnay; 70% aged in stainless steel and 30% barrel-fermented) offers lots of fleshy popcorn, light peach, tangerine and lemon oil characteristics. It is a medium-bodied, fresh, lively, captivating white to drink over the next 1-2 years.

Composed of 88% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon and 4% Syrah, the solidly made, deep ruby/purple-colored **2008 Merlot Estate** exhibits notes of roasted herbs, white chocolate, black cherries and currants. Medium-bodied with a straightforward, fleshy mouthfeel, it should drink nicely for 2-

3 years. The finest red, the **2009 Cabernet Franc Estate** (100% Cabernet Franc) displays abundant floral, blueberry and spice box notes, fresh, elegant, medium-bodied flavors and a style somewhere between a Loire Valley Cabernet Franc and one from Bordeaux. Enjoy it over the next 2-3 years, although I would not be surprised to see it last longer. Alexander Valley Vineyards has also done an outstanding job with Zinfandel. Their well-known, highly popular **2009 Sin Zin** (a 20,000 case blend of 98.4% Zinfandel and 1.6% Petite Sirah) was aged 10 months in American wood, although the oak is by no means an obvious component. Lots of brambleberry and black cherry fruit intermixed with pepper, licorice and a hint of roasted herbs are present in this spicy, medium-bodied, lush, silky Zinfandel. Enjoy it over the next 2-3 years. The similarly styled **2008 Zinfandel Redemption** is slightly fuller with more noticeable wood. It offers medium to full-bodied, lusty, heady flavors interwoven with earth, pepper and spice. Drink this delicious Zin over the next 2-3 years. Tel. (707) 433-7209; Fax (707) 433-9408

AVALON	2009	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	CALIFORNIA	(\$12.00)	RED	87
AVALON	2009	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA	(\$18.00)	RED	88
AVALON	2009	MERLOT	NAPA	(\$15.00)	RED	87
AVALON	2010	SAUVIGNON BLANC	CALIFORNIA	(\$12.00)	WHITE	87

Avalon's wines are well-worth seeking out given their amazingly low prices (I assume they can be found even cheaper at discounters). There are 10,000 cases of the **2010 Sauvignon Blanc**, a 100% Sauvignon that is crisp and steely with notes of grapefruit, honeysuckle and lemon zest. Fresh, medium-bodied and surprisingly intense, this well-made, dry, impressive white should be consumed over the next year. Winemaker Alex Cose has also fashioned a delicious **2009 Merlot** (10,000 cases) from Napa Valley. Its dark ruby/purple color is followed by abundant berry fruit notes interwoven with white chocolate and sweet cherry characteristics presented in a medium-bodied, silky-textured, minimally oaked style. It is best drunk over the next 1-2 years. A heck-of-a bargain, the cleanly made,

BLITZ 21 WINES	2010	SAUVIGNON BLANC	NAPA	(\$18.00)	WHITE	88
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As one might suspect from the name, a former NFL player is involved with this **2010 Sauvignon Blanc**, an attractive, steely, crisp, grapefruit and citrus-styled white. With lots of perfume, dry, medium-

BONNY DOON VINEYARD	2009	ALBARINO	MONTEREY	(\$18.00)	WHITE	87
BONNY DOON VINEYARD	2009	CONTRA	CENTRAL COAST	(\$14.00)	RED	88
BONNY DOON VINEYARD	2009	MUSCAT	MONTEREY	(\$15.00)	WHITE	87
BONNY DOON VINEYARD	2010	VIN GRIS DE CIGARE	CENTRAL COAST	(\$15.00)	ROSE	90

It is good to see Randall Grahm return to his roots. People often forget that despite his clever newsletters and obvious gift at turning a phrase and getting most wine journalists to be seduced by his slick prose, for many years he was, in fact, making industrial quantities (nearly 450,000 cases) of mediocre wines. Thankfully, this appears to be changing. Hopefully Grahm, who is a fascinating character, has decided to do what he did best in the mid-1980s ... make exciting wines from generally unusual and under-rated varietals. The **2010 Vin Gris de Cigare**, the finest dry rosé he has yet produced, is a blend of 71% Grenache, 16% Roussanne, 11% Grenache Blanc and 2% Mourvèdre. Aged in both stainless steel and barrel, it is a dead-ringer for a Bandol rosé (even though it has only 2% Mourvèdre). Abundant aromas of lavender, flowers, cranberries and cherries are followed by crisp, fresh, lively flavors. Move quickly to purchase this super value as there are only 3,300 cases. Another enticing as well as fairly-priced offering is the **2009 Albarino**, a blend of 91.8%

bodied flavors, plenty of character and no evidence of wood, it is an excellent value in Sauvignon Blanc, particularly given the fact that it comes from Napa Valley. Tel. (407) 217-5353

fresh **2009 Cabernet Sauvignon California** (45,000 cases produced) offers notes of roasted herbs, black currants, cherries, cedarwood and underbrush. It is a spicy, medium-bodied, surprisingly flavorful, long Cabernet to enjoy over the next 3-4 years. Even better is the **2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa**. There are 100,000 cases of this 100% Napa Cabernet Sauvignon that is a tribute to Alex Cose's winemaking skills as well as his ability to access good fruit. A dense plum/ruby color is followed by a wine with serious ripeness, supple, velvety tannins, abundant black currant, cedar and spice box notes, medium-bodied flavors and surprising texture and length. Drink this amazing offering over the next 4-5 years. Tel. (707) 938-9229; Fax (707) 938-9189 (Purple Wine Co.)

BUEHLER VINEYARDS	2008	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA	(\$25.00)	RED	90
BUEHLER VINEYARDS	2009	CHARDONNAY	RUSSIAN RIVER	(\$16.00)	WHITE	88

Wow! Readers should be buying these two terrific values from Buehler Vineyards by the case. The **2009 Chardonnay Russian River** (18,000

cases produced) is a steal. Fresh honeysuckle notes intermixed with pineapple and white peach nuances emerge from this medium-bodied