

## The Best of Samples



There is a distinct warming in the air. Leaves are beginning to sprout and over-enthusiastic daffodils are peeking out their petals to take Mother Nature's temperature. But in our household, there is a different portent that heralds the arrival upcoming arrival of the vernal equinox; wine samples. A lot of wine samples.

Each spring, I am inundated with wine samples from winemakers and vineyards from around the world. They show up with alarming regularity and seem to multiply like the brooms in a Fantasia sequence. During the height of "sample season," my neighbors are concerned for my health and wellbeing as they witness the pile of wine boxes that overrun the front porch. I'm sure the FedEx and UPS people are convinced that I have some sort of "problem." And I know the recycle guys just want to party with me.

Now, while this sounds like a wonderful problem to have, the caveat is that I actually have to try the wines. I consider it an obligation to all of the nice people who navigate the myriad of legal red-tape in order to get the wines into my possession. And while most of the wines I receive are decent-to-good, once in a while, a wonderful wine will pop up and grab my attention, but it doesn't fall into any specific theme or topic that I might be working on. So in order to give those attention-grabbing wines their due, I present you with a little of this... and a little of that. These are my favorite wines that don't fit in a particular category, but are worth the hunt, just the same.

Once in a while, I get to drink wine and do well at the same time. The **2014 Head High Rosé** is just such a wine. One dollar for every two bottles the winery sells goes to environmental and community based non-profit charities. And the wine is a good cause too. It is a fresh, delicate, and lively Rosé handcrafted from Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, fermented in cold stainless steel with minimal skin contact. This process captures the sweet and ripe berry highlights of Pinot Noir but with bold, bright cherry and strawberry flavors that boost this wine into a perfect palate pleaser. The refreshing acidity focuses the fruit and provides a lingering, crisp finish where hints of cranberry glide in. **\$18**

This beautiful wine comes from a beautiful place. Mt. Beautiful is located in the wild, rugged and breathtakingly scenic region of North Canterbury, New Zealand. Only seven miles from the ocean, the vineyards are protected from harsh sea winds by their benevolent namesake, Mt. Beautiful. The **2014 Mt. Beautiful Pinot Gris** offers vibrant aromas of mango, papaya and tropical fruit on the nose and flavors of opulent stone fruit, juicy ripe pears, and a touch of floral honey on the palate before dropping off into a persistent, luscious finish. **\$19**

Just because it's from Bordeaux doesn't mean it has to be expensive. Rollan de By is one of the leading producers in the Médoc to be classified as a Cru Bourgeois - a classification of wine from the Médoc not included in the 1855 Classification of Crus Classés, but still offering high quality. Modern in style, the **2012 Chateau Rollan de By** has quickly risen to prominence under the care of world-renowned consultant, Alain Raynaud. Predominately a Merlot wine, small amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot are added for depth and balance. It is a ripe, suave style of Bordeaux showing mocha, licorice and black tea aromas on the nose and flavors of blackberry, cassis and dark plum on the palate. The velvety finish ends with a note of roasted coffee. An exceptional value for anyone who wants a serious Bordeaux for a great price. **\$25**

Once in a while, there is a wine where I actually have to look twice at the price to make sure that the fact sheet is correct. Such is the case with the **2012 Amici Cabernet** Sauvignon from Napa Valley, California. This wine is a blend from some of the best Napa Valley sub-appellations. It is crafted in the tradition of a Bordeaux blend, offering notes of baker's chocolate, black olive, blueberry pie, roasted coffee and toasty oak that shine all the way through this well-balanced wine. The uber-long finish exhibits a hint of black licorice and toasted brown sugar on the back of the palate. It drinks beautifully now but has the structure to last 10-15 years, if you can wait that long. **\$45**