

# P R I D E M O U N T A I N V I N E Y A R D S

## 2005 - 2014 VERTICAL TASTING PRIDE MOUNTAIN VINEYARDS VINTNER SELECT MERLOT

Our Vintner Select Merlot program began with the 1999 vintage. The thinking at the time was that our many merlot blocks produce such concentrated and flavorful merlot each vintage that we should select the one lot of merlot aging in barrel that just completely blows us away and feature it in its own bottling. When we have visitors to the winery whom we really want to impress, we always make sure to barrel taste one of these intensely flavored lots of merlot. The goal of the Vintner Select Merlot program is to let many people be able to experience how outrageously great merlot can be when grown in the right setting. Over our 25 years of trying different clones, we have found that on our south-facing slopes at 2100 feet of elevation, that often have 4 AM low temperatures in the upper 70s despite the surrounding valleys being filled with 56-degree fog, it is Clone 3 merlot that we love the most and that consistently makes up our Vintner Select Merlot. The Vintner Select Merlot is always 100% varietal merlot, is always Clone 3 and is mainly sourced from our largest merlot block called Lower Mountain Top that has a wide 10' x 7' vine spacing and faces directly south on an 8% slope.

On February 12, 2017, the ten most recent vintages of PMV Vintner Select Merlot (2005 to 2014) were tasted non-blind by Steve Pride in a single flight after a 2-hour decant. The wines are listed in the order tasted:

**2005:** Complex exciting aromas of sandalwood, moist tobacco, resinous underbrush and concentrated ripe plum. In the mouth, you feel the weight and density of the wine but despite that considerable tannic left there is only the mildest of chalky grip on the long finish. Great concentrated favors of dark plum and cherry, cedar, anise weed and almond paste. The wine is packed and stacked but will benefit, even at 12 years old, from another few years of cellar time for the full-throttle character to become still further refined.

**2006:** Classy wine with suave aromas of ripe cherries, black licorice and refined smoke nuances. The wine is absolutely sublime in the mouth with a silky, balanced, mouth-coating character that excites the tongue without edginess or excess chalkiness on the persistent finish. Pleasant sophisticated flavors of candied plum, almonds, dried herb and cedar that somehow feel fresher and more exciting than the 2005. This is an absolutely gorgeous wine that is in a great place right now and should stay there for years to come. My favorite wine in the vertical. Don't hesitate opening this beauty right now!

**2007:** Concentrated dark aromas of sandalwood, ripe dark plums, tobacco and subtle smoky nuances. A gorgeous dense wine in the mouth with a gentle supple attack and easy middle that transitions to gradually emerging tannins on the finish. The dark fruit flavors have dried herb, almond and pencil shaving nuances that emerge with time in the mouth. The overall textural experience is great right now but not quite as perfect as the 2006. So can be consumed now with complete pleasure but if there is a chance that another year or two will produce the experience of the 2006, I would hold off a bit longer. It has plenty of fruit and tannin for additional aging.

**2008:** Thrilling nose of ripe blackberry, cherry pits, baking spice and cinders. An absolutely beautiful textural experience from the attack to the long silky finish with everything in perfect balance. There is less density and weight than the 2005, 2006 or 2007 which indicates to me this is one to consume sooner than later even if it can favorably age for another 5 or so years. A range of great dark fruit flavors followed by more subtle, earthy, herbal nuances. I would not hesitate to consume this now after a one-hour decant.

**2009:** Intense thrilling nose of black cherry, plum, resinous underbrush and earthy undertones. Wow, classic merlot in the mouth with round velvety texture, no holes from the attack through the lengthy finish. Classic PMV merlot flavors with additional interesting pear skin and earthy nuances. Weighty pleasure throughout with no grippy tannins and nothing poking out. I loved the 2006 but this is possibly even more pleasurable. Enjoy now but this has many years (ten or more) of life ahead of it. A beauty!

**2010:** Pleasing sweet dark fruit nuances combine with complex white pepper, resin and dried herb to make a fantastic nose. Ripe and delicious with thick concentrated flavors of black fruit, notes of tropical fruit, hints of vanilla and cherry pit. A well-balanced wine from start to finish but with a nuance of heat on the finish despite 2010 being one of our coolest vintages ever. Overall, though being very pleasant, presents itself as a bit young compared to the earlier wines and in need of a few more years to more thoroughly resolve and refine.

**2011:** Great nose that has the usual PMV-merlot dark fruit character but has additional complex perfumed and floral nuances that earlier vintages did not show. In the mouth, complex cedar, spice, dried herb and graphite notes add thrilling interest to the underlying black cherry, cherry pit and dark fruit flavors. Texturally, the wine is spot on, with density and a satisfying round, mouth-coating character. The finish still shows a hint of emergent chalkiness that ideally needs a few more years to fully lie down. Given that 2011 was the coldest vintage in our 25 years, I could not be happier with this nuanced complex wine. You can fully enjoy right now, but given the quality, why not give it a couple of more years to let the tannins completely resolve and enjoy this beauty in its prime.

**2012:** Wow, super-concentrated, fruit-driven, complex nose. The mouth shows perfect balance from start to finish, with density and pleasing mouth-coating character but nothing grippy or out of place, which is the classic signature of 2012. Thrilling wide range of flavors including cedar, white pepper, black licorice, black cherry and wild strawberry (the little ones that grow in forests). No excessive chalky tannins on the finish, just a gorgeous wine that I can recommend pulling the cork on today, even if it has a very long life ahead of it. Somewhere tied with 2006 and 2009 as my favorite at the tasting.

**2013:** Dark nuanced nose of ripe blackberry and black cherry, resinous underbrush and dried herbs. Gorgeous attack and middle, but the tell-tale 2013 tannins begin to sneak in after a few seconds making the finish still too excessively chalky. The 2013 needs a number of years for those tannins to resolve. The flavors are spot on PMV merlot with the usual range of dark fruit, resinous underbrush and earthy undertones. This is a great PMV merlot that just needs to go to sleep in your cellar for a few years. It will emerge like Sleeping Beauty.

**2014:** Great nose consistent with all previous vintages with additional mocha and coffee nuances due to the youth of this wine (bottled in August, 2016). Gorgeous round wine that is much softer in tannin compared to 2013 but still has pleasing density and roundness. Flavors are still showing their oak-influenced youth (though nothing about our new oak percentages have changed from say the 2008 vintage to the present) but this is a smooth balanced wine that will take on weight and further complexity in the year or two to come. Hold off on this one, if you can, for the next few years and experience it when everything has filled out and taken on its final definition.

**Rankings:** The goal of this tasting was to rank the wines on overall pleasure and drinkability at present. If everything is aging as it should, the older wines should be ranked earlier on the list below and the younger wines ranked later, which is, for the most part, what happened:

1. 2006 [The most sophisticated and perfect wine in the line up with loads of VS Merlot ripeness. Enjoy!]
2. 2009 [Another fantastic dense merlot that is in perfect balance and ready to enjoy. Pure pleasure!]
3. 2012 [Beautiful expressive merlot with a great mouth feel; drink now or hold, even if it is a relative baby.]
4. 2005 [Concentrated complex flavors that can be enjoyed now but will benefit from a few more years]
5. 2008 [Perfect balance and flavors, this one is ready for action now and is slightly less dense than the others]
6. 2007 [Great full-bodied merlot that still has a few tannins to resolve on the finish]
7. 2011 [Great complex merlot that has it all but I would give this another few years to more fully express itself]
8. 2010 [Enjoyable intensely flavored merlot that has a note of subtle alcohol; give it more time to integrate]
9. 2014 [This has everything we love in PMV merlot and just needs some years to fill out and take final definition]
10. 2013 [Packed with all we have at PMV but needs a few more years to let the considerable tannins soften]

**Conclusions:** I am really struck by the consistent vintage signatures that this Vintner Select Merlot vertical displayed compared to the Vintner Select Cabernet Sauvignon vertical tasted last month (and to all of our reds from these vintages for that matter). For example, the 2005 vintage has fantastic flavor and complexity but can still benefit from some years to resolve the tannins. That said, the 2005 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon is in an ideal place at present as is the 2005 Syrah. Overall, 2005 remains as one of my favorite vintages in our history across all of our different wines including the whites. The 2012 vintage is showing beautifully at present and has density without excessive tannic grippiness in both the VS Cab and VS Merlot. The 2009 has also emerged as one of my all time favorites for merlot and cab. But at the moment, it is the 2006 vintage that has found its sweet spot at these tastings: classy sophisticated wine that I recommend you open and enjoy right now. Note that a few years ago, the 2006 vintage across the board still had a few tannins to shed. So aging to 10+ years in bottle is wise if you can do it.

There was not one dog in this line up. All of these merlots are showing the tell-tale round, mouth-coating textural character we expect from merlot. Thanks for your interest and enjoy!