

# Here are 'everyday' values

It is always pleasant to report on wine releases that carry sound value. There is, of course, more appeal in reporting great wines, whatever the cost, but most of us must pay close attention to what we buy if we are to be able to afford wine most days, for "everyday wines," as the phrase goes.

Today in the market there are two series, one from Napa and one from Sonoma, that consistently produce very sound wines in the under-\$5-a-bottle range. The first, Round Hill, has only recently been available to us, though it has been available in California since the early 1970s.

Its origins and ownership are difficult to trace, but originally it was created to be the prestige label for the Ernie's Wine Stores in California, carrying wines a step above the standard stuff issued under the Ernie's name.

In some complicated fashion, it got spun off, and today it is a legitimate and semi-independent operation located on Lodi Lane, just below the Freemark Abbey complex. The wines are still featured in Ernie's stores under some marketing arrangement, but distribution has now become national.

IN ADDITION to a fairly standard line of varietals and generics at decent

prices, Round Hill releases regularly a series called "house" wines. These are the ones that are the focus of this column, the real values, sold here for about \$4 a bottle, perhaps a bit higher. Now available are a 1984 chardonnay and a Lot 4 cabernet sauvignon, both of high quality. Additionally, there is a Lot 4 chardonnay sold in 1.5-liter bottles that, I think, is not the same as the 1984 issue. Both, however, are varietal, uncomplicated, clean and pleasant. These, and the cabernet, are all fine values.

Earlier efforts to make "house" fume blanc have been less successful.

Round Hill also has a standard issue 1980 petite sirah available locally. It is a massive, grapey, full, fairly complex wine of great vigor. For those who like deep and rich sirahs, this one is not to be missed. It should age well, but it is such a pleasure now it will be hard to keep around.

The other winery presenting a good "series" value, Glen Ellen of the Sonoma Valley, is still only five or six years old and has been available to us in Michigan most of that time. This family operation makes a very high quality cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay and, unusually, both a fume blanc as well as a sauvignon blanc. They are not inex-



wine  
**Richard  
Watson**

pensive, all of them.

In addition to these, its inexpensive series is called Proprietor's Reserve, and each year under this name it issues at least one red and one white, usually two. With these issues it is necessary to read the fine print on the labels to know what you are buying, but it is worth it.

FOR EXAMPLE, there are now two 1984 Proprietor's Reserve whites. One is made, as the label indicates, from chardonnay, and it is a beauty. The other is also a 1984 Proprietor's Reserve white with no varietal designation. The label indicates that this is a "Dry Table Wine" and that is all.

Pity the poor buyer who originally bought the first, liked it, and then somewhat casually bought the second thinking he was getting the same wine. For that one, if my detective work is

correct, is a blend of chenin blanc, riesling and French colombar. It is not a "dry" wine, except perhaps for the person whose standard is a spate or other rich riesling.

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