

James Laube Unfined

An Excellent Napa Cabernet for \$20

Posted: 04:15 PM ET, January 03, 2008

Napa Valley's 2005 bumper grape crop has created plenty of opportunities. Producers can select their finest wines for their top labels and discard wines that don't fit into those blends. There's often lots of good wine that doesn't fit in those cuvées, which is where the opportunities lie.

Roots Run Deep winery is a new company based in Yountville focusing on high-quality Napa wines at affordable prices. All of its wines will retail for \$20 or less, which sounds like something out of the 1980s.

Yesterday in my regular blind tasting I came across RRD's 2005 Educated Guess Cabernet (\$20, 18,000 cases), an excellent wine that offers rich, spicy pure Napa Cabernet flavors at a price where you can afford to buy a case. With the 2006 vintage, a Napa Chardonnay and Pinot Noir will join the lineup, with about 3,000 cases of each.

Owner Mark Albrecht and winemaker Barry Gnekow (who's made wine for Hahn, 7 Deadly Zins, Old Ghost and Cycles Gladiator) tapped Beckstoffer Vineyards in Rutherford for Cabernet Sauvignon, purchased as finished wine, and the Napa Wine Co. in Oakville for Merlot. The wines are made at Napa Wine Co.

This is Albrecht's first wine project after having worked with Cost Plus World Market, where he served as vice president of wine and gourmet food for 12 years, creating numerous brands, including Red Truck for Cline.

The wines so far are blends of both crushed grapes and purchased bulk wine. But starting in 2007, all of the wines will be made from purchased grapes.

The challenge, of course, is keeping their prices in the \$20 range and maintaining quality. Stay tuned.