

ROBUST REDS

for Roasts

IF YOU LIKE ...

Medlock Ames 2015 Heritage Alexander Valley Merlot (\$55)

Don't discount Merlot as a great varietal, no matter what you might have seen in the movies. In the hands of Ames Morison, winemaker/partner at this Chalk Hill-area winery, the Heritage Merlot is a generous, plummy, and spicy wine with solid tannin structure – delicious now and also with the capability to improve with cellaring for a decade or so. Roast leg of lamb comes quickly to mind as a perfect pairing.

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ...

Ridge Vineyards 2016 Lytton Estate Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah (\$40)

Ridge's Geyserville winery outpost is best known for Zinfandel, many of which have a splash of Petite Sirah in them. This 100 percent varietal wine deserves standalone status, for its savory character, well-mannered plum, blackberry, and blueberry fruit, and silky texture not often found in wines made from the muscular, not-so-Petite grape. Braised short ribs and chicken mole would be great mates.

PINOT NOIR

for Mushroom Season

IF YOU LIKE ...

Papapietro Perry Winery 2015 Leras Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$63)

Vivacious red cherry and berry aromas and flavors, and a forest-floor savory note that appears in many Pinot Noirs, lend this full-bodied wine to service with almost anything fungi. It's delicious by itself and complements many duck preparations, yet truly shines with mushroom pâté, meat ragouts with mushrooms, and prime rib with mushroom sauce.

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ...

La Crema Winery 2016 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$25)

Large-volume La Crema bottles Pinot Noirs at a wide range of prices, and this one over-delivers. It's a blend of grapes from a dozen or so vineyards, which winemaker Craig McAllister wove into a seamless wine with robust fruit, intense spice, and woody earthiness. It's not a shy wine, so it's best served with wild-mushroom risotto with lots of savory Parmigiano-Reggiano, or perhaps mushroom-topped pizza.



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If ocean conditions allow, many Sonoma winter meals will feature traditional, and treasured, Dungeness crab, sumptuously served with Chardonnay. Valentine's Day calls for late-harvest white wines kissed with sweetness – far more romantic than a box of candy – and the chilly weather encourages cooks to match roasted and braised meats with hearty red wines. It's also wild mushroom season, and few wines pair more beautifully with fungi than Pinot Noir. **LINDA MURPHY** recommends these wines for winter season enjoyment.



CHARDONNAY

for Crab

IF YOU LIKE ...

Jigar Winery 2015 Peters Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$32)

This Forestville winery shows a balanced, less-is-more hand with this crisp, lively Chardonnay that's a great mate for steamed crab, served with drawn butter and/or spicy remoulade. The snappy green apple, Asian pear, and citrus flavors, which come from the cool-climate Peters Vineyard, are enhanced by spicy oak, yet the vibrant fruit and refreshing acidity take center stage.

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ...

Olema Wines 2017 Sonoma County Chardonnay (\$16)

Amici Cellars in Napa Valley created the Olema brand to focus on good-value wines grown and produced in Sonoma County. This Chardonnay is a great introduction to the brand, with lively Granny Smith apple, pear, and tropical fruit flavors that go down easy. Purchase this crowd-pleasing wine by the case and serve it at your next party.

SWEETIES

for Valentine's Day

IF YOU LIKE ...

Merry Edwards Winery 2014 Late Harvest Russian River Valley

Sauvignon Blanc (\$48 for 375 ml)
Local legend Merry Edwards recently turned over day-to-day winemaking duties to Heidi von der Mehden, though Edwards remains CEO/CFO of her Sebastopol operation. She created this unctuous dessert wine from estate-grown fruit, and it's rich in crème brûlée, grilled Meyer lemon, poached peach character, and ginger spice, with bracing acidity to balance the sweetness. Serve it with fruit pastries and a dessert cheese course.

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ...

Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyards 2015 Late Harvest Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$36 for 375 ml)

Australia-born winemaker Mick Schroeter knows a thing about "stickies," as sweet wines are called Down Under. This rendition, from Chardonnay that hangs so long on the vines that the sugars concentrate into liquid gold, is a viscous, lush wine with butterscotch, peach, pear, and apple pie à la mode personality. The finish is fresh and mouthwatering.