

The Wine Curmudgeon

Common sense talk about drinking, buying, and enjoying wine

March 07, 2008

Wal-Mart's \$3 wine

It's a great value, actually.

The Oak Leaf label, produced by The Wine Group, is the retailing giant's house brand.

[As noted a couple of weeks ago](#), it has scored quite a few successes in respected wine competitions. The Wine Curmudgeon was skeptical, of course – not only because that is his nature, but because he is skeptical of all things Wal-Mart.



But I tasted the chardonnay and the merlot, and each were much better made than most wines at that price, including [Trader Joe's Two Buck Chuck](#). I brought in several people to help me evaluate, and we agreed that these California wines tasted like they cost \$10 or even \$15. The chardonnay was not over-oaked, as is often the case with cheap wine, and had real chardonnay green apple flavor. The merlot, which is usually cloyingly fruity at this price, had some backbone and the fruitiness had been kept down to a reasonable level.

Will the wine be as good a value next year? That's one key question, since wine quality is a function of grape quality. If the producer can't find comparable quality, then it will buy crummier grapes to keep the wine at \$3. And the wine won't be as good.

The other question revolves around Wal-Mart and how serious the chain is about selling this quality of wine at this price. I'm guessing it's a loss leader for the chain, something to bring in shoppers and to compete against Trader Joe's and Costco, which is well-known for its wine selection and good prices. If Wal-Mart changes direction, the price could go up or the wine could disappear entirely.

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