

# The Wine Panel's top wines of 2009

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Tina Danze is a Dallas freelance writer. She writes about the Wine Panel the last Wednesday of every month.

This year, the Taste Wine Panel sampled more than 200 wines in search of food pairings or simply good values. Most of our tastings centered on wines in a lower price tier, so the panel's favorite wines included some great budget buys.

Here's a round-up of the panel's top 10 picks of 2009.

**2006 Alexander Valley Vineyards Merlot, California:** Decant this one about an hour before serving and you'll be rewarded with more complexity and intensity than is typical of a merlot at this price. Although it has more cherry and plum notes than a classic merlot, this rich, dense wine is very satisfying. \$17.99 to \$20.99; widely available.

**2005 Castaño Hécula Monastrell, Spain:** If you're looking to branch out from the familiar reds, try this smooth, full-flavored wine from southeast Spain. The wine shows dark berries and brown spices. Ideal for beef or lamb. \$12.99-\$15.99; Central Market; select Centennial, Goody Goody and Sigel's stores; Majestic on Greenville Avenue; [Whole Foods Market](#); Big Daddy's on Northwest Highway; and Molto Formaggio.

**2007 Cono Sur Sauvignon Blanc, Chile:** Intensely fruity and crisp, this wine delivers grapefruit, lime and lemon flavors that give it a refreshing quality. It's a good aperitif or patio-party wine. \$8.99; Big Daddy's on Northwest Highway; select Centennial, Goody Goody, and Sigel's stores; Albertsons; Market Street; Mr. G's; Central Market in Plano; and Put a Cork in It.

**Cristalino Brut Cava, Spain:** Light, crisp and delicious, this well-made sparkler is an insanely good value. At this price, you don't need a special occasion to justify bringing out the bubbly. The fruity Cristalino Brut Rosé is also a good sparkler for the money. \$5.97-\$8.18; select Tom Thumbs, World Market, Central Market and Whole Foods Market; widely available at most large chain liquor stores.

**2007 Durigutti Malbec, Argentina:** This spot-on malbec boasts rich, ripe fruit and a dry finish that's not overly tannic. It's a natural match for rustic dishes like grilled flank steak with chimichurri sauce. Decant it an hour or two before serving to open up flavors. \$16.99; Central Market, Dallas; Whole Foods Market in Highland Park and in Plano; Pogo's; Monticello Liquors; Majestic liquor store on Greenville; Perry's; Chateau Wine Market; Urban Market; El Wine Chateau; Cork; and Liq-O-Rama in Blue Mound.

**2008 Ferrari-Carano Fume Blanc:** This juicy, rich wine has bright citrus flavors that cut through creamy sauces and complement seafood dishes like crab cakes. \$14.99; widely available.

**Lucien Albrecht Cremant d'Alsace Brut Rosé NV:** This sparkling wine's bright fruit flavors make it a good choice for spicy fare. The combination of red fruits and spice in the wine proved the perfect match for an Indian chicken curry. \$21.89 to \$28.99; select Goody Goody stores; Whole Foods Market; Central Market; A Toast to Texas Wine Shoppe; and Alma Beer and Wine.

**2007 Penfolds "Koonunga Hill" Shiraz-Cabernet, Australia:** A well-made wine for the money, with supple, ripe fruit and excellent structure. It's a full-bodied wine, with loads of dark berry flavors laced with chocolate, spice and subtle oak notes. \$9.99; widely available.

**2006 Red Diamond Cabernet Sauvignon, Washington State:** It's hard to find true cab character at this price, but this wine shows it. Berry and cherry flavors are laced with green olive, cocoa and vanilla notes. Call this your everyday cabernet. \$8.98-\$9.99; widely available.

**2007 Réserve Perrin Cotes du Rhone Blanc, France: Complex and delicious, with intense, ripe fruit, this white blend is a bargain. Its rich peach, pear and melon flavors are laced with mineral notes. An excellent food wine and a great value. Try it with scallops, shrimp or any shellfish. \$10.99 to \$11.99; widely available.**

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