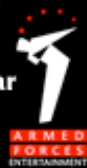




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Drink Globally, Splurge Locally

East Bay wines ain't cheap, but for that special occasion ...

By Blair Campbell

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John Badgley has the voice of God. At least that's how it sounded to East Bay vintner Sasha Verhage early one autumn morning in 1996, as he sat in the passenger seat of Badgley's truck on the way to pick the winemaker's Cabernet grapes in Napa's Oak Knoll area. Badgley waxed poetic about fog, climate, regions, and varietals, stitching together an alluring narrative about his craft. At the time, Verhage was a software designer at Broderbund. Three years later, he was a winemaker, producing half a barrel of his own Cabernet. Two years after that, it was a hundred cases of Zinfandel, and Eno Wines was born.



Stories like this were plentiful last week as a panel of East Bay vintners convened at the Commonwealth Club to taste and discuss making wine in an urban setting. Local loyalists all, these guys are doing their part to support the epicurean habits of the community in which they practice their craft. Sadly, Wineaux probably can't afford their wines for regular imbibing. The majority retail in the \$22 to \$40 range, and not without reason — these vintners cite the high costs of labor, cork, land, and fruit.

These economic realities are why so many of my columns feature international wines. Winemaking is simply cheaper in Chile, Australia, and Spain, so when I go to BevMo, Safeway, or Marina Liquors, the cheapest wine in the store just *isn't* going to be a Grenache from Alameda.

My suggestion? Drink globally, but for a special bottle, make an effort to splurge locally. Also *carefully*, because all expensive local wines are not created equal, as was proven at the tasting that followed that Commonwealth Club panel. We especially loved the **2004 Verve Columbia Valley Syrah** from **Aubin Cellars (\$24)**, a velvety mouthful of dark fruit. Among Verhage's **Eno Wines**, the **2004 Old Vine "The Patriarch" Zinfandel (\$25)** and **2004 "The Matriarch" Syrah (\$35)** were noteworthy, as were **Periscope Cellars' 2005 Petite Verdot (\$18)**, made primarily from the Petite Verdot grape used to add hardiness to Cab blends, and the **2005 Deep 6 (\$22)**, a red blend that's smooth and mellow. Periscope's wines actually become affordable if you buy them as *futures* — wines that are sold before they're bottled at a discount of as much as 60 percent.

Not represented from the East Bay was **Tamás Estates**, whose **Pinot Grigio (\$8.99)** is light and refreshing, an excellent accompaniment to seafood. While Tamás winemaker Chris Graves expresses skepticism about futures, he does offer significant volume discounts. VisitEastBayVintners.com for a directory, where you can buy local wines online and learn more about futures, volume discounts,

barrel tastings, and winery tours.