

By Laurie Daniel



20 YEARS OF MARILYN: Occasionally I get e-mails from readers who are looking for this or that vintage of something called **Marilyn Merlot**. It's a Napa Valley wine whose label carries a different picture of Marilyn Monroe in each vintage. The whole thing always seemed a little too gimmicky to me, but the wines drew a strong following, with some people trying to collect every vintage. Not bad for a concept that was cooked up over a dinner party in 1983.

The **2004** vintage is the 20th for Marilyn Merlot, and I finally took the plunge and tasted it. **The verdict: a very nice merlot that, at \$26, isn't cheap, but it's fairly reasonable by Napa Valley -- and collectible wine -- standards. The wine is firmly structured and displays ripe black cherry flavors accented by notes of anise, mint and cedar.** It's a little more angular than the star it celebrates, but it should get softer and fleshier with a year or two more in the bottle. The grapes come from a couple of prime vineyards in the heart of the valley. The wine will be available June 1 from www.marilynwines.com or (866) MMWINES (866-669-4637).

Producer Nova Wines says the Marilyn wines -- cabernet and a young merlot called Norma Jeane are also in the portfolio -- are the only products that have permission from Monroe's estate to use her image and her name. Royalties paid to the estate support the Lee Strasberg Theater Institute and the Anna Freud Foundation.