


Don't scorn jug wines for everyday sipping



wine

Richard Watson

There is an esteemed wine critic who has said he would rather drink but a single glass of fine wine in a week than have an unlimited amount of ordinary wine over the same time span.

He's certainly free to hold such an opinion, but he must be considered a true snob.

I take for my model the man who first said, "A day without wine is like a day without sunshine."

After all, wine is a beverage; something to be drunk and not worshipped. And imagine, only one buzz a week! Might almost as well be a teetotaler.

So that we may drink wine every day, everyday wine was created. Most of it comes in large and small jugs, although there is plenty of wine of jug quality and lower that comes in fancy bottles — but that's another story.

Since a lot of people agree with the "sunshine" doctrine rather than the glass-a-day principle, it seems appropriate to discuss the best of the jugs currently available on our shelves. These impressions represent a kind of informal consensus of several local wine specialists who are also imbibers.

THE STAPLE RED over the past several months has been the Fetzer premium red. Loaded with zinfandel and cabernets, it is a big, supple thing. It contains enough tannin to keep it interesting and tough. Its counterpart, premium white, has not generally been so well received.

These could readily be replaced by the current trio of "classic" wines from the Monterey vineyard. The white is a blend of pinot blanc, colombard, chenin blanc and chardonnay, which is unquestionably the best white jug wine I've ever had.

The rose is essentially grenache, clean and crisp, and the red is a massive and complex blend of zinfandel and cabernet sauvignon of excellent quality. This is a great group — a bit more costly than most jugs, but well worth it.

Also a bit expensive (\$8 a 1.5 liter bottle) are the two issues by Almaden's prestige label, Charles LeFranc. The maison blanc is 100 percent pinot blanc and the maison rouge is 100 percent pinot noir. The present vintages on out shelves, a 1979 and 1978, are not as good as their predecessors, but worthy wines — straight and containing varietal character.

Almaden's Monterey chablis and Monterey burgundy, at a couple dollars less, are also good value. But most agree the 1979 chardonnay and 1978 cabernet are to be avoided.

THE CHIEF PROBLEM with most white jug wines, coming from the heat of the central valley, is the sugar levels they attain. Two recent issues that have avoided this are the Chateau Sonoma white and the Cresta Bella chablis blanc. Neither is exceptional, but both are decent values.

Since the mid-1970s, Sebastiani has been putting varietals in big and small jugs. Most dependable of those to date is the cabernet sauvignon and the French colombard. Both are dependable and very drinkable.

And then there is the highly stable and most fairly priced grouping from Souverain, offering excellent burgundy, zinfandel, rose of pinot noir and chablis. You can buy any of these with confidence.


The Taylor's California Cellars varietals recently arrived on our shelves. Advance word is that the few whites exceed the two reds. A subsequent article will evaluate these. They will get a lot of promotion through television, newspapers and journals.

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