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By **ROBERT WHITLEY**

Nickel & Nickel, Oakville (Napa Valley, California) Merlot

Harris Vineyard 2008: Merlot doesn't get much better than the remarkable juice from Nickel & Nickel's Harris Vineyard. The nose is inviting, showing hints of cedar, spice and red fruit. On the palate the wine opens up and coats the palate with flavors of plum, raspberry and gentle toasty oak. The tannins are smooth and supple, yet the wine has the backbone to improve with age, though the temptation to drink it now might be difficult to resist. One of the great Merlots of the world, let alone California. **R: 97**

Nickel & Nickel, Carneros (California) Chardonnay

Truchard Vineyard 2009: Truchard is undoubtedly among the finest Chardonnay Vineyards in California and Nickel & Nickel always seem to make the most of it. This is a sensational example of what California vintners can do with Chardonnay when they utilize good vineyards and don't attempt to manipulate. This vintage of Nickel & Nickel Truchard exhibits bold lemon citrus and pear fruit on a broad frame, with exceptional depth and length, and fresh acidity that lifts the fruit. It's a brilliant wine and easily one of the finest California Chardonnays I've sampled this year. **R: 95**

Nickel & Nickel, Russian River Valley (California) Chardonnay

Medina Vineyard 2009: Rich and mouth-coating without losing its backbone, this is a powerful example of the remarkable ability of the Russian River Valley to deliver Chardonnay grapes that are ripe and generous without losing the structure that gives great Chardonnay life and enables it to endure. This vintage shows nuances of lemon curd, baked apple and ripe pear. **R: 92**