

LOCAL WINE PICKS

## Better than Two-Buck Chuck: This cabernet's a steal

The Tribune

Rabbit Ridge Winery began life in 1981 outside the Sonoma County town of Healdsburg. Owner Erich Russell began buying land in Paso Robles in 1996 and eventually moved operations there, opening a new winery in 2003 on San Marcos Road, west of Highway 101.

A range of wines is produced — and poured in the tasting room — but the emphasis is on reds. During a recent visit, the staff was pouring an amazing value, the 2003 Wild Hare Cabernet Sauvignon (\$6), available only at the winery. It's a harmonious wine with bright black cherry fruit and some herbal/black olive notes. (If you buy three cases, the price drops to less than \$3 a bottle for something that's way better than Two-Buck Chuck.)

Other wines aren't quite so cheap but still offer good value. The 2004 Westside Zinfandel (\$14) is a medium-weight wine with jammy raspberry flavors. The 2003 Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon (\$14) has good concentration, with flavors of black cherry and cassis and firm tannins.

Moving up in price, the 2003 LPR Limited Paso Reserve (\$20), a blend of zinfandel, primitive, petite sirah and syrah, is quite tight and tannic at this point but offers ample fruit. More approachable at this point is the 2003 Cote Rotie Style Syrah (\$30), which contains 5 percent viognier. It displays smoky blackberry and black raspberry fruit, generous oak and tannins that build toward the finish. You could drink it now with something hearty, but it would benefit from a couple more years in the bottle.