

**THE MISSION:** Find good red wines costing less than \$10 for everyday drinking.

**THE TASTERS:**

- Blythe Beck, executive chef, Central 214
- George Howard, Serendipity Wine Imports
- Paul Pinnell, sommelier, owner and general manager of Dali Wine Bar and Cellar
- James Tidwell, certified wine educator; master sommelier, Café on the Green, Four Seasons Resort and Club in Las Colinas
- Cathy Barber, food and wine editor
- Tina Danze, freelance writer

**2007 Cortijo III Rioja, Spain:** This easy-drinking tempranillo-garnacha blend reveals more personality than most budget wines. It shows intense red-berry flavors, with classic tempranillo spiciness and silky tannins. "It doesn't taste like a mass-produced wine," said Paul Pinnell. \$8.95; Central Market; Sigel's; select Goody and Centennial Stores.

**2008 Darby & Joan Cabernet Sauvignon, Australia:** Although not a classic cab, this rich, jammy wine is typical of Australia. It bursts with ripe, dark berry flavors spiced with juniper and licorice. "It's tons of fruit barreling down," said Paul Pinnell. \$9.99; Sigel's; WineStyles in Flower Mound and Watauga; Put a Cork in It; Shellman's Fine Wine and Spirits.

**PANEL PICK**  
**2006 Red Diamond Cabernet Sauvignon, Washington State:** This wine showed the most true cabernet character and proved a great value for a cab. Berry and cherry flavors are laced with green olive, cocoa and vanilla notes. "It's a good everyday wine for cab drinkers," said James Tidwell. \$8.99-\$9.99; widely available.



TASTE | WINE PANEL

# Budget reds

A dozen finds for \$10 or less

By **TINA DANZE**  
 Special Contributor

Find more budget wines on **4E**.

**C**halk it up to the economy—or just good sense: This month the wine panel indulged a penchant for budget wines.

We've flirted with them in prior tastings, marveling at how some bargain bottles hold their own with pricier picks. But until now, we'd never focused exclusively on the under-\$10 category. Some panelists begged for a little wiggle room—an extra buck or two yields many more remarkable values—but we held firm to the rock-bottom price tier.

After all, these aren't wines you bring to a birthday dinner. They're reliable, everyday wines. We sought good wines

for the money, but not necessarily the truest expression of the varietal. And we gave the nod to some well-made, easy-drinking wines, even if they weren't particularly complex.

We sampled 23 reds sold by at least one retailer for less than \$10. We were pleased to find a dozen good wines. Because promotions come and go, we excluded wines sale-priced for less than \$10. That said, not all stores carry the wines we've listed for the same price, so expect some retailers to creep over or fall below our stated price.

Next month, we take on whites.

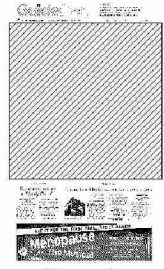
*Tina Danze is a Dallas freelance writer.*

**Ravenswood Vintners Blend Zinfandel,**

**California:** Not necessarily the best value in zinfandels, but a well-made, reliable wine nonetheless, it bursts with blueberry and raspberry fruit, peppered with spice and bramble. Paul Pinnell called this "a slam-dunk for a wine under \$10." \$9.99; widely available.



**Cristalino Brut Rosé Cava, Spain:** This affordable, fruity sparkler could even be a party wine. Clean and refreshing, it delivers strawberry, raspberry and bright cherry flavors with a hint of sweetness and loads of lively bubbles. Relatively low in alcohol, Blythe Beck called it "perfect for sipping by the pool." \$7.99 at World Market; Big Daddy's on Northwest Highway; Whole Foods Market; select Goody and Centennial stores; Pogo's; and Addison Wine and Spirits.



## Seven more bargain reds



### 2005 Paringa Sparkling Shiraz, Australia

This fruity, medium-bodied sparkler rates as fun and interesting. Rich and ripe. It holds dark berry, plum and black cherry flavors with a hint of sweetness. A novelty wine that will wow many — but not all. "It's kind of over the top," said Paul Pinnell. \$9.99; Goody Goody; World Market; Big Daddy's on Northwest Highway; Whole Foods Market; select Centennial stores; Put a Cork in It; Brian's Wines and More; Mr. G's.



### 2005 Blackstone Merlot, California

This smooth wine shows nice complexity for a merlot of this price. "The supple, black-plum fruit has an implicit sweetness that rounds out the wine," said James Tidwell. Although somewhat generic in its flavor profile, it's a well-made wine for the money. \$8.99; widely available.



### 2006 Solaz Tempranillo-Cabernet Sauvignon, Spain

This tempranillo blend is impressive for the money. The 20 percent cabernet component lends a structure and body uncommon at this price. Juicy, with sweet oak notes of cinnamon and vanilla, it's a pleasing, well-made wine. \$7.99; most Kroger, Albertsons and Tom Thumb supermarkets; Big Daddy's on Northwest Highway; select Centennial stores.



### 2007 Torres Sangre de Toro, Spain

Made of garnacha and carifena, this crowd-pleaser shows an elegance that belies its price. Rich, dark berry and currant flavors are woven with hints of licorice and spice. "Year after year, it gets consistently good reviews," said George Howald. \$9.99; widely available.



### 2007 Penfolds "Koonunga Hill" Shiraz-Cabernet, Australia

This tasty blend was a close contender for the Panel Pick. "It's a well-made wine, with supple, ripe fruit and excellent structure," said Tidwell. "The bright, expressive fruit flavors jump out of the glass," said Pinnell. \$9.99; widely available.



### 2008 Lindemans Bin 99 Pinot Noir, Australia

Clean and elegant, this wine boasts juicy cherry and berry fruit with super-soft tannins and well-integrated oak. "It's a solid, versatile food wine," said Howald. At this price, you'd be hard-pressed to find a decent domestic pinot. \$7.49; widely available.



### 2007 Cellar No. 8 Cabernet Sauvignon, California

This easy-drinking wine leans far to the soft side for a cabernet. Still, it's a pleasant wine for drinking on its own. It shows dark cherry and currant flavors with notes of vanilla and nutmeg. Think of it as a red table wine and you'll appreciate it more. \$8.99; widely available.