

Laurie Daniel on Wine

Bargains and surprises from the Critics Challenge competition

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I was among the judges earlier this month at the Critics Challenge International Wine & Spirits Competition in San Diego. As the name indicates, the competition includes wines from all over the world, although it's dominated by U.S. wines, especially from California. These types of tastings, where all wines are sampled blind and judges motor through a lot of glasses, are imperfect, of course. At best, they provide a snapshot of the wine at a particular point in time. But there were wines that clearly stood out for me. And when I saw the results, I was pleased to see some really good bargains, so that's what I'll focus on.

WENTE
VINEYARDS

Wente Vineyards entered an exceptional \$20 cab, the 2016 Wente Vineyards Southern Hills Cabernet Sauvignon from Livermore Valley. It displays lively, dark fruit, a hint of dried cherry and polished tannins. The winery website currently lists the 2017, but some stores should still have the 2016. (I also liked Wente's 2016 Charles Wetmore cab, but it's \$10 more.)

