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[Tasting round-up 2010](#)

By [\(Sweet\) Libby Volgyes](#) | [Wine reviews](#) | January 01, 2011

As our year end swirling stills, we have one final installment of tasting round-ups to share. All were samples sent to us for review. Some were incredibly pleasing, some were unexpected surprises and a few were utter disappointments. No matter, it's all in a day's work.

2008 Stag's Leap Chardonnay, Arcadia Vineyard, (\$50, available online)

While chardonnay isn't my favorite varietal, I'm getting more interested in the really nicely made chards. I took this wine to dinner at my favorite restaurant, Little Moir's Food Shack, and enjoyed it with a couple of seafood dishes. It had a subtle aroma of apples, bananas and a touch of citrus. The weight of the wine was pleasant and solid, with a great mix of caramel and the tropics. The finish was crisp, I expected more steeliness, yet it was soft and supple. It is a nice, flexible, superbly crafted chardonnay.

CJR Reginato Blanc de Blancs, NV (\$15 online)

With a pale butter color and graced with large, lazy bubbles, I had high expectations for this sparkler. I was intrigued because it was made with 70 percent chardonnay and 30 percent chenin blanc – a change from the chardonnay-pinot noir combination. It had a subtle smell of yeast and citrus. It was off-dry with a light apple taste. It was uncomplicated and unrefined and while it was drinkable, I would pass over it in the future. As far as cheap sparklers go, this one just reinforces bad sparkling stereotypes.

Dona Paula Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc, (available online)

I was very excited about a late-harvest sauvignon blanc, but it didn't hit the spot for me. It's got a pretty gold color and an aroma of fresh peach and canned mandarin oranges. It had the crispness you'd expect of a sauvignon blanc with an unbalanced sugar levels. It didn't pass the Sweet wine test for a dessert wine but it might be an interesting party trick...

2008 Erath Pinot Noir (\$15.97 at Total Wine; \$17.97 at Crown)

There's no question at all that this is a new-world Pinot Noir. It's a fruit bomb and Jolly Rancher explosion in your mouth that coats it with cherries, black cherries and super-charged jaminess. I loved the whisker-soft texture and silky mouth-feel. It was a touch earthy, very new-world and had a crisp, uber-long finish. It was easy to drink, pleasant, and sells at a good price point, but it didn't knock me on my butt.

2008 Franciscan Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.07 at Total Wine; \$19.97 at Crown)

I was excited about this Napa cab but ultimately disappointed. While the smell and the taste were decent, it felt way too thin in the mouth to be enjoyable. For this price, either go elsewhere for a good wine or spend \$10-15 more and get a great Napa cab.

2008 Meiomi Pinot Noir (\$17.97 at Total Wine; \$19.99 at Crown)

I love this wine. I love this wine so much I buy it for my mother! To me, it represents everything a pinot aspires to be, yet somehow manages to stay in the affordable range. And I'm glad it does. It's got a bright cherry color and a bright, fruity aroma of cherries, strawberries, raspberries and baking spices. Think of your mama's cherry pie, put it in a glass and this is what you get. It's very fruity and smooth with tight structure and an impressively long finish. It's sophisticated and elegant, very feminine but with well-done, light tannins. This is a wine with personality and class.

2008 R Collection Field Blend (\$18.99 at Total Wine)

I brought this little beaut to my book club's dinner. Filled with dark cherries, vanilla, blackberries carried on a boat of other berries, this smooth, pretty wine is a pleasant, uncomplicated wine. Needs food but otherwise promises to be an easy-going dinner companion.

2009 Snoqualmie "Naked" Riesling (\$11.99 at Total Wine)

Just because the temperature is dropping doesn't mean that I enjoy my rieslings any less. I took this one to drink with a spicy cheese fondue recipe. What's cool about this wine is all the "Naked" wines are organic and "stripped" of artificial and unnecessary ingredients and techniques. Born into the Chateau Ste. Michelle family out in Washington, it doesn't have quite the impressive breeding as its brothers. It had a beautiful, strong smell of honey and flowers with a touch of citrus. It was pretty sweet – and if I'm calling it sweet, don't say I didn't warn you. It tried for a crisp finish but didn't make it all the way, ending in a sweet taste with an unbalanced slightly-less-sweet finish. There are better rieslings at this price point.

2009 Tempra tantrum (\$6.99 at Total Wine)

"Give me something cheap and nondescript," I requested from Dry one day. She handed me the 2009 Tempra Tantrum and though it was inexpensive and slightly nondescript, it was very drinkable. It had aromas of cherries, cola, chocolate and a bit of brambles. It had a short finish, a bit of spice and pepper. It was not as big as I expected, more of a mellow, easy-going drink. Cheap and nondescript? Yes. But that didn't mean the bottle wasn't shared, drunk and enjoyed.

2007 Quady Elysium Black Muscat (\$18.99 at Total Wine)

When Dry and I first poured this out, we sniffed, looked at each other and decided it smelled like cough syrup. It was full of dark fruits and the sweet alcohol immediately hit the nose. It was

unbalanced and not enjoyable. Another fail on Sweet's dessert wine scale. Still...if you do have it, don't hesitate to mix it in a cocktail, or, say, poach some pears in it.

2008 Villa Maria Hawke's Bay Cellar Selection (\$24 online)

I adore New Zealand wines and I adore Bordeaux blends, but this one needs a few more years alone before you might want to take it out to play. And even then, I'm not sure I'd reach for it again. It's got a lot of blueberries, cherries, plum, and jam, and a bit of milk chocolate. It had a nice touch of spice from the malbec. This one was enjoyable now but it didn't knock my socks off, probably due to its youth. It definitely has potential, but it was too chunky and unrefined for me to spend \$25 on it. If you do have it, lock it up for a few years and then let me know what you think.

From Bold:

2007 Bradford Mountain Zinfandel, Grist Vineyard (\$20 online)

This is a great holiday wine, because it's good with all meats, very berry and very jammy – definitely a comfort wine, at least for Bold! On the nose, this dark purple wine smells a bit of anise (love that), is peppery, rich in berries, and very fragrant. On the palate, it's got a touch of strong tannins, but that's overcome with blackberry, a little earth and more anise on the taste. It's great for the value and aged in 100 percent French oak for 16 months. It's nice and spicy, with a full mouth feel. I will definitely drink this again.

2009 Sobon Estates Zinfandel (\$12 at Total Wine)

From a Plymouth, Calif., sustainable-practices winery comes this old vine zin in a screw-top bottle. It's a dark berry color, with a big berry nose of cherries and plums. The nose is fragrant and gave a good idea of what the taste gives you. This zinfandel was "yummy, juicy," as my tasting notes say. I used an aerator on it (I find that's always a good idea with a zin), and it was ready to drink. There were some tight tannins, but it was a really smooth-drinking wine, a medium-bodied zin. For an old-vine zin, it was a surprisingly light wine. And it's a great buy at that price.

2009 Budini Malbec, Mendoza (\$9.99 at Total Wine)

This inexpensive ruby-red wine comes from a large malbec area in Argentina. It's got a big nose on it, full of blackberries and currants. Unfortunately, the taste didn't match the nose. It was a lot lighter than I expected, and just didn't hold up on the palate. I caught some dark cherry and a wee bit of spice in it, but it didn't bowl me over. I tried it again the next night and got the same result. It's not on my hit list.

From Dry:

2008 Galil Mountain Viognier – Galilee, Israel (\$15 online)

This tasty Kosher wine is a great accompaniment to the Hanukkah table. Packed with ripe apricot, nectarine, peach, honey and orange blossom, this full-bodied white wine is a nice alternative for chardonnay lovers. The wine has a smooth mouth feel, nice acid and a dry finish.

2008 Davis Bynum Pinot Noir – Russian River Valley (\$20 online)

This delicious pinot was packed with a berry punch of juicy raspberries, cherries, cranberries and pomegranate. It's a rich, fruity wine with balanced acidity, medium-body and a long, soft finish. It was like a warm, fuzzy cashmere blanket that I wanted to wrap myself up in. The ripe, fruity flavors and medium-body allows this pinot to stand up to a meal with a little oomph. It was a great accompaniment to a holiday dish of roasted duck breast topped with a chile-pomegranate sauce.

2008 Ridge Lytton Springs – Dry Creek Valley (\$29.99 at Total Wine, \$24.99 at Crown for the 2007 vintage, \$32.99 at ABC for the 2007 vintage)

This big boy is a blend of 74 percent zinfandel, 21 percent petite sirah and 5 percent carignan grapes. A deep ruby color in the glass, the wine has a lush and juicy nose with a hint of spice and brambles. The palate was full of very ripe blueberries and blackberries with vanilla and cinnamon. It's full-bodied, round and smooth with round, soft tannins, a bit reminiscent of mom's just-baked blueberry pie.

2008 Snoqualmie Naked Cabernet Sauvignon – Columbia Valley, Washington (\$11 online)

I've tried a few good wines recently, but this one was a disappointment. I brought it along to a holiday party and tried it with a few of the Swirl Girls. We all agreed that it was a very simple wine with some ripe dark fruit flavors, but not much else going on.

2008 Antigal "Uno" Malbec – Mendoza, Argentina (\$20 online)

This wine practically exploded with juicy red fruit like cherry, cranberry and red plum. The nose was full of juicy, ripe fruit and peppery spice. It's full and silky on the palate with firm but ripe tannins, balanced acidity and a long finish. It's a very enjoyable wine and great for the price.

2008 Helfrich Pinot Gris – Alsace, France (\$15 online)

2008 was a great year in Alsace and I found this wine to be ripe, fruity and delicious! The wine has a gold color and an aromatic nose of apple, pear and honeysuckle. It's medium-bodied and very smooth on the palate with baked apple pie flavors. The wine is dry but not tart and overall was a very enjoyable sipper. I'd definitely buy this one again and again.

2009 Selaks Wines Drylands Estate Sauvignon Blanc – Marlborough, New Zealand (\$17.99 at Total Wine)

New Zealand sauv. blancs are easy to like and this one was no exception. The wine has a pale yellow color in the glass and a bright, fresh nose of pink grapefruit and lime. It's a crisp and refreshing sipper with a medium-body and a clean, dry finish.

2008 Helfrich Gewurtztraminer – Alsace, France (\$11 online)

This wine has a pale gold color and a very aromatic nose of tropical fruits, honeysuckle and rosewater with a touch of spice. It's a medium/full-bodied wine that is silky and smooth on the palate with flavors of baked peach pie, mango and lychee and a strong floral component. It was a little bit like eating a rosebush, which is typical for gewurtztraminer, though not my favorite.

2008 Wild Horse Pinot Noir – Central Coast, California (\$17.99 at Total Wine, \$19.99 at Crown and ABC)

This is a simple but enjoyable pinot at a nice price. The wine has a light garnet color and a nose of tart cherry, cranberry, raspberry and cinnamon. It's smooth on the palate with a medium body and soft tannins. The alcohol seemed a bit hot at first but the wine softened with time.

2009 Martin Codax Albariño – Rias Baixas, Spain (\$11.99 at Crown, \$12.99 at ABC)

This is a consistently nice wine year after year. It's a pale straw color and has aromas of fresh peach, apricot, orange and cut grass. The same flavors carry through on the palate with a medium body and a fresh, dry finish. This wine is a great accompaniment to fish dishes and especially shrimp.

2006 Bodegas Caro CARO – Mendoza, Argentina (\$46.99 at Total Wine)

This 50/50 blend of cabernet sauvignon and malbec is the result of a partnership between two great wine families, the Lafite Rothschild family in France and the Catena family in Argentina. The CARO (CAtena, ROthschild) has a deep garnet color and a full, fruity nose of raspberry, blackberry and cherry jam along with a nice earthiness, cinnamon, vanilla and plum skin. It's full-bodied with a nice acidity, firm tannins and a long, spicy finish. This is one for the cellar.

From Earthy:

Santa Margherita Prosecco (\$18.99 at Total Wine; \$19.99 at Crown)

This sparkler burst from the glass with large bubbles, tickling my nose as I tipped for a first whiff. There was a hint of green apple and pear, with green apple and a little bit of yeast across the tongue. It was very dry from front to back.

Although it was quite vibrant and crisp in the mouth thanks to all those bubbles, there wasn't anything memorable about it and I'd rather remember what I got for \$20 a bottle.

2008 Snoqualmie “Naked” Merlot, Columbia Valley (SRP \$13)

“Naked”, as in made with 100 percent organically grown grapes. But that isn't a saving grace for the wine.

It had a fruity impression on the nose and big, dark cherries on first taste, but it finished fairly weak; even what seemed a little chalky on the back end. It had barely discernible tannins and lacked structure and depth.

2006 Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley (\$49.97 at Crown, \$54.99 at ABC)

I was excited when this wine showed up at the Swirl Girls doorstep, as I had heard other wine lovers speak highly of Jordan in the past. I decanted it for over an hour before pouring the first glass. I got mouthwatering aromas of raspberry and currant, and then dark berries up front and through the mid-palate. The tannins were soft, which complemented the light veil of vanilla and oak. Although I felt it finished short for a cab coming from a strong vintage, it was still a pleasurable glass of wine. It's one I'd be curious to taste with a few more years of age. (The wine, that is. I've stopped aging.)

2009 Cupcake Sauvignon Blanc – Marlborough (\$9.99 at ABC)

I'll admit that we've turned our collective nose up at the inexpensive Cupcake wines that are regularly delivered for our review. Perhaps it was just peer pressure for me, because I honestly don't recall having tasted any of them. The time to do so was here with the arrival of the

sauvignon blanc, from Marlborough, New Zealand — home to my favorite style of the variety. It had a classic sauvignon blanc nose – crisp, citrusy, leaning to lime. While it had a lighter body than some higher-priced sauv blancs, from the same region, it still had a bright acidity with a great zing on the tongue (although it fell off quickly on the finish). It had flavors of lemon and grapefruit, but the characteristic grassy and gooseberry notes were missing. Although not my favorite NZ SB, it is certainly an enjoyable glass of wine. And at that price, it's one I'll continue to enjoy.

2007 Spring Valley Vineyard “Nina Lee” Syrah – Walla Walla, Washington (\$50 online)

I loved this label with the black and white photo of a somewhat provocative, yet innocent-faced Nina Lee (pronounced “nine-ah”).

The Spring Valley web site says the names given to its wines are a tribute to the family members who have succeeded in farming the same land where the vineyard and winery now flourish.

Her story is even more intriguing and admirable: “This 100 percent Syrah is named for the wife of Frederick Corkrum. After meeting following her vaudeville performance at a local theater, they married in August of 1929 and began their struggle to stay afloat during the Great Depression. Following Frederick’s death in 1957, Nina Lee, who didn’t want to depend on anyone for her livelihood, continued to operate the ranch on her own. Nina Lee passed away after 21 years of successful farming.”

The wine is a lovely tribute to her then, with a light aroma of blackberries and a rich, jammy palate. It’s got a peppery mid-palate and finishes dry, earthy and quite smooth. It’s got a nice balance of fruit and acidity.