

The New York Times Magazine

Letter of Recommendation: LaCroix Sparkling Water

By MARY H. K. CHOI - MARCH 3, 2015



Did you know? The comedian Joe Mande used to claim to be LaCroix's unofficial spokesman. This led to three retaliatory boycotts of the seltzer, by Mande's estimate, after his tweets offended conservatives online. Eventually, lawyers for LaCroix sent Mande a cease-and-desist letter, bringing the "relationship" to an end. Mande says he no longer drinks LaCroix. Credit Jason Nocito for The New York Times

I was introduced to them at work, the same place where most of us worry about contracting respiratory viruses. I'd just landed a job in sunny Los Angeles, where I ate breakfast, lunch and dinner at a standing desk in a windowless office. I was paid more money than I'd ever made before, which was just enough that I could never stop counting it, over and over until it lost meaning, like that thing that happens when you do acid and stare at your hand.

The days were long, and my employer knew what all employers now know: If you plan to keep your workers away from their families, sofas, friends, pets and sunlight for that many hours, you'd better give them snacks. Every available surface was decorated with instant-gratification bribery — sour straws, chewy Lemonheads, Nerds, miniature Oreos, Starbursts and tiny bags of Doritos. This, of course, coincided with my quitting cigarettes for the 12th time, so I was rage-chewing raw almonds on the half-hour.

During a morning meeting, I noticed two of my younger colleagues clutching cans of LaCroix. I later realized that they were rarely seen without them. Initially, I thought it was one of those food-as--personality things, where otherwise dull people develop an "obsession" with something ostensibly exotic — typically Nutella, Sriracha or Fernet-Branca — and pass it off as a quirk. But the first time I cracked one open and took a swig, I understood. LaCroix sparkling water is absolutely delicious.

The New York Times Magazine

(Continued)

My initial reluctance was partly due to the cans' hideousness. The first time I drank LaCroix, I half expected it to be filled with self-tanner. Or Axe body spray. The cans look somehow simultaneously obnoxious and earnest, as if they're trying to appeal to Canadian ravers or the sort of people who have septum piercings and shop at Desigual. With its bootleg Van Gogh swirls and the not-quite Yves Klein blue logo, LaCroix would look right at home nestled in a neoprene koozie screen-printed to look like an acid-washed denim jacket. Everything about the can suggests trashy fun. The inside of my recycling bin has begun to look like a Cirque du Soleil poster.

Regardless of what kind you get, most offer a suspicion of flavor rather than a bracing burst of taste. Fine by me; everything these days seems too sweet or intense for my liking, anyway. Aside from the can, everything about LaCroix is gentle. Even the bubbles are small and frothy rather than spiky — a Vinho Verde, not a cava — making it easy to put away a couple in one sitting, totally guilt-free. That's because LaCroix is everything-free: sugar, sodium, calorie, preservative. It comes in 12 core flavors, but true LaCroix-heads know that Pamplemousse is the best.

The company that originally made the drink was based in La Crosse, Wis., and the brand's vestigial Midwestern guilelessness collides awkwardly with its European pretensions: "Pamplemousse" instead of "Grapefruit"; a new line of flavors called "Cúrate" (loosely, "cure yourself" en Español). It even has a nutrition ambassador named Barb, who lives in Arizona. Her Twitter bio says she is a "former Bostonian enjoying sunshine 365." LaCroix also sponsors running teams in places like Plantation, Loxahatchee and Sunrise, Fla. To the extent it has a brand identity, LaCroix is for people who might not be perfect but are proud of their lifestyle choices every day.

I recently came to the realization that it had been easily 12 years since I'd strung together more than one or two days of sobriety without having five or six drinks to celebrate. I'd been casually buzzed for over a decade, just like everyone I have ever met who isn't actively in recovery, and while we're all doing our best, it did strike me as a little gross. So recently, I quit everything to see if I could do it. I've now been totally sober for just over a month, which isn't exactly a feat of discipline. But in five weeks — without rewards or those crackly bursts of serotonin where the vibe in the room coalesces and people start chattering at one other with renewed interest — you start getting lonely and self-conscious, unsure of whether you get to hang out anymore.

This Midwestern seltzer has come to fill the gaps that booze and pot left behind. Now, when I meditate in the morning and set my intentions — promising not to smoke cigarettes or slug pinot grigio at lunch or eat the brick of weed fudge in my fridge, which would only make me eat every last Dorito in my sunshine-less hell box — I let LaCroix lead me to positive thoughts.

LaCroix is not as exhilarating as taking ecstasy at Joshua Tree, blanketed by a glittering velveteen sky, but, boy, do I get stoked when I've remembered to pack one for the movie theater. And now that I'm free of a constant low-grade hangover, I'm left with a lot of time to just walk around, extra alert. I see all of us now. The truth is, for every dork that buys Sriracha-branded knee socks at Urban Outfitters, there's a mid-30s lady quaffing crates of flavored soda water because that's her "thing." My seltzer fixation broadcasts to the world that I'm getting older and, like everyone in their mid-30s in Los Angeles, on some form of passive diet or detox. It's stupid, but there is an unmistakable joy when friends spot me by my can and strike up a conversation about how they secretly like Orange the best. They know LaCroixville is a safe space — a tacky community with as much judgment as there are calories. Zip.

Read more here: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-lacroix-sparkling-water.html>