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The Savvy Traveler  
**Couture Wine at a Sample Sale Price**



by Courtney Cochran

Savvy shoppers, listen up! If someone told you that you could snap up ultra-luxe designer duds at ridiculously reasonable Target prices, how long would it take you to remove everything absolutely non-critical from your schedule and skedaddle on down to start buyin'?

Probably about as long as it takes you to grab your keys and fire up that ignition, right?

Well, what if I told you that this sort of euphoric shopping experience CAN be had — not with said designer duds (sorry, but you must have known it sounded too good to be true!) — but instead with a fabulous Napa-made bubbly selling at more than half off its original price?

Ah-hah! I thought that would get your attention.

**Nor Cal Négociant**

**Congenial négociant Cameron Hughes** is offering just this sort of temptation right now through his line of custom blended wines sold under the label Cameron Hughes Wine. I was wowed by his Lot 25 Napa Valley Carneros Sparkling Wine at a holiday party last week, and since Cameron was there himself I took the opportunity to get the low-down from him personally on how he does it.

Turns out that Cameron works his mark-down magic by purchasing unbottled juice at significant discounts from overstocked and other (read: bankrupt! Ok, that's purely speculation) producers who've made dynamite wine but no longer can or wish to bottle it themselves.

In this way he's a lot like the négociants of renowned wine region Burgundy in France, except that he lives in San

Francisco and doesn't speak a lick of French. Instead, Cameron is fluent in "the deal" and works hard to sniff out luxury-caliber wines that need a buyer, then negotiates extreme savings on their purchase price.

Next, he bottles the wine in limited run "Lots," often re-blending finished wines to create totally custom products. The wines are then sold at deep discount at Costco stores nation wide and in limited quantities at Cameron's e-commerce site. Thanks to Cameron's aggressive negotiating and cost-effective sales tactics, savings can sometimes add up to as much as 75% off the wines' estimated value!

**Lot 25:** \$50 wine for 24 bucks ain't bad!

So, now that we know that Cameron's a savvy businessman with a reputation for putting out some very tasty wine at delicious prices, let's take a closer look at his Lot 25.

**Vintage:** 1998

Appellation: Carneros, Napa Valley CA

Grape: 50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir, Méthode Champenoise

Production: 6,000 cases

Availability: December 2006

Price: \$24 with Free Shipping anywhere in continental US

Purchase: chwine.com

**Tasting notes:** Pretty orange blossom and citrus notes entice on the richly textured nose, followed by peach, pear and green apple on the palate. Flavors of toast, caramel and cream round out this lovely medium-bodied wine before the long finish delights with its nuances of refreshing citrus and warm baking spices. Fine texture and lively bubbles to boot! Perfect with cracked crab, white meats and truffled popcorn this winter.

**What's the secret?**

Drinks like a \$50 bottle, indeed. So, what's Cameron's secret? He says he scored this gem from a top-notch Carneros producer that decided not to launch a new \$50 sparkling wine brand in order to focus on its still wine business. Translation: Cameron's gain, your gain. This is wine speak for win-win.