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California shiraz stuns wine world

The Associated Press
June 17th, 2004

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BERKELEY -- Two Buck Chuck, the California wine famous for its low price, was worth its weight in gold to judges in a New York competition.

A Charles Shaw shiraz -- Charles Shaw is Two Buck's formal name -- got through to the finals of the International Eastern Wine Competition, one of only 53 finalists out of 2,300 wines entered.

The news was a stunner for the wine world, where high praise is often accompanied by high prices. But for Ceres-based Bronco Wine Co., makers of Charles Shaw, the honor was vintage vindication.

"First the people spoke and now the critics have spoken," said Bronco spokesman Harvey Posert.

Charles Shaw, carried exclusively by the Trader Joe's grocery chain, sells for \$1.99 in California, although it can cost more elsewhere due to shipping and other costs.

The wine's success created a new category of wines known as "supervalues," which last year accounted for about 13 percent of California wine sales, said analyst Jon Fredrikson, of Gomberg, Fredrikson and Associates.

At the East Coast competition, a panel of four judges agreed Charles Shaw shiraz was worth a gold medal, giving it the "double gold" status that puts it in the sweepstakes for best of category. Those results were to be released at a banquet Friday.

Two Buck's high showing reportedly caused some chagrin at the competition after the results of the blind tasting were released.

But Richard Leahy, editor of Vineyard and Winery Magazine which puts on the competition, was seeing the silver lining. "I think it's good news for the consumer that a wine at this price point is also that good," he said.

No argument from Trader Joe's spokeswoman Pat St. John: "What are the chances of this having double gold and being sold for \$1.99? It's just a wonderful underdog type story."

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