

the drunken cyclist

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The Random Samples—1/24/2020

It is time for another edition of “Random Samples”—I occasionally get samples from marketing agencies and/or producers, and these can often be grouped together into some sort of over-arching theme: [Drink Them and It Will Come](#), [Summer is Here](#), [So That Means \(More\) Rosé](#), [If It Doesn't Sparkle, It Doesn't Matter](#).

Other times, I get just a bottle or two that do not have any apparent connection or link. Instead of holding on to those bottles until the “right” combination comes along, I decided to link all these “random” bottles together, making their own category (and, being the math geek that I am, “random sample” has a bit of a double entendre.



2017 Big Max Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley, CA: Retail \$22. I shied away from this bottle for a while given the rather large Brown Bear that is its label (wines with critters on the label tend to be, um, well, bad), but there was little reason for worry: fruity (citrus), grassy, and quite tart, this is a prototypical Sauvignon Blanc. And it is extremely tasty. I do not usually prefer this variety, but this is a particularly good rendition. **Very Good to Excellent. 88-90 Points.**

2017 Big Max Cabernet Sauvignon, California: Retail \$30. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Normally, I shy away from “critter wines” which are wines that have some sort of an animal on the label to attract consumers who make wine purchases based on their reaction to the label as opposed to what actually might be inside. But after a quick twist of the screw-top, I could tell there was much more to this wine than the hulking brown bear that is affixed to the bottle. The nose consists of big, bold fruit, almost jammy, with hints of black pepper and clove. The palate is a continuation of the theme with rich dark fruit, a bit of spice on the midpalate and a slightly hot finish (14.0% ABV). This wine certainly falls under the axiom “Don’t judge a bottle by its label” or something like that. **Very Good to Excellent. 88-90 Points.**





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2017 Cecchi Maremma Toscana La Mora, Italy: Retail \$15. 100% Vermentino. While I have been to the Cecchi facility and several of their properties in Chianti, but I have not (yet?) seen their project in Maremma, along the coast, to the South and West of Sienna. Quite mineral with plenty of citrus fruit on the nose. Quite fruity on the palate as well with salinity and depth. If I were to nitpick, it is slightly lacking in tartness, but it is a tasty quaff, nonetheless. **Very Good to Excellent. 88-90 Points.**



2017 Herdade do Esporão Alentejo Colheita, Portugal: Retail \$16. From organic grapes. Cabernet Sauvignon, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz. A couple of years ago, I spent a week in Alentejo, Portugal and Esporão figured prominently. Wonderful people and fantastic wines characterize one of the larger producers in the country and this is a fine example of the many relatively inexpensive wines that are available from the producer in the U.S. Rich, mostly dark color, with blackberry fruit, anise, black pepper. The palate is much of the same, fruity, slightly spicy, and oh-so-easy to drink, this is a wonderful wine for simply sipping or on the dinner table alongside some grilled chicken or sausage. Yum. **Very Good to Excellent. 88-90 Points.**



2018 Alois Lageder Pinot Bianco Terra Alpina Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT, Italy: Although I have never been to the region officially (I was in Trento a few years ago, which is close), I am a big fan of wines from the region. This falls right into that assertion as it is both bright and fruity with tons of pear and a hint of pear. Great acidity on the palate but also some roundness with all that fruit. Not overly complex, but the price is certainly right. **Very Good to Excellent. 88-90 Points.**



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2014 Kirkland Signature Rioja Reserva, Spain: Retail \$7. 100% Tempranillo. What Costco has done with its wine program has been fairly impressive as they are currently the largest wine retailer in the U.S. In addition to having wines from all over the world at fairly good prices, they also sell their own Kirkland brand which is made for the chain by fantastic winemakers in the respective region. I have tried the Champagne (Brut and Rosé) and the Chianti Classico. Those were true to type and region as is this Rioja: raspberry fruit, black pepper, spice. It's all there and for seven bucks? Score. **Good to Very Good. 86-88 Points.**



2018 Rodney Strong Upshot, Sonoma County, CA: Retail \$28. 27% Chardonnay, 21% Grenache Blanc, 18% Gewurztraminer, 17% Pinot Noir, 11% Viognier, 6% Sauvignon Blanc. Even before I started blogging, I drank a lot of wine, now it is off the charts. Every so often, I ask why you never see Pinot Noir as part of a blend and the response is always the same: they look at me like I'm an idiot. Well, leave it to Jason Seidenfeld to make what I believe to be the first non-sparkling wine I've ever had (I think) that has Pinot Noir as part of the blend. And it is a white, no less. A kitchen sink blend of five grapes that I am pretty certain to have never been blended together before. And it works, lip-smacking tartness reminiscent of fresh summertime lemonade (without the sugar). Lovely and crisp, and the perfect antidote for a warm afternoon (it was 80 here in Houston on this January day). **Excellent. 90-92 Points.**