

Unsolicited Samples

I was once told by an editor that journalists do not talk about how they do their work. "Just do the reporting and leave the 'how' out of the story," he said.

This case is a bit different: It's about how difficult, time-consuming and aggravating it is to find wines to write about in our Page 3 Tasting Notes column.

What prompted this was an unsolicited sample of a fine 2002 Rioja from Luis Alegre that arrived weeks ago. I liked it, but the shipping box had no press material at all.

So I went on Wine-Searcher.com to find out what its availability and price were. (I see no point in writing about a wine that's too expensive or unavailable.) Wine-Searcher had nothing. Nor did the winery's website.

But the wine had a back label with the name of a San Francisco-based importer and a phone number. The number was disconnected.

Next I did a Google search for the brand and found a Florida firm that was its national distributor.

I called the company. A phone system asked me to leave a message— but a few seconds later I heard that the voice mailbox was full. It hung up.

I next called Bottle Barn in Santa Rosa, which has a broad selection of imports. The wine department had not heard of the brand.

Next I called Gerry Dawes, who has specialized in importing Spanish wine for more than 30 years. He knew of the property, but had no idea why I would have gotten a sample of the 2002.

The wine remains a mystery, and I intend to find out more

about it.

But for now, all I have for my search is a lost hour. And this kind of thing happens frequently.