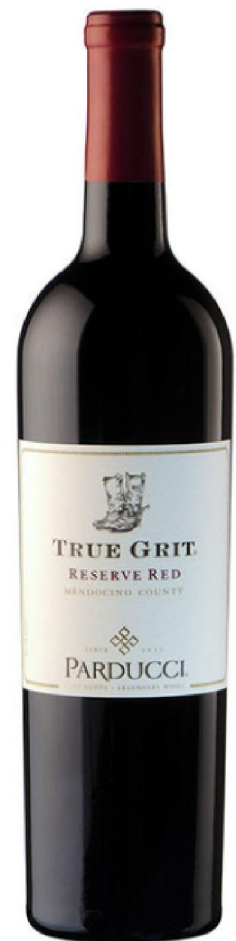


7 California Red Wines Under \$20 for Memorial Day Weekend



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Easy-drinking reds for summer.

Even before you swap in a full tank of propane and dust off your **summer grilling** recipes, now is the time to take stock of what's really important: the juicy, easy-drinking **red wines** you'll be sipping while the **barbecue** heats up.

From northern Mendocino County south to **Paso Robles**, lovers of big, opulent, hedonistic red wines can count on California's varied climates and terrains to deliver the goods.

But keep it classy while you're at it—I find that oversized **Riedel Bordeaux glasses** are a terrific fit for big, lavish reds, and if you don't have a wine cellar, stick any of these bottles in the refrigerator for a good 20 minutes prior to popping the cork. When that 500-degree rush of BBQ-scented air comes on strong each time you open the grill to flip burgers, you'll be thankful there's a slightly cool, juicy red wine waiting to ease the sting.

Here are eight of the most quaffable under-\$20 red wines from California that I've come across in recent tastings—guaranteed delicious accompaniment to all the flavorful food coming hot off your grill this Memorial Day.

Marietta Old Vine Red Lot 66 (\$15)

Each year, winemaker Scot Bilbro produces two different lots of this blend from multiple varietals in Sonoma and multiple vintages. What began 33 years ago culminates in Lot 66 — a powerful old vine zinfandel blend of the last four vintages. A plethora of red berry, red floral and red spice aromas give way to a richly textured wine that is light on its feet and teeming with pliant red and blackberry flavors and subtle hints of herbs, bramble and tobacco spice.

2015 “7 Moons” Red Blend (\$10)

A kitchen sink California-blend of Syrah, Merlot, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Grenache. Fantastic aromas of blackberry and blueberry fruit, dried sagebrush and hints of cinnamon. Soft and silky with flavors of ripe blackberries and blueberry compote, mouthwatering acidity and a bit of candied cinnamon on the finish.

2015 Ravage Cabernet Sauvignon (\$11)

If you're grilling anything that is smothered in BBQ sauce, let this wine be your sidekick. An incredibly masculine wine, packed with smoky, meaty and roasted herb aromas and flavors, underscored by ripe plum, blueberry fruit and savory porcini mushrooms on a long and dark-berry-driven finish.

2014 Austerity Cabernet Sauvignon (\$14)

This 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon from Paso Robles delivers powerful aromas of red berries, red licorice and hints of new oak and vanilla spice. Bright and juicy with sweet red raspberry and black cherry fruit. Good acidity on the finish, with just a hint of mocha. If you find the [2013 vintage](#), that's a good bet too, with a bit more body and red berry fruit.

2014 Ancient Peaks Cabernet Sauvignon (\$15)

Primarily Cabernet Sauvignon with splashes of Syrah, Cabernet Franc and Zinfandel from the winery's estate Margarita Vineyard, which is tucked into the Santa Lucia Mountain range in Paso Robles. An impeccably deep, dark and brooding wine, with rich layers of silky blackberry and black cherry fruit, sweet oak spice and dark salted chocolate on the finish.

2013 Kenwood Vineyards Zinfandel (\$15)

A terrific, juicy Sonoma Zinfandel with just a splash of Syrah from Kenwood Winery's longtime winemaker Pat Henderson. Bright and lively, with red berry, sweet tobacco and red licorice aromas. Round and silky on entry, loaded with boysenberry fruit, cinnamon and bramble character, giving way to a mouthwatering finish.

Locations Wine CA Red (\$19)

Winemaker Dave Phinney (you might know his other brand, The Prisoner) produces this non-vintage dated, full-bodied powerhouse red. Juicy and plush, with decadent concentrated dark-berry fruit, black licorice, briary notes, and hints of smoky black pepper spice.

2013 True Grit Reserve Red (\$18)

The 2012 and 2013 vintages of this fantastically complex Northern California red blend from Mendocino County have benefited from the back-to-back drought years, which stressed vines and helped concentrate fruit and flavors and aromas. A sumptuous mix of bramble, vanilla and baking spice gives way to a round, creamy mouthfeel of black raspberry fruit, with hints of black olives on a long spicy finish.