

5 Things You Should Buy at Costco

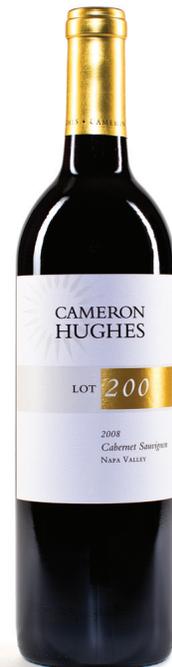
Costco was cool even before the Great Recession. Targeting business owners and other affluent customers, the members-only warehouse shop avoided the Walmart stigma and sold a mix of high-end electronics, basic foodstuffs, and household necessities, plus an eclectic mix of humidifiers, bestselling books, and vintage Champagne. Now that frugal is fashionable, however, Costco seems like the perfect store for the times. The blogosphere, no surprise, offers up sites for Costco fanatics and Costco cooks. CEO and founder Jim Sinegal is renowned for the low salary he awards himself and the relatively high pay he shells out for employees. Even A-listers are getting in on the action: Jessica Alba, Megan Fox, and Zac Efron have been spotted loading up their cars with 30-packs of toilet paper and flat-screen TVs.

So should you follow the crowd? Yes, but only for certain items. If you've got the storage space, it's tough to beat Costco for staples such as paper towels, diapers, and shaving cream. Below, we've listed five surprising items that you should pick up at the warehouse.

1. Wine

OK, "Costco Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape" doesn't exactly roll off the tongue. But who cares — it goes down the throat quite nicely. The 800-year-old appellation, quaffed by popes and praised by Nostradamus, is now available under the "Kirkland" house brand at your local warehouse club. And it's good stuff, according to experts. The 2008 Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape sells for \$20, but would be \$30 anywhere else, says Andrew Cullen, who rates wines sold at the store at the CostcoWineBlog. "Before you see a bottle at Costco, it has been screened by Costco wine buyers, which cuts out 75 percent of the less desirable wines," says Cullen, who has no relationship with the company he writes about.

Ray Isle, executive wine editor of *Food & Wine* magazine, says the fact that Costco sells such huge quantities of wine — it's the largest retailer of fine wine in the country — means it can get good deals and better access to top vintages. In addition to selling wine under its own brand, Costco offers a good selection of other wines at competitive prices. A recent favorite of Isle's is the Lot 200 Cameron Hughes 2008 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. "I just tasted this two days ago, and it was pretty damn good Cabernet for the price," Isle says.



There's a lot of turnover, though, so don't go in expecting to find the same bottles month after month. On the upside: Thanks to the convoluted state regulations on liquor sales, you don't even need to be a Costco member to buy wine there. When the greeters ask you for your membership card at the entrance, just tell them you're only buying alcohol and they'll wave you through. Cheers!