

Water, or Whine?

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Last year, Americans spent \$15 billion on bottled water. Turns out, the joke's on us: Not only are top sellers Aquafina and Dasani just bottled public water, but the wasteful plastic packaging will still be lingering in the year 3000. But do water snobs have a valid argument that private water tastes better than tap? *Chicago* asked four sommeliers to blindly taste, then rank, seven waters—five private labels, plus tap water from Chicago and Elmhurst. Sniffing, smelling, and occasionally swirling, they recalibrated their palates, then rated them best to worst. Dawn Reiss

THE PANEL

Belinda Chang, Cenitare
Steven Alexander, Spiaggia
Molly Wismeier, Charlie Trotter's
Jeremy Quinn, Webster's Wine Bar

BEST: FIJI

BC: I don't know if "sharper" is the right word. It's harder, heavier water, maybe more pure. You feel a presence.

SA: It seems denser; it seems to linger.

MW: Yes, it does feel heavier, harder. You feel the presence more.

JQ: It's more natural. I like it. The texture seems the most complicated. It's the most refreshing.

EVIAN

BC: Clean, soft, viscous. I don't want anything I drink to fight with what I'm eating, so it's the perfect water.

SA: There's a little calcium. There's something soft to me about it.

MW: It seems pretty neutral.

JQ: There's a soft, almost floral tone to it. Not a lot of sodium, with wide body.

ELMHURST TAP WATER

BC: A little chlorinated, slightly salty.

SA: I do like it.

MW: There's minerality to it. With a salty, soft presence and a little chlorine.

JQ: It's refreshing.

DASANI

BC: It has a soft texture, without minerality.

SA: There is almost a sweetness to the water.

MW: This one is a fish tank.

JQ: It's very vegetable. Almost like sautéed broccoli.

AQUAFINA

BC: It's definitely the least clean.

SA: It smells like a fish tank with algae. It has a mossy feel that you'd find in a riverbed.

MW: There's definitely the presence of something there. It's much softer. I can't really place it.

JQ: It's very chemical and tastes like plastic. It has more weight and a good texture.

ICE MOUNTAIN

BC: It has tannin. We found it. It's the cabernet water. It's almost drying on the palate. It's not as hydrating as the others.

SA: It's a bit rawer. It's more angular and finishes quicker. It's more tannic.

MW: This is more salty.

JQ: It's dry, with more chemicals. It makes me more thirsty.

WORST: CHICAGO TAP WATER

BC: Chlorine on the finish.

SA: Not pleasing at all. It doesn't seem like something you'd want to put in your mouth.

MW: It smells like a swimming pool.

JQ: Bleached, chlorinated. It's just awful.

* Like many local municipalities, Elmhurst uses water from Lake Michigan. But each municipality maintains its own infrastructure and chlorinates its own water, hence a possible difference in taste despite a common source.

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