

# Cycles GLADIATOR

2013 MERLOT



Anybody who knows me or has read any of my notes over the years understands that I take Merlot VERY seriously. It's actually something of an obsession for me. Is it a healthy one or an unhealthy one? I don't know. You'll have to decide. It started back in 1996 at the First (and only, I'm afraid) International Merlot Conference held up at Sterling Vineyards in Napa. I had an opportunity to taste the very best Merlots from Pomerol, Washington State, South Africa, Italy, and yes, even California. It was a paradigm shifting moment for me. I discovered what many of you already know: that great Merlots are TRULY serious wines on par with the best Cabs and Pinots of the world, AND that Merlot is a very fastidious grape, only producing superior wines when grown in tightly delineated areas where it's usually too cool to grow great Cab, but too warm for great Pinot Noir. In short, a difficult grape to grow correctly. But I bet many of you still hear people from time to time refusing to sample even the very best of the varietal's offerings in part because there are so many substandard Merlots on the market as well as the hangover affect from the movie Sideways: "No, if anyone orders Merlot, I'm leaving. I am NOT drinking any f\*#king Merlot!" Thanks, Miles.

2013 was a fantastic year for all varietals on the Central Coast. The drought allowed for judicious watering from wells. Good vineyard managers recognized when their plants called for a drink and so properly provided optimum growing conditions for the vines to develop superior grapes. Merlot was no exception. The primary Merlot source for this blend comes from the southernmost area in the Paso Robles appellation. Cool weather, and alluvial soils provided a deeply colored and well-structured wine to build on. I added some lovely Estrella-area Merlot for sweetness and bright fruit notes. I finished the wine with about 12% Cabernet Sauvignon to add some back end structure and depth. Merlot should always be a big, broad pallet on which you can paint layers with small quantities of other varietals.

The nose is pretty complex with notes of black cherry, tea leaf, and cedar aromatics. Broad entry flavors of dark fruits: plums, blackberry, and cherry. The midpalate continues with cherry followed by dusty tannins from the Cabernet. A firm thread of acidity lifts the fruit and keeps it on the tongue well into the finish. This is a very sturdy Merlot that would pair well with traditional Cabernet dishes like steak, but I think you would get the most out of this wine when paired with a rich Italian tomato based pasta or meat dish. I'm also thinking lamb. Not sure why but I suspect the gamey/savory notes of the meat would be enhanced by the berry notes and crisp acidity of the wine. Salud!

Varietal:  
88% Merlot,  
12% Cabernet  
Sauvignon

Appellation:  
100% Central Coast

TA: 0.62 gms/100ml

pH: 3.49

Alcohol: 13.9%

Oak regimen:  
22% New French,  
15% New American,  
balance neutral  
oak

Adam LaZarre . Winemaker