

SNOW ON WINE

THE COST OF “WHAT’S NOT TO DRINK”

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SHELF APPEAL – wine marketers know it’s their prime tool. Wine bottles sit there on a shelf among dozens of similar products, so boosting a bottle’s appeal helps boost overall shelf appeal – creating eye-catching products improves sales.

Wanting an impressive bottle to compliment a fine dinner, “Joe Consumer” (Joe) eyes the vast and sometimes overwhelming rows of wine bottles. A catchy label and fancy foil capsule stand out. Joe picks up and feels the heft of an extra heavy bottle with a deep punt and senses **this** must be a quality wine. Seems a bit pricy at \$29, but such a fine-looking bottle is surely worth it. What a disappointment when it drinks like a \$12 bottle of wine.



If only Joe had known the average cost among Washington wines of “What’s **NOT** to Drink” (WNTD) is about \$25 to \$30 per case (\$2.50/ bottle). That “dolloed-up bottle” was definitely above average -- at least in WNTD cost. That heavy premium bottle (at possibly more than triple typical WNTD cost), along with high-end looking artist label (\$0.95), a sexy embossed metal capsule (\$0.55), and extra-long “Logo Branded” cork (\$1.25) instead of a screw top or composite cork (either \$0.15) effectively swayed Joe’s purchasing decision but added WNTD cost of almost \$11/bottle. On top of that, the winery and/or distributor add a \$2 reward for their marketing genius. And so, the dollars available for the “What **IS** to Drink” (WITD) part of the equation is reduced to about \$13 bucks!

Don’t get me wrong – I do buy wine in heavy bottles. Primer Cru Burgundy now releases well over \$100/bottle and spending \$10 on a heavy, thick high punt bottle unlikely to break in the rigors of shipping and handling makes sense. As does a longer more expensive cork for a wine meant to age a decade or two. When the “WITD” part of the equation is \$70 or \$100 or more, protecting that investment with higher “WNTD” cost makes good sense. And at that price we want a bottle that looks high-end.



But what can we do to maximize the value of “WITD”? One seasoned wine distributor suggested to me that the “Marketing Premium” reward added by “Big Name” wineries, and especially those which have been bought-up by International Conglomerates, is often well over the \$2 that poor Joe Consumer paid. He suggested minimizing that “Undrinkable Cost” by buying from smaller, independent wineries. Consider looking for wine where less expense is put into the container and closure; like a plastic capsule (\$0.05), low-end cork (\$0.15) or screw top. If breakage in handling isn’t an issue, then a lighter flat-bottom bottle (\$1.25) is fine, and if you know the winery, why go for an artsy label. Of course, the lowest container and closure cost is the 16 oz. aluminum can at about \$0.45/can.

One of the benefits of SES membership is the insight we gain about wineries, their owners, vineyards, and staff. A major cost of “WITD” would be the grapes. Quality terroir drives per acre ground cost, which growers must recover in higher price per ton. Increasing quality with fewer tons per acre yield of grapes raises per ton cost more. Skilled staff for grape picking and sorting commands higher wages. All eventually raising our wine quality. After harvest winery costs continue. Buildings, equipment, skilled winemaking staff to pay, quality barrels for aging and aging time all go into “WITD”. These are the costs we want OUR BUCKS to go to when purchasing a wine bottle (bottle of wine).

At SES tastings we directly learn the “WITD” quality wineries offer as we taste. Our knowledgeable presenters help us understand about their vineyards and winemaking staff and practices. Experience which allows us to confidently select bottles which will give us maximal “WITD” value. Unlike Joe Consumer, SES members need not be influenced by a lot of additional WNTD costs. We learn by tasting which wineries maximize the value that we can drink.

