



THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

# Grocery store passes first taste test

One New Year's resolution was accomplished with the first of my monthly walks down the wine aisle of a grocery store. The goal is to find the best value among grocery-store wines. Supermarkets are a convenient place to buy wine, allowing one to bring home both the bacon and the Pinot.

The Safeway at 32nd Street and Camelback Road in Phoenix also has a 10 percent discount on six-packs of wine, but there is a hook: You must first have in hand a "discount card."

I went to the customer service desk to find out what was needed to be eligible for a Safeway card and found it easily accomplished right on the spot.

In general, there is a deep suspicion of store "discount cards," as no one wants Big Brother tracking how many times a year they buy milk of magnesia or Pepto-Bismol.

But because the cards have become common at grocery stores and the wines for the article had to be under \$10, it was critical to get the discount. So for the sake of



savings, I'm now "hooked in."

With the card, the wines came under budget and the bill was \$45 (including tax). Wow, that's inexpensive, but is it worth it? Let's see.

**2003 Mirassou Sauvignon Blanc, California (\$9)** — It's a dry white with good, fresh lemon-lime flavor and texture. The aroma has some of the usual Sauvignon Blanc straw and hay. Fire up the barbecue and grill some shrimpies. This is a crisp, tart quaffer. 83 points.

**2002 Columbia Crest "Two Vines" Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Wash. (\$6)** — This is a little flinty and steel-like on the nose. The taste has a good mouth feel with some creaminess and honeyed fruit on the end. It could easily trick

someone into thinking it's richer than it is. 79 points.

**2004 Lindemans Chardonnay "Bin 65," South Eastern Australia (\$5)** — The aroma has a little melon and banana; not much in the way of toast or oak. The flavor is soft and easy-to-sip — a fruity little devil. 79 points.

**2004 Meridian Pinot Noir, California (\$8)** — This wine is very nice and quite a surprise. The value is in the bottle. The color is light. The aroma has a little spice with soft fruit. The very pleasant Pinot flavors are simple but lush, with just enough spry fruit to carry it home. 83 points.

**2002 Hogue Cabernet/Merlot Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Wash. (\$9)** — This wine has a dark color and an earthy nose. The flavor is mostly grippy and dry with some black currant fruit. This wine is more Cabernet-like and a good value for the price. Don't look for any warm lush fruit with this one, but if you like them dry and dirty, go for it. 80 points.

**2004 Smoking Loon Syrah, California (\$8)** — Great color,

warm fruit, a forward nose. This is crushed ripe raspberry and cherry; nice lushness topped with a little vanilla ice cream. 82 points.

After tasting these, I'm amazed that you can get so many wines that are drinkable for less than 10 bucks. This has been exciting and fun, and I'm looking forward to 11 more months of grocery sleuthing. Today my corner; tomorrow the world.

*Tarbell, owner of Tarbell's restaurant in Phoenix, can be reached at wine@tarbells.com.*

## Key to the ratings

- (100):** A perfect wine.
- (95-99):** Excellent. Worth looking for.
- (90-94):** Extremely good. A standout in its class.
- (85-89):** Very good. A solid, well-made wine and a good value.
- (80-84):** Good. Fine for everyday entertaining and large parties.
- (75-79):** A soundly made wine for everyday drinking.