

# *The Dispatch*

## Virtual wines: They're cheaper, 'yummy'

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When you think of winemaking if ever you do, what images come to mind?

Likely your imagining~ are colored with romance - a stone cottage on a sweeping, vine-covered hillside; an old man testing grapes between his thumb and forefinger and giving an approving nod - like a movie, perhaps, only better.

In reality today's wine bottles aren't necessarily filled with grapes from one vineyard or one grape-growing region. These new-wave wines are called virtual wines, and they're the future of winemaking, some experts say.

"What is important in terms of what (wine makers are) doing is in terms of not making investments in bricks and mortar. Instead, we put our money into very high-quality grapes and winemaking," says Kerry Damskey a consultant to winemakers in California's Napa Valley and Sonoma regions and beyond.

In other words, winemakers today find themselves in an ever-changing and challenging market in which sophisticated methods - such as mixing grapes from different vineyards - help them remain competitive. "The wine would be much much more expensive if it were

done in an Old World model," says Mr. Damskey; who trained at the University of California- Davis, which has a department of viticulture and enology.

In a recent article, Chicago Tribune wine writer

Bill Daley predicted that the trend in virtual wines - or wines without a bricks-and mortar operation behind them- will continue to grow in 2005.

"A worldwide glut of grapes has meant more than good wine at even better (cheap) prices. The glut has allowed would-be winemakers to get along without their 'own' juice," Mr. Daley wrote.

Bill Brinton and his wife, Gerry, agree that modern winemaking methods help them create an affordable product - and an award-winning one.

The Brintons own Charles Creek Vineyard in Sonoma, Calif. The company's Cabernet Sauvignon, La Sonrisa del Tecolote (\$26), received 92 points out of 100 on the wine-rating scale published by Wine



Enthusiast magazine.

In addition, California Grapevine, a newsletter, scored the same wine third on a list of mostly higher-priced wines, placing it between a \$56 bottle and a \$70 bottle.

"As you know, living out there in the Midwest, some years are great for a particular crop," and some years are not, Mrs. Brinton says. This way, "we're" tied to a particular region (for grapes). We can pick and choose."

As for taste Mr. Damskey says winemakers like the Brintons work to create wines that are enjoyable right away with a fruity lushness laughingly calls "the critical yummy factor".

"We have evolved from more Old World styles that are a little more tannic or acidic. We've evolved to growing grapes and making wines that are bursting with flavor and lushness and are drinkable almost immediately" he says.

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**Charles Creek wines** are available locally at Gendler's Wine Cellar, 1509 River Drive, Moline. For more information, visit [www.charlescreek.com](http://www.charlescreek.com)