

Blind Whites - Great Value Reds

In search of great wine, blind tastings can serve as a valuable vehicle for side-by-side comparison/contrast of flavor and quality without the influence of label or price. That said, it is important to note that blind tastings are not without drawbacks. Side-by-side comparison can sometimes result in flavor masking or enhancement that is not indicative of the “true” flavor profile. Just as pairing complimentary food can make a good wine taste great, drinking 2 or more “contrasting”, (or perhaps conflicting) wines side-by-side can make a great wine taste badly. Therefore the rule of thumb for successful blind tastings is to ensure that the wines being compared are of similar flavor profile, specifically in acidity and sugar levels, the latter being the greatest culprit of flavor profile distortion in side-by-side comparisons.

With the disclaimer aside, this newsletter represents blind results for 3 “High-End” Chardonnays, 4 “value” Cabernet Sauvignons (& blends), and about a dozen Sauvignon Blancs. We also tasted a handful of newly released Spanish Garnacha’s, that were unremarkable so I’ll reserve comment.

In summary, the top Sauvignon Blanc was the 2009 Kono, the top value cab/blend was a 2-way tie between the Edge Cabernet Sauvignon and the Little Valley Wine Company “Red Table Wine” (both 2007 vintage), and the 3 high end Chards were all Yummy (Louis Jadot Chassagne Montrachet 2006, Rustenberg Five Soldiers 2007, and Shafer Red Shoulder Ranch 2007)!

| Cab/Blend | Region | Yr | \$ | Comments | Rating |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|----|------|--|--------------|
| Edge | Napa | 07 | \$20 | Big food wine, especially with a char-grilled steak! Tight and age-worthy, Edge is full bodied with great black cherries that are dark and rich. The fruit is followed by a delicious finish of tobacco and bitter chocolate. Great value!!! | Almost Yummy |
| ExLibris | Washington | 07 | \$16 | Nice ripe cherries in a full bodied fruit forward palate. Delightful and pleasant wine with a dry but port like finish. Worked very well with grilled steak and lamb. | Very Good |
| Little Valley Wine Company “Red Wine” | Napa | 07 | \$16 | Elegant & soft with damn-near perfect structure. Delightful fruit permeates throughout the palate and when paired with Kobe sirloin, amazingly red cherries came alive. | Almost Yummy |
| Amber Knolls “Est 75” | Red Hills CA | 05 | \$20 | Lighter style cherries than traditional California cabernet and tight tannins. Tannins and high acid tended to mask fruit displaying a thinner flavor profile and stringent finish. | Good |

| Chardonnay | Region | Yr | \$ | Comments | Rating |
|--|-----------------|----|------|---|--------|
| Louis Jadot “Chassagne Montrachet” Morgeot | Burgundy | 06 | \$70 | Elegant, broad and interesting. Delicious treat with an assortment of flavors that excite the palate with incredible elegance. Pairing with food is nothing short of perfection! | Yummy |
| Rusteneberg Five Soldiers | Stellenbosch SA | 07 | \$35 | With the lowest price point of the 3, Five Soldiers displayed an amazing flavor profile that displayed characteristics of both Burgundy and California. A delicious chardonnay that delivers great up front fruit, delightful elegance and a long finish. | Yummy |
| Shafer – Red Shoulder Ranch | Napa | 07 | \$50 | Gigantic fruit is delicious and almost over the top. Pairing food is challenging as the flavors, structure and complexity require substantial flavor characteristics such as grilling, brown butter, herbs and spices. | Yummy |

| Sauvignon Blanc | Region | Yr | \$ | Comments | Rating |
|-----------------|-------------|----|------|---|--------------|
| Kono | New Zealand | 09 | \$10 | Extremely full body with an abundance of fruit. Fruit is complex and interesting including both citrus and tropical flavors. Finish is amazingly long and delightful. Best in Class! | Yummy |
| Terranoble | Chile | 09 | \$10 | Impressive showing for Chile! Lots of citrus with lime most prominent amidst some tropical fruit. Very nice and well made | Almost Yummy |
| Molina | Chile | 09 | \$14 | Another Chilean surprise with tasteful citrus and tropical fruit! Well made and well balanced and a delicious flavor profile. | Almost Yummy |
| Provenance | Napa | 08 | \$15 | Very nice wine with delicious notes of melon and other tropical fruit. Well made wine with good balance that ends with a tasty finish that includes hints of oak. | Very Good |
| Sean Minor | Napa | 08 | \$14 | Interesting and different flavor profile apart from traditional sauvignon blanc. Flavors are an interesting blend of citrus, non-citrus and a quinine finish that begs for some lime! | Very Good |
| Mulderbosch | So. Africa | 08 | \$17 | The most elegant wine in the field with great structure and subtle and smooth flavors blending together for a delicious wine. 2008 is fading a bit and looking forward to 2009 | Very Good |
| Wildhurst | Lake County | 08 | \$14 | Displayed some Chenin Blanc characteristics with vanilla and brandy flavors. Relatively nice with a little bite on the finish. | Good |
| Mussel Bay | New Zealand | 08 | \$10 | Typical New Zealand style with lots of citrus and plenty of grapefruit. Relatively simple but good. | Good |
| Solini | New Zealand | 09 | \$12 | Fun and fruity, but relatively high acid. Nice flavor profile but not remarkable | OK |
| Cupcake | New Zealand | 09 | \$10 | Nice but simple. Citrus and melon are pleasant but relatively simple followed by a quick finish. | OK |
| Centauri | Chile | 08 | \$16 | More Citrus and grapefruit than I believe should ever be in a wine. Way out of balance and structure | No Rating |