

Wine, etc.: You can't ignore box wines as a reasonable tradeoff

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We love to challenge inquisitive wine tasters to blind tastings — not because we enjoy embarrassing people, but because taking away labels and price gets tasters to focus on what they like.

If we point to an expensive bottle of wine in a group tasting, it's the one people will pour first. And many will think the wine is great because, well, shouldn't a \$50 wine be great?

Not always. So, on a recent evening among neighbors we poured a \$48 Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon into a carafe alongside a carafe of inexpensive cabernet that cost roughly \$5 a bottle (\$20 for 3 boxed liters). All we wanted was for the tasters to point to which wine they liked better.

Most of them quickly identified the expensive wine because it was so different. But not everyone liked its tannins, full body and tightly wound flavors. An hour later, the box wine was gone — but a glass of the expensive cabernet remained. That said a lot.

The quality of these wines has improved dramatically since Franzia introduced the concept many years ago. Europeans, who don't get hung up on drinking boxed wines, are enjoying them with reckless abandon. The **French Rabbit** label from Southern France is becoming popular here too.

