

Paste

25 of the Best California Red Wines Under \$25

By Amy Glynn



“Red wine” is a beverage category so unbelievably diverse it can feel like you have to take a class before you go shopping for it. It’s made nearly everywhere in the world, it encompasses the distinct characteristics of thousands of grape varietals, and people get really fetishy and weird about it. Serious, long-lived reds like Cabernet Sauvignon can command exorbitant prices especially when they come from regions with a high cachet factor (Napa Valley, Bordeaux, Burgundy, for example). But there is a vast diversity of really great stuff out there, from Aglianico to Zinfandel, and it doesn’t have to break the bank.

Here are 25 California reds with a really good price-to-quality ratio. They run from light-bodied to very intense, from fruity to leathery, from lighthearted to Extremely Serious. None of them will put you out more than \$25. All are excellent dinner companions, friends to grill-tending folk, party-suitable and as reasonable to sip a la carte as to pair with food.

Quivira Dry Creek Zinfandel (\$19)



If I miss a chance to talk up my delightful pals at Quivira, assume I have been replaced by a bot and send someone to my house to investigate, please. These Dry Creek superstars make some spectacular wines, most of which you cannot hope to find in the under \$25 range. This Zinfandel is a blessing of an exception and an example of what happens when you don't let Zinfandel come into its overripe expression as a 16% ABV blackberry jam-bomb. This is a Zin with some restraint. Purple, with the ubiquitous blackberry note that lets you know it's a Zin, and tones of dark cherry, earth, and saddle leather. It's a rich, rich wine, but it's not decadent, which I mean in the sense of decaying. It's one of the more perfect Zinfandels especially for the money, and while you can and should drink it whenever the mood strikes, it's true companions are robust, wintry comfort food dishes; think stews, roasted meats, stuffed winter squash.

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