DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU HEARD ABOUT AMAZON.COM? There was a long Wall Street Journal article about the company in the early 1990s. The first few paragraphs covered the things we all know about Amazon today. It sounded sort of crazy then – like some of those high-flying internet schemes that ended up going bust. As the piece continued, though, it revealed that Jeff Bezos had studied the book business carefully and had identified parts of the bookselling process that slowed things down and increased costs. His new virtual bookstore would eliminate some of the bottlenecks, increase service to customers, and incidentally, make Bezos a very rich man.

Could somebody do something similar in the wine business? Are there ways to boost efficiency, eliminate bottlenecks, and increase customer satisfaction in the world of wine? Evidently there are. Cameron Hughes and his wife, Jessica Kogan, have done it. They’ve started a virtual wine company called Cameron Hughes Wine (www.chwine.com).

Hughes and Kogan don’t own vineyards or a winery. Like Jeff Bezos, they built their company out of knowledge and insight.

Cameron’s father was in the wine business, and Cameron grew up hearing about wine every day. After Cameron completed college, Dad encouraged him to join the Wine Group, one of the largest wine marketing firms in the U.S. He
Cameron Hughes had worked out a way to produce some excellent wine at great prices. How were he and Jess going to sell it?

**Notes on Some Recent Cameron Hughes Wines**

We tasted a slew of Hughes wines recently. The quality was consistently good. You may not be able to find these particular wines any longer, but don’t hesitate to try new ones as they arrive. Here are our tasting notes.


**Lot 58** – 2006 Chardonnay, Santa Barbara County – Pale straw with faint green highlights. Fruity bouquet. Good body, creamy. Fruity with some grassiness, apples, minerals, a hint of oak, and possibly almonds. Round and warm. “Comfort wine.”


**Lot 52** – 2006 Malbec, Valle de Uco, Mendoza, Argentina – Very dark. Bouquet full of blackberries and pepper. Intense berry flavors. Good acidity to hold its own against steak from the grill.

**Lot 37** – 2006 Grenache Rosé, Campo de Borja DO, Spain – Robust rosé color and Grenache bouquet. Fruity, with blood oranges, citrus rind and pomegranates. Refreshing, great for hot summer weather.

**Lot 51** – 2004 Malbec Lujan de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina – Dark color. Blueberry pie bouquet. Dark berries with good acid, tannin and a sense of vanilla. As time went on we noted a sheen of raspberries.

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People liked the wines, and the company began to grow.

Cameron and Jess made a great team. Cameron knew wine. Jess had worked in marketing in fashion and with dot-coms.

The real breakthrough came when the young couple worked a deal with Costco. The giant chain would buy entire lots and sell them to consumers at amazing prices—generally between $8 and $14 per bottle. When the wine was ready, Cameron and Jess shipped it to select Costco stores throughout the country (as there’s never really enough wine for all of the stores), where it generally sold out the week it arrived. Once Costco’s customers got to know the Cameron Hughes brand and understood that each new lot was going to be gone in a couple of days, the wines sold even faster.

There’s one peculiar thing about the system. Consumers generally don’t know when a new wine will be arriving. (It is possible to get a heads-up from the company’s website, and wine fans can request to be added to the company’s email list). Most customers visit Costco every week and buy the wine when they see it. They don’t have a chance to taste the wine before they buy it, but they trust the Cameron Hughes brand, and they know the wine will be good.

The company continues to grow and has begun to make wines available through new retailers in some markets. Rob Eddlemon, who heads the company’s Midwest and East Coast sales team and is based in Austin reports, “In Austin we are sold primarily through Costco, though Cost Plus World Market occasionally receives CHW Lot designations produced exclusively for them.”

So be sure to look for Cameron Hughes Wines when you shop at Costco or World Market. Try a few bottles for yourself. And then put yourself on the Cameron Hughes email list.

**MORE INFO**

[www.chwine.com](http://www.chwine.com)