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Do your friends still mock you for drinking Merlot? Here's why they should stop

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For centuries, Merlot did not have an image problem. It looked good. It was well liked. It made friends with palates across the land. It was Cabernet Sauvignon's less stodgy but still morally upright cousin.

Then, in 2004, director Alexander Payne made the movie "Sideways." Suddenly Merlot had issues. Suddenly Merlot needed image consultants.

In the movie, sad sack Miles, played by actor Paul Giamatti, rages briefly against the grape. "If anybody orders any Merlot I'm leaving!" he threatens, more because he is a hot-headed pathetic loser than because Merlot is offensive. I mean, I don't leave the table when a companion orders a mango margarita, and that's an actual crime.

And still Merlot sales dropped. Drinkers sneered. Everybody became an expert on Pinot Noir.

But things are finally looking up for Merlot. Bloomberg reports the varietal is [making a comeback](#): "Sales of 'luxury' versions of the red increased 5 percent over the past year, according to Nielsen, while a 2016 Wine Intelligence report found it was the No. 1 varietal of choice for American drinkers of all ages," a recent story reports. "Restaurants sold 8 percent more Merlots costing \$100 and up, according to Winemetrics' 2016 Fine Dining Report."



So now, on the eve of International Merlot Day — Nov. 7, and I do respond to evites — we are here to tell you that the story has a happy ending. At least for me. I got to drink a bunch of good Merlot. Only one was close to luxury Merlot, but we liked everything we tried. So the next time someone [wineshames](#) you and threatens to leave the table if you order Merlot, let him go. That way there's more for you.



2015 Rutherford Ranch Merlot (\$26): The first sip is a bit tart and gives way to cherry and chocolate notes. Some clove, too, and we love clove, though we are not very [Goth](#). We'd call it wonderfully drinkable, and that's an understatement.

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