

French rabbit



Whimsical labels lead to one wine that's fun and one that's fine

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Although I usually try to avoid cute animals on my wine labels, I am a bunny aficionado. That's one reason I couldn't resist a product called French Rabbit when I stopped in at St. Louis Cellars, 2640 South Big Bend Boulevard in Maplewood.

The bunnies were hopping across the front of a 1-liter Tetra-Pak, a light, recyclable, aluminum-coated paperboard package with a resealable screw cap.

In America, the containers are more often associated with juice, soup and soy milk, but Europeans have been drinking wine out of Tetra-Paks for years. In fact, French Rabbit reminded me of a time in the early 1990s when a dear friend moved to Italy. "Come to Rome," she said. "You'll love it. They sell wine in milk cartons."

I did travel to Rome and found some decent, inexpensive Italian wines packaged in cartons.

French Rabbit, which was selling for \$11.99, is a Chardonnay produced in the Languedoc Roussillon region in southern France by the Boisset family, a strong supporter of sustainable, biodynamic and organic winemaking methods.

This is a fun white wine that's simple and fruity with no heavy oak flavor. It's perfect for a warm day, and the Tetra-Pak's walls cool quickly. French Rabbit is a perfect wine for sipping as an aperitif on spring days or with simple, light foods like salads or shellfish.

I decided to keep the animal theme going and for a red, I went for the 2005 Cuatro Pasos from Spain's Bierzo region selling for \$14.99. Don't be fooled by the black label and shiny red paw prints: This is a serious and delicious red

made from the Mencía grape.

While the label is striking, it also carries two well-respected names. One is Bodegas Martín Códax, the Spanish cooperative winery that bottled the wine; the other is the importer, Eric Solomon Selections-European Cellars, based in Charlotte, N.C.

Bierzo, located in the province of León in the northwestern corner of Castilla y León, is an up-and-coming Spanish region that's been getting a lot of attention in the U.S. wine press. I haven't seen many of the wines in the St. Louis area, so I was anxious to give this one a try. And boy, am I glad I did.

This was a yummy, somewhat exotic red that's soft and smooth. The Cuatro Pasos is a medium-bodied, mouth-filling flavorful wine that has a distinctive plummy flavor that's quite intriguing. It has a touch of spice and smoke and ends with a long, elegant finish. This is a food wine that would pair well with grilled entrees.

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