

October 21, 22, 23
Long Beach Convention Center
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FORMERLY THE HARVEST FESTIVAL

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The new soda pops: A tasting

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Cricket Cola. Made with cane sugar, kola nut and green tea, this delightful soft drink is rooty and spicy, with gingerbread flavors and herbal notes. It's very lightly carbonated. Not what you'd think of as a cola. (Beverages & More, Galco's, Mel & Rose.)

Curiosity Cola. From UK-based Fentimans, this soda has an intriguing fruit-and-spice aroma and an elusive gently spiced cola flavor. Others in the line include a British schoolchild favorite, Dandelion and Burdock, made with pear juice and infusions of, yep, dandelion and burdock. A pleasing taste of fruit and spices. Mandarin and Seville Orange Jigger is a not-sweet soda with pulp, bright orange flavor and an underpinning of ginger and juniper. (Available at Mel & Rose Liquor & Deli; Sainsbury Deli; Tudor House in Santa Monica, [310] 451-4107.)

GuS Dry Valencia, Dry Crimson Grape. A quinine note gives an edge to these sodas. The orange has a lovely light orange-juice nose and a good orange flavor — not bitter, not sweet, but citrus. The grape has a good grapey aroma but, thankfully, no candy texture. There's a palate-cleansing quality to this line of cane sugar-sweetened sodas. (Available at Cheese Store of Silver Lake, [323] 644-7511; Cost Plus World Market stores; Whole Foods.)

Manhattan Special Black Cherry, Manhattan Special Orange. The cherry is gloriously not maraschino-esque but instead tastes of cherry juice. It's balanced, not too sweet. The orange is a bright soda-pop (not juice) style but has straight-ahead orange flavor. Both are made with sugar and fruit concentrates. (At Galco's.)

Natural Brew Organic Grapefruit. From Chico, Calif., this light, tasty soda is "way better than Squirt" because it really does taste like grapefruit. (Available at Mel & Rose Liquor & Deli, Whole Foods.)

Reed's Spiced Apple. Smells like apple pie, tastes like autumn. Very apple-y, soft in the mouth with a gingery base. (Galco's, Mel & Rose Liquor & Deli.)

Riggs and Forsythe Bitter Lemon, Riggs and Forsythe Aronia Cassis. This bitter lemon soda has "more pith" than other citrus drinks. It's not puckering but light and sparkling. The cassis is fruity but not sweet and has root notes without any sticky molasses tones. (At Beverages & More, Galco's, Mel & Rose Liquor & Deli.)

Soho Genuine Blackberry Soda. A contemporary soda in a vaguely retro-looking bottle. There's an honest blackberry flavor in this sweet, light-textured pale-pink pop that has a nice fruit acidity. "For drinking in the sunshine," commented a taster. (Available at Bristol Farms, Mel & Rose Liquor & Deli.)

Stewart's Key Lime. Though our tasters didn't embrace the entire line from longtime producer Stewart, the Key lime soda is a fun novelty, has the texture of a Key lime soufflé and would be great in a float. (Aero Market, Beverages & More, Galco's, Mel & Rose Liquor & Deli, Sainsbury Deli)

Ting. A Jamaican grapefruit soda that's smooth, not as harsh as mainstream grapefruit drinks, but with a pleasant tickle. (Available at Galco's, Juliano's Deli, Mel & Rose Liquor & Deli)

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