

# MAXIM

MARCH 2008

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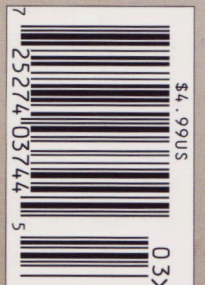
We Name the Beltway's  
Biggest Badasses p.100

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# QUAFF ON THE CHEAP!

These top-notch wines may stain your teeth, but they won't break the bank.

## Marqués de Cáceres Crianza Rioja 2004 (\$12)

**Grapes:** Spain's northerly La Rioja region is to tempranillo (a robust wine grape) what Colombia is to the coca plant (minus the rebel ambushes). The area serves up king-size flavor—and value, if you know where to look.

**Why so cheap?** Reds from La Rioja come in several quality levels, based on how long they spend in oak barrels before being bottled and sold; crianza versions slosh around for a year in each casing (compared with two or more for the region's top vintages). The price tag reflects this distinction, but don't sleep on it: Notes of vanilla, coconut, and the signature tobacco finish give these wines complexity for pennies.

**Use it to wash down...** Any Spanish-influenced dish, but especially hearty tapas like enchiladas, empanadas, and chorizo.

## Bogle Vineyards Old Vine Zinfandel 2005 (\$11)

**Grapes:** Balloonlike zinfandel grapes are grown almost exclusively in California, where ample sunshine in places like the Sacramento River Delta region paves the way for ripe fruit flavors (and, yessir, sky-high alcohol levels: 16 percent versus the traditional 11 to 13 percent). But it's not just a more intoxicating brew, the old vine style lends the taste of nutmeg and pepper to the heady mix.

**Why so cheap?** Zin enjoys a better reputation than merlot, but because it hasn't achieved the staggering popularity of "elite" reds like pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon, you get much more bang for your booze-soaked buck.

**Use it to wash down...** Subtly saccharine foods like BBQ ribs and wings (while technically a dry wine, fruity zins—like unicorns, rainbows and you—are often described as "sweet").

## Penfolds Koonunga Hill Shiraz Cabernet 2005 (\$9)

**Grapes:** From the winery that put Oz on the winemaking map comes this consummately drinkable blend of shiraz and cabernet sauvignon grapes, the two powerhouse reds that thrive Down Under. Why blend? Shiraz can taste like a kiss from a blotto grandma—overly syrupy. By mixing it with the robust cabernet grape, a once ladylike drink grows a backbone with flavors of tobacco, cocoa, and toast.

**Why so cheap?** Penfolds sources cabernet and shiraz from all over South Australia for this wine, enabling it to charge less than if the grapes came from a single region or vineyard (and the entire wine world agrees that this selection overdelivers on quality and skimps on price).

**Use it to wash down...** Pepper steaks, smoked meats, aged meats, meat-meats, and the fieriest chili your chapped lips can slurp down.

## Casa Lapostolle Rapel Valley Merlot 2005 (\$13)

**Grapes:** Merlot's fall from grace after the movie *Sideways* was akin to Britney's performance at the '07 VMAs, but what naysayers often forget is that this grape is a world classic...when it isn't aged too long.

**Why so cheap?** Merlot's decline in sales is reflected in its price tag. This is good news for collectors, critics, and consumers alike, and the French-owned Lapostolle makes theirs in the signature style of Bordeaux's famous reds.

**Use it to wash down...** Velvety merlots work best with filet mignon and similar fancy beef cuts, but portobello burgers and soft cheeses pair up swimmingly as well.

## Alamos Mendoza Malbec 2006 (\$11)

**Grapes:** Sometimes called the black grape, Malbec was a bit player on the international scene until it broke out as the lead act in Argentina, winemaking's newest hot spot. Formerly an afterthought within Bordeaux blends, it took to the sandy, elevated soils of Mendoza and quickly came into its own.

**Why so cheap?** The currency crisis in Argentina continues to be a source for value in all sorts of goods, wine included. Stock up now, before they get their *mierda* together.

**Use it to wash down...** Marinated meats, steak fajitas, chimichangas, and any dish with a little south-of-the-border sass to it.