

Cono Sur, Central Valley (Chile) Merlot 2008 (\$10, Vineyard Brands): I think it is safe to say that \$10 Merlot is currently one of the most mistrusted options in the entire world of wine, but this is a bottling that offers pure flavors and very good quality for the money. You won't find a lot of nuanced complexity, but there's plenty of honest plum and black cherry fruit along with a subtle leafy edge. **85 [Michael Franz](#)** *Oct 13, 2009*

Marqués de Cáceres, Rioja (Spain) Blanco 2008 (\$8, Vineyard Brands): Yes, you read it correctly--a white wine from Rioja, Spain's most recognized region for red wine. There's a long tradition of making white wine in Rioja, but the local preference for a heavy slightly oxidized style made them impossible to sell in the United States. Hence, they were rarely seen. But as with so much about Spanish wines, things have changed and so has white Rioja. This one is fresh and lively, not ponderous. It has a subtle lanolin-like texture that makes it even more appealing. A marvelous buy. **88 [Michael Apstein](#)** *Oct 13, 2009*