

Tasting Notes

The wines below were tasted open within the last week.

Exceptional

2005 **Baileyana** Chardonnay, Edna Valley (\$22): Superb delicate aroma of citrus, faint hints of passion fruit and pineapple, and a complexity from light barrel and ML use. Great balancing acid to a slightly rich, balanced Chardonnay from Christian Roguenant.

2001 **Kendall-Jackson** Stature, Napa Valley (\$95): Classy roasted herb and black cherry aroma with a bit of maturity already showing. A superb red wine (64% Cabernet) that is still somewhat available. A red Meritage of a high order.

2003 **Rosemount** GSM, McLaren Vale (\$18): Racy dried herb, cranberry-pepper aroma with a wild spice note, and generous blackberry and mulberry fruit. A 63% Grenache/28% Shiraz blend that offers a lot more flavor than

\$18 usually delivers. The 2002 GSM may still be available in some markets and is actually a more impressive wine.

2004 **Kendall-Jackson** Syrah, Santa Barbara County, Alisos Hills (\$35): Pepper and spice, great acidity, and with aeration it opens to show a lot of depth and richness. A cool-climate statement!

2005 **Kendall-Jackson** Pinot Noir, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County Seco Highlands (\$35): Fresh beets and dried herbs alongside a distinct Burgundian note of spinach and spice. Slightly smoky, but with great depth and length. Mainly sold in restaurants.

2005 **Tangent** Albariño, Edna Valley (\$17): Tangerine, lime and white pepper, with a brilliant spice note in the mid-palate. Good acid, but the wine is so succulent you'd

think it's got a tad of sugar.

2005 **Tangent** Pinot Gris, Edna Valley (\$17): Lime/kiwi fruit and a fresh, stone-fruit complexity. Light tropical fruit in the finish makes this perfect for seafood pairing.

2005 **Tangent** Sauvignon Blanc, Edna Valley (\$13): Herb/spice and lemon/tarragon aroma; rich fruit intensity in the mouth. Also superb in this line is a 2005 Pinot Blanc (\$17).

Very Highly Recommended

2005 **Rosemount** Grenache Shiraz, South Eastern Australia (\$10): Violet and cranberry, with attractive red fruit aftertaste that has a bit of pepper in the finish. A \$20 wine masquerading at half the price. Only drawback: a tad soft. Also Very Highly Recommended: '05 Rosemount Cabernet Sauvignon (\$10) and 2005 Shiraz (\$10).

Who Wants More Labels?

Call me paranoid, but the allergen labeling issue might not be so much of a headache for the U.S. wine industry were it not being pushed by a host of anti-alcohol forces.

After chatting with various folks who are aware of the allergen issue, I have come to the conclusion that at least a small number of what I call neo-Prohibitionist groups are pushing to get as many warning labels added to wine as possible.

One is the benign-sounding Center for Science in the Public Interest, the same group that bends the facts to frighten people into avoiding Italian and Mexican food and wants a skull-and-crossbones on every wine bottle, beer bottle, and single-malt.

Also, I have heard anecdotal evidence that other anti-alcohol forces also are pushing to see wine hit with yet more cluttering labels. Such labels merely imply that there is a danger from a product that is ostensibly healthier than water.

(You may have read news reports recently about Dasani, Coca-Cola's "aqua pura" that one news story said contained "alarming levels of cancer-causing chemicals.")

Wine Institute has sent comments to TTB opposing allergen rule-making that would be burdensome for wineries. The Institute hopes to avoid a worst-case scenario. But if a label is mandated, the Institute asked that it not say "Contains allergens,"

but instead refers to the wine being "processed with" them.

Such an eventuality would still be bad news for wine makers, in particular because an ingredient list might also mandate that yeast be listed, even though it's gone from the product once it's sealed.

Bargain of the Week

2006 **Rosemount** Sauvignon Blanc, South Eastern Australia (\$10): Bright melon/kiwi/passion fruit aroma with stylish juicy entry, but classic low-pH crispness. Not a NZ style, but as vibrant a varietal intensity as you can find at the price.

Quality Higher Than the Price Shows

It's not easy to keep abreast of the changing wine industry. Brands are being developed all the time and old brands are being reinvented.

Both situations cross my desk (and palate) weekly, and among the latest are some fascinating brands worth looking at.

One is a screwcapped line from Edna Valley, from the Niven family. The wines were made by Burgundy-born, Dijon-trained Christian Roguenant.

Called Tangent, the line is all white wines of superb balance and structure, with no oak or malolactic to screw up fresh fruit elements.

Two others are existing brands Rosemount from Australia and Kendall-Jackson, the ubiquitous California line of wines that seems to simply get better and better.

In all three lines, there are wines that are priced properly and target

the consumer perfectly. But in all three lines, there are a few wines that are far more sophisticated than the price indicates.

That is, a light white wine that sells for \$10 (without discounts) is usually targeted toward consumers who don't require either a distinct varietal character or a totally dry wine. (Many \$10 wines are made with some residual sugar to appeal to a broader range of consumers.)

Even many \$25 wines are "dumbed down," and lack a classic, age-worthy structure.

So it was pleasing to me over the last week to try a wide range of these wines and see how many were undervalued, and represent far more in terms of their intrinsic value than their prices could ever indicate.

In our Tasting Notes, you'll find a range of these superb wines.

A key point here: in almost all cases, other wines in the line are just as good quality-wise, but may be from varietal categories in which competitors are close on their heels or perhaps even slightly ahead.

Moreover, as is our custom, we list full suggested retail prices here. In most cases the wines listed are likely to be found at about 20% less in major markets, making them outrageous values.

A final note about availability: a few of these wines (mainly the Rosemount line) aren't yet in stores because although the wholesalers have the wines, distribution isn't yet at full saturation. Also, a few of the more expensive wines may well be easier to find in fine restaurants.

In all cases, the wines are truly superb and worth a search.

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