



## The Big Bargain Chardonnay Smackoff

July 30th, 2007

At the time the hubbub about the gold-medal winning \$2 Chuck hit the internets a few weeks back, I not had tried any Charles Shaw wine for at least 3-4 years. The last was a merlot, I think, and that was so nasty it soured me on these wines for a good long time, though not as long a time as was caused by the thoroughly charred hot-dog a friend of my parents forced me to eat when I was six — it took me 25 years to warm up to hot dogs after that.

Since the \$2 Chuck tasting was in a competitive environment where scores of other wines were sampled, I thought I should taste it against at least one other comparable wine. So, I thought, why not match the bargain champion of Trader Joe's, the best-selling brand in the country (according to TJ's), the much-derided wine that millions of people buy by the case, against a wine from the price leader at Costco, which is only the largest wine retailer in the USA. Plus, I happen to have a bottle of the stuff on hand, thanks to the generous folks at CH.

### Wine One

The first sampler requires vigorous swirling to bring out faint aromas of granny smith apples and lemon twist. The wine's a bit over chilled, I think, so its initially weak showing seems to be my bad. But hey, competitive wine tasting is a tough sport. It's fuller in the mouth, though still pretty lean for a chardonnay, with a burst of green apple candy, followed by just a touch of oak and/or leesiness leading to a decent finish. The balance is good, but the acidity seems sharp at first, though it settles down at least somewhat after the first sip. Drinkable.

### Wine Two

The second sampler is the same temperature, but has a more generous nose of peaches, pineapples, and pears with some toasty oak and spice. In the mouth it's juicy and hedonistically viscous, with fruit flavors true to the nose, as well as understated, attractive butterscotch and vanilla. ***It's got good balance and natural-seeming acids that make me dump Wine One into a pot of stock I've got bubbling on the stove, and continue to savor the nice long finish of number two.***

Okay, so it was obvious that #1 was the Charles Shaw from the first sniff, but I would have to agree with the CA State Fair judges and with Jim Laube: it's very drinkable and - duh - an excellent value at \$1.99. So good, I guess, that I'll have to force myself to try one of the Charles Shaw reds, accompanied, no doubt, by a dinner of well-charred hot dogs. However, though I do not know what wines were tasted against the \$2 Chuck, ***I don't know how the heck they could have rated it higher than a wine like the Cameron Hughes Chardonnay, which is not just a good value wine, but a genuinely good wine.***

