

A PUBLICATION BY THE WINE ADVOCATE

matter *of* taste



ROBERT M. PARKER, JR

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR

*How a lone visionary became
“the world’s most prized palate”*



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ROYAL OAK OFFSHORE
IN PINK GOLD AND CERAMIC.
CHRONOGRAPH.



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Who would have thought the humble corkscrew could be an object of such beauty? Check out the best



Robin Lynam

Robin Lynam is a Hong Kong-based journalist specializing in travel, food and drink, and arts and culture. He contributes to a wide variety of publications, and writes regular columns on wines and spirits for the *South China Morning Post*, *Gafencu*, *Bar Talk* and *Hong Kong Golfer*. He is also the *South China Morning Post*'s jazz columnist. In *Matter of Taste*, Robin investigates how oak barrels impact upon fine wines (page 34).



Gary Bowerman

Gary Bowerman is co-founder of Scribes of the Orient, a media and marketing services agency with bases in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Shanghai. Formerly the editor of *Shanghai Business Review* and Shanghai editor for Luxe Guides and Zagat Survey, he has contributed articles, hotel and destination reviews from across Asia for *Condé Nast Traveller*, *Business Traveller* and *Concierge.com*. He is currently writing a book about the Chinese travel industry to be published in late 2014. Here, Gary visits superb city wine bars worldwide (page 84).



Charmaine Chan

Charmaine Chan started her journalism career 20 years ago in Sydney, Australia and has since worked at newspapers and magazines in Tokyo and Hong Kong. She was literary editor at the *South China Morning Post* before being appointed the newspaper's design editor eight years ago. She has also worked as deputy editor at the *Asia Literary Review* and as a freelance writer for publications worldwide. In this issue, Charmaine highlights some of the best corkscrews on the market (page 46).



Diana d'Arenberg

Diana d'Arenberg is an art and culture writer. She has contributed to *Harper's Bazaar Singapore*, *South China Morning Post*, *High Magazine*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Ocula.com* and other publications, as well as to her own blog, *post-ism.com*. She is also the former editor and co-founder of *Framed*, a Hong Kong art and culture magazine dedicated to profiling artists, collectors and designers. Here, Diana explores how contemporary wineries are getting creative with their labels (page 62), and wine's role in great art through the centuries (page 78).



Ed Peters

Ed Peters' wine collection would be one of the largest in Asia if he hadn't drunk most of it. Having toured wineries in Europe, China and Australia for research purposes, he is not unfamiliar with the term "wrath of grapes," a pertinent aphorism if not exactly original. As a prolific writer, Ed has contributed to the *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Condé Nast Traveller* and many other publications. He investigates how to start a rewarding wine collection (page 58).



Welcome to *Matter of Taste* magazine – a unique publication that provides a vivid glimpse into the elegantly engaging world of fine wines and fine-wine culture.

Since 1978, renowned bi-monthly journal Robert Parker's *The Wine Advocate* has been a global leader in delivering unbiased wine reviews, earning an enviable reputation as the independent consumer's guide to fine wine. Now, laced with additional histories, profiles and colorful feature articles, *Matter of Taste* goes behind the scenes to demystify *The Wine Advocate*'s methods,

bringing you that much closer to the professional critics that not only shape but *make* the global fine-wine market.

Readers of *Matter of Taste* also enjoy access to entertaining and informative features on the world's most iconic regions, wineries, winemakers and labels. What's more, you'll receive invaluable pointers from *The Wine Advocate* reviewer team on a number of wines to drink, cellar and collect thanks to a sample medley of impartial recommendations to suit various budgets.

With helpful suggestions on everything from wine bars worth visiting in cities around the world and innovative designer corkscrews to a concise guide to how oak barrels help in the maturing of fine wines, there is something within these pages to suit everyone, from the new wine enthusiast to the professional oenophile.

I hope you will find *Matter of Taste* to be as fun to read as it is practical.

Cheers!

LISA PERROTTI-BROWN MW
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We are thrilled to partner with *The Wine Advocate* and present Robert Parker's Wine Advocate Grand World Tour 2014 in five Asian cities, including Hong Kong, Singapore, Beijing, Shanghai and Kuala Lumpur in February and March 2014.

Acknowledged by *The Financial Times* as "the world's most prized palate," Robert Parker is arguably one of the world's most influential wine critics. Having the opportunity to meet up with him to engage, dine and discuss the world of wines is just one of the many exclusive experiences that we offer to our premium Card Members.

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FROM THE FIRST DROP

INTRIGUING EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE PRODUCTION OF WINE PREDATES RECORDED HUMAN HISTORY, AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS ARE DIGGING EVER DEEPER TO UNCOVER WHO GOT THERE FIRST. **GARY JONES** INVESTIGATES

THE LATE ROBERT MONDAVI, AN influential California vineyard operator who, through combining age-old techniques with cutting-edge innovation, brought the wines of Napa Valley to worldwide recognition, is credited with stating that “wine has been with civilized man since the beginning.” Though oenophiles certainly appreciate the sentiment, and we could all argue for eons on the meaning of “civilized,” the findings of specialist historians suggest wine has been around for a lot longer than we might think.

The oldest known evidence for the intentional creation of something akin to wine points to China a head-spinning 9,000 years ago – towards the end of the Stone Age. In 2004, in fact, researchers led by Patrick McGovern, the scientific director of the Biomolecular Archaeology Laboratory for Cuisine, Fermented Beverages, and Health at the University of Pennsylvania Museum in the United States, found trace residues

of vintage alcohol in excavated Chinese pottery jars.

“Chemical analyses of ancient organics absorbed, and preserved, in pottery jars from the Neolithic village of Jiahu, in Henan province, northern China, have revealed that a mixed fermented beverage of rice, honey, and fruit was being produced as early as 9,000 years ago,” the university declared in a statement.

The ancient tipples, the researchers said, were probably produced using bacterial molds to break down rice carbohydrates into simple sugars, and the presence of fruit was identified by tartrate remains. The scientists, however, were unable to pinpoint the type of fruit. Did Jiahu’s prehistoric winemakers employ grapes, hawthorns, longans or a combination? If grapes had been used they would have been wild species native to the region, and not the European varieties that were only introduced into China in the second century BC via the Silk Road.

Words to the Wine

Throughout history, the world’s wisest thinkers and writers have snatched up their quills or turned to their typewriters in attempts to glorify the grape

“Wine is constant proof that God loves us and loves to see us happy”
United States founding father Benjamin Franklin

“If we sip the wine, we find dreams coming upon us out of the imminent night”
English novelist and playwright D.H. Lawrence

“Give me wine to wash me clean of the weather-stains of cares”
Essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Quickly, bring me a beaker of wine, so that I may wet my mind and say something clever”
Ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes

“MEN ARE LIKE WINE – SOME TURN TO VINEGAR, BUT THE BEST IMPROVE WITH AGE”
Pope John XXIII

“Wine makes every meal an occasion, every table more elegant, every day more civilized”
Prolific French wine writer André Simon

“Penicillin cures, but wine makes people happy”
Scottish immunologist Alexander Fleming

“Wine is one of the most civilized things in the world and one of the most natural things of the world that has been brought to the greatest perfection, and it offers a greater range for enjoyment and appreciation than, possibly, any other purely sensory thing”
American author Ernest Hemingway

McGovern, who is widely respected as the preeminent expert on the subject and author of the book *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture*, among others, has argued that domestication of the wine grape and winemaking may have originated in what is now Georgia in the Caucasus region, and radiated geographically from there. The earliest archaeological evidence of such wine production yet found has, indeed, been at sites in Georgia dating back to 6000BC, as well as in Iran.

A Neolithic excavation in Iran called Hajji Firuz and dating back to at least 5000BC, in fact, unveiled a deposit of sediment in the bottom of an amphora that proved to be a mix of tannin and tartrate crystals. Five other jars, each with the capacity for about nine liters, suggest volume production. A Greek site, meanwhile, is notable for the recovery of crushed-grape remnants. It dates back to 4500BC.

There is also increasingly abundant evidence for winemaking in Egypt in the third millennium BC. A tomb belonging to the so-called Scorpion King and dating to about 3150BC was found to contain 700 jars believed to have been made and filled with wine in the eastern Mediterranean and shipped to North Africa.

Finally, one of the most compelling discoveries pertaining to the origins of ordered and efficient winemaking was made in Armenia in recent years. What has been dubbed the Areni-1 Cave was found to house a sloping, platform-like wine press, fermentation vats, storage jars and cups, as well as seeds and vines. The site dates to about 4000BC during the Copper Age, and experts believe that grapes were crushed on the platform and their juice then flowed under gravity into the jars.

Speaking to *National Geographic*

News in 2011, McGovern called the discovery “important and unique, because it indicates large-scale wine production, which would imply, I think, that the grape had already been domesticated.” He added that the Areni-1 grape might have produced something similar to that of ancient Georgian varieties that appear to be

ancestors of the Pinot Noir grape, resulting in a palatable dry red.

Most interesting of all, the cave also gave up a well-preserved leather moccasin from roughly the same period. Was Areni-1 the world’s first mass-production winery, where teams of workers removed their footwear to crush grapes with their bare feet?

The Areni-1 grape might have produced something similar to that of ancient Georgian varieties that appear to be ancestors of the Pinot Noir grape, resulting in a palatable dry red

VENI, VIDI, VINO!

The all-conquering Romans took winemaking to new levels, and their technical expertise spread far and wide with their empire

WHAT IS BELIEVED TO BE THE world’s oldest bottle of wine still in existence was unearthed in 1867 during excavation work required to construct a house in a vineyard near the town of Speyer in Germany. The bottle (pictured right) was discovered inside one of two sarcophagi of Roman nobles and dates back to about 350AD, making it more than 1,650 years old.

The amphora, which is on permanent display at the History

Museum of the Pfalz, close to where it was found, is made of green-yellow glass and its handles are crafted in the shape of dolphins. One of several bottles discovered at the site, it is the only one with its contents preserved.

Though cork closures existed in Roman times, they were quite uncommon and the bottle was sealed with wax. The liquid inside is segregated into two layers, the upper portion being thick, semi-opaque and perhaps consisting of

olive oil (the Romans sometimes used oil to protect wine from the air and avoid oxidation).

For a number of years now experts have been debating whether to open the bottle, unsure of what will happen to its contents. The museum’s wine curator believes it is extremely possible that the wine will still be micro-biologically unspoiled (though quite unsuitable for drinking, of course).

It is believed that the Romans produced the wine locally, and the Pfalz is one of Germany’s premium winegrowing regions to this day.



OLDEST Grape Vine?

A vine in the small town of Maribor in Slovenia has been growing for more than 400 years. Its Zametovka grapes (one of the oldest known varieties) are still being harvested for wines in the 21st century. Offspring of the vine have been discovered flourishing in locations across the globe.

OLDEST Barrel of Wine?

The world’s oldest barrel of wine, which is said to boast alluring aromas of vanilla and hazelnut, is more than 540 years old. The 1472 vintage, originally from the Alsace region of France and considered to be the oldest viable wine in existence, is stored in the cellar of a former hospital in Strasbourg.



INDEPENDENT (adjective): neutral, objective, detached, impartial, just, fair, equal, open-minded, equitable, disinterested, unbiased, even-handed, nonpartisan, unprejudiced, non-discriminating – *Collins Thesaurus*

DISPASSIONATE AFFAIR

THE WINE ADVOCATE IS LAUDED INTERNATIONALLY FOR PROVIDING IMPARTIAL INTELLIGENCE ON THE WORLD'S FINEST WINES. FOR ITS FOUNDER, ROBERT M. PARKER, JR., THE HONEST APPROACH HAS BEEN THE KEY TO SUCCESS



ROBERT M. PARKER, JR. TASTES AT THE CELEBRATED CHÂTEAU RAYAS IN THE SOUTHERN RHÔNE VALLEY IN 2003



DELIVERING IN EXCESS OF 20,000 wine reviews every year, *The Wine Advocate* is a respected bi-monthly publication, based in the United States but referred to and enjoyed globally, that is essential reading for both wine professionals and enthusiasts alike. Offering detailed consumer advice while declining to accept advertising, *The Wine Advocate* gives its readers unadulterated facts and only the opinions of unbiased experts.

In 2014, *The Wine Advocate* boasts more than 50,000 subscribers from every nook of the US and more than 40 countries worldwide, and its founder and president, Robert M. Parker, Jr., with his distinctive note-taking vocabulary, is praised as the most influential wine critic on the planet. A 2012 article in *The Financial Times* newspaper described Parker as “the world’s most prized palate.”

The Wine Advocate’s history can be traced back to decidedly humble (but pleasingly romantic) beginnings – to 1967, in fact, when 20-year-old Parker, a native of Baltimore, Maryland, headed to France for a month during his Christmas vacation from the University of Maryland to visit his girlfriend, who was then studying at the University of Strasbourg in Alsace. As well as getting the girl on his European sojourn (the young lady in question soon happily accepted an invitation to become Mrs. Patricia Parker, and remains so to this day as Parker’s wife of 44 years), the seeds of what would grow into an obsession had been planted during that trip – Parker had discovered and developed a healthy taste for the grape.

Back in the late 1960s, however, the concept of *The Wine Advocate* was merely a twinkle in Parker’s eyes that his friends and family, keen on him becoming a lawyer, discouraged as fanciful. Returning to Baltimore to graduate with honors with a major in history and a minor in art history, he went on to the University of Maryland Law School, graduating in 1973 and joining a local firm as a practicing lawyer. Parker’s professional heart, however, had already been lost to wine.

During the early 1970s, when Parker was considering writing his own wine guide, he was taken with the work of Ralph Nader, an American consumer advocate who sought to “out” corporate malpractice by challenging inaccurate propaganda. Parker recognized that much of what was then being written about wine was compromised by financial agendas. He dreamt of a publication that could be free of commercial ties to wineries and merchants – a guide that would deliver wholly unbiased views and that served the interests of consumers. The concept Parker envisaged would be funded purely by the people that buy, read and use it.

Because of the paucity of reliable information on wine, by 1975 Parker’s vision for an “independent, consumer’s guide” was beginning to take shape in his mind. Again, friends and family advised caution. In August of 1978, however, he made his bold move, and the first issue of his *Baltimore-Washington Wine Advocate* was sent out free of charge to mailing lists obtained from a number of wine

retailers. The initial batch of recipients numbered fewer than 600. One year later, the fledgling publication’s name was changed to *The Wine Advocate*.

Things progressed steadily, with Parker maintaining his “day job” as a lawyer. The year 1983 proved significant, however, when his controversial and glowing reviews of the 1982 Bordeaux vintage, tasted from barrels in the wineries, created a stir amongst many wine writers who felt the vintage was too ripe and the wines wouldn’t age. When Parker turned out to be correct about the greatness of the wines in question, his reputation and subscriber base soared. On March 9, 1984, after more than 10 years as an attorney, a senior attorney, and as an assistant general counsel for the Farm Credit Banks of Baltimore, he cast aside his law career to focus on *The Wine Advocate* and wine full-time.

Thirty years later, virtually every knowledgeable observer agrees that *The Wine Advocate* exerts the most significant influence on the serious



WITH CHEF, AUTHOR AND TELEVISION PERSONALITY JULIA CHILD IN 2001

wine consumer’s buying habits and trends not only in the US, but in France, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Russia, Mexico, Brazil, China and every other major wine market of the world. Through those decades, Parker has

stayed true to his ideal of delivering only meaningful, comprehensive, independent, accurate, critical commentaries and opinions on fine wines and fine-wine values, and *The Wine Advocate*’s high standards remain uncompromised to this day.

THE DAWNING OF THE WINE ADVOCATE – A TIMELINE

1947	Robert M. Parker, Jr. is born in Baltimore, Maryland	1973	Parker graduates from the University of Maryland Law School, joining a Baltimore law firm	1978	The first issue of his <i>Baltimore-Washington Wine Advocate</i> is published and sent out to fewer than 600 people	
1967	Parker visits his girlfriend in France, developing a fascination with wine that will dictate the course of his life		1979	The name of Parker’s publication is changed to <i>The Wine Advocate</i>	1984	Parker leaves his career in law to focus full-time on his love of wine

Through those decades, Parker has stayed true to his ideal of delivering only meaningful, comprehensive, independent, accurate, critical commentaries and opinions on fine wines and fine-wine values, and *The Wine Advocate*’s high standards remain uncompromised to this day

PARKER AND FRENCH WINEMAKER MICHEL CHAPOUTIER LOOK OUT OVER THE FAMOUS HERMITAGE VINEYARD IN THE RHÔNE VALLEY



As well as writing for his labor of love, Parker has been a contributing editor for *Food and Wine Magazine* and respected US publication *BusinessWeek*. He has written periodically for English magazine *The Field* and has been the wine critic for France's popular *L'Express* – the first time a non-Frenchman has held the position. He has also delivered a weekly column for *BusinessWeek*, as well as for *Forbes*.

Also along the way, Parker has been profiled in such magazines as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Atlantic Monthly*,

People, *Money*, *The Traveler*, *Changing Times*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, *BusinessWeek*, *Smart Money* and *The Robb Report*, in notable newspapers such as *The Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The London Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Financial Times*, *Le Journal de Dimanche*, and *L'Express*, and in virtually all of Europe's leading print titles, including *The Economist*, *Paris Match* and *Figaro*.

In 1999, he was profiled in a front-page article in the *Los Angeles Times* by Pulitzer Prize-winning media critic David Shaw. Parker has been profiled on the CBS network's *60 Minutes II* and appears on PBS's *Charlie Rose Show*. He has written 14 books on wine that have been best sellers not only in the US, but also in their translated versions in France, Japan, Germany, Sweden, Poland, China,

Spain, South Korea, and Russia.

What's more, Parker is the only wine writer and critic in history to be awarded the highest presidential honors by two French presidents and an Italian president. In 1993, President François Mitterrand of France made Parker a Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite. In 1999, he was decorated with the Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur by French President Jacques Chirac at a ceremony at the Elysée Palace. In bestowing the honor, the president said, "Robert Parker is the most followed and influential critic of French wines in the world, something I witnessed recently when choosing wine for [US] President Clinton, who automatically referred to Robert Parker as his reference for making a proper wine-buying decision."

In 2002, Parker was made a commander in Italy's National Order of Merit. The country's highest honor

was bestowed by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi for Parker's contributions in recognizing the quality of Italian wine and for his educational efforts in *The Wine Advocate*. He was the first wine writer or critic in history to receive Italy's highest honor.

In 2005, Chirac promoted Parker to an officer in France's Legion of Honor, an extremely rare distinction recognizing the extraordinary contribution he has made to the quality of wine writing and the education of consumers around the world about French wines.

The years, in fact, have been filled with many other such challenges met and honors bestowed. In 2002, for example, Parker founded eRobertParker.com, which has become the most visited website on wine according to Alexa.com, a California-based subsidiary of Amazon.com that provides commercial web-traffic data. In 2004, the Culinary Institute of America created a legacy endowment for wine-education scholarships in Parker's name.

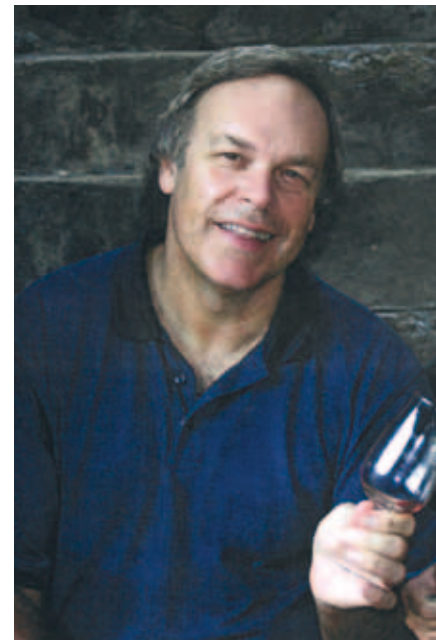
In 2005, Simon & Schuster published Parker's *The World's Greatest Wine Estates: A Modern Perspective*. That book was followed in 2008 by the 7th edition of *Parker's Wine Buyer's Guide*, and in 2009 by *Parker's Wine Bargains: The World's Best Wines Valued Under \$25.00*. In 2006, Parker's alma mater, the University of Maryland, bestowed upon him the Distinguished Alumnus Award for that year. In 2010, he became one of 63 graduates to be inducted into the university's Alumnae Hall of Fame.

In 2011, Parker became the first wine writer and critic to receive the Gran Cruz de la Orden del Mérito Civil, Spain's highest civilian honor, which was awarded by His Majesty King Juan

Carlos at a ceremony and reception in Madrid. In February 2013, Parker became the first wine critic inducted into the Culinary Institute Of America's Vintners Hall of Fame in Napa Valley.

And despite such heady plaudits and wide acceptance by the wine establishment, Parker has continually stated – in *The Wine Advocate* and in his books – that his professional advice meets the highest ethical standards. By insisting upon such standards, he seeks to guarantee that his valuations are pro-consumer and not pro-industry, making him truly independent.

Today, active as ever in the pursuit of truth in wine, Parker lives in the countryside of northern Maryland with his wife, his daughter, Maia, and his English bulldogs.



THE WINE ADVOCATE'S FOUNDER RELAXES WITH A GLASS IN CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE; SEPTEMBER, 2004

RAVE REVIEWS!

High praise from the world's most distinguished magazines and respected newspapers

TIME

"The man with the paragon palate... For countless wine lovers, Robert Parker's tastes are infallible"

Newsweek

"Parker has revolutionized American wine criticism, and... has brought the stringent standards of a fanatic, the high moral purpose of a reformer"

Forbes

"*The Wine Advocate* is the best for guiding the consumer through the labyrinth of Burgundy and Bordeaux"

Decanter

"His influence is unparalleled in the history of wine journalism"

Los Angeles Times

"Parker is the most influential wine writer in the world today"

WALL STREET JOURNAL

"Widely regarded as the world's most powerful wine critic"



BEING DECORATED CHEVALIER DANS L'ORDRE DE LA LÉGION D'HONNEUR BY FRENCH PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC AT A GLITTERING CEREMONY AT THE ELYSÉE PALACE IN 1999

A GLASS ACT

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE BEST WINE GLASS IN THE WORLD IS THE FILLED ONE IN FRONT OF YOU, BUT THE CORRECT STEMWARE CAN ADD SUBSTANTIALLY TO THE ENJOYMENT OF FINE WINE. IT'S AS MUCH ABOUT SCIENCE AS ELEGANCE

DO THE STYLE AND SHAPE OF A glass affect the flavor of the wine within? The matter is controversial and debatable, and while no verdict has been conclusively demonstrated by rational study, most wine drinkers – from the pensive oenophile to the most casual of tipplers – agree that there's something oh-so special about having the right, sparkling and perfectly balanced tool for the job in hand.

Some argue that the issue is partly olfactory, and that glasses should be chosen that capture aromas favorably. This is especially true of red wines, and appropriate drinking vessels feature wider and rounder bowls for greater wine surface area and maximum aeration, boosting oxidation so that complex flavors are released and

smoothed. Essentially, as oxygen reacts with the wine its flavor is subtly altered, the liquid has the opportunity to realize its full bouquet and aromas are captured for the ideal multi-sensory experience.

That said, not all red wine glasses are equal, and the more full-bodied the wine, the larger the bowl should be. A Bordeaux glass, for instance, is tall with a broad bowl, and it was conceived for wines like Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. More delicate red wines such as Pinot Noir also benefit from a larger bowl, such as that of the special Burgundy glass, to accumulate muted aromas.

Though white wine glasses are generally smaller than those used for reds, they also vary considerably in size and configuration to stress the unique

characteristics of different wines. As with reds, wide-mouthed glasses are preferable for full-flavored wines that benefit from some oxidization. Oaked Chardonnay is just one example. Oxidation, however, is much less agreeable with lighter whites because it can conceal gentle nuances, and a smaller mouth will hamper oxidation to ensure a clean and crisp taste.

The streamlined and elegant glasses employed when sipping Champagne and sparkling wines boast distinctive shapes for an altogether different reason, and the fluted and tulip-shaped vessels, with their long stems and narrow bowls, are fashioned to reduce the beverage's surface area and retain carbonation. What's more, such tall and thin designs mean the gas stored within

has to journey further for maximum visual appeal. After all, what good would bubbly be without the bubbles? As with other wine glasses, the flute should be held by the stem to prevent heat transfer from the drinker's hand.

Fortified wines such as sherry, port and Madeira, meanwhile, are richer and more alcoholic than the above tipples, and therefore are best enjoyed from small glasses, perhaps featuring an aroma-enhancing inward taper.

And finally, when choosing wine glasses of the perfect size and shape for their roles, it's well worth also considering what they are made from. Though standard glass is perfectly acceptable, as well as pleasingly affordable and durable, the magical minerals contained in crystal result in a higher index of light refraction to provide that all-important sparkle and sophistication.

We'll raise a glass to that!



CALIFORNIA DREAMING

BEFORE MAKING PLANS FOR YOUR NEXT WINE-THEMED
VACATION, IT'S WELL WORTH A VISIT TO THE DVD STORE.

FINE WINE, AS GARY JONES DISCOVERS, SOMETIMES
TRAVELS EXCEPTIONALLY WELL

IT IS ADVISABLE, IN THE RUN-UP to any vacation, to gain a thorough understanding of your destination. That certainly holds true for sojourns to wine country. In these multimedia times, however, why should we limit ourselves to books in our research? Why not movies? Wine, after all, like far-flung, exotic locales, enjoys considerable time on the silver screen, and many cinematic heroes turn to a glass during moments of drama, high tension and comedy.

Sherlock Holmes' fancy for Château Margaux, 1858 vintage, was revealed in his 2009 incarnation, for instance, and Hannibal Lecter's thirst for "a nice Chianti" was made terrifyingly clear in *The Silence of the Lambs*. Maverick industrialist Tony Stark popped the cork on a bottle of Louis Jadot Mâcon-Villages in *Iron Man III*, while James Bond is never secretive about his fondness for the grape, variously partaking of Château Angélus (*Casino Royale*), Dom Pérignon (*Dr. No*, *Goldfinger* and *The Spy Who Loved Me*) Taittinger Blanc de Blancs, (*From Russia With Love*) and Bollinger (*GoldenEye*).

In more than a few movies, however, wine has served as far more than a prop, is crucial to the plot and actually plays a starring role. That's certainly true of Oscar-winning comedy-slash-drama *Sideways* (2004). And where better to explore the terrific trinity of wine, movies and travel than the home of the "dream factory" of Hollywood itself: laid-back California.

Hilarious *Sideways* follows two middle-aged men – failing writer, wine-aficionado and middle-school English teacher Miles (played by Paul Giamatti) and his soon-to-be married actor friend and college roommate, Jack Cole (Thomas Haden Church) – on a week-long road trip through the verdant hills and vineyards of Santa Ynez Valley wine country in Santa Barbara County.

While self-deprecating Miles views Jack's bachelor week as a chance for the two buddies to hang out together and relax, to enjoy great food, taste fantastic wines and play a few rounds of golf. His gregarious sidekick is determined to let loose and enjoy a last-minute romantic adventure or two before his trip down the aisle. Their



PREVIOUS PAGES: FALL IN THE GLORIOUS SANTA YNEZ VALLEY. FROM TOP: THE *SIDeways* MOVIE POSTER; CHARACTERS STEPHANIE, JACK, MILES AND MAYA GET ACQUAINTED

TRAVELING SIDEWAYS

Genuine working wineries in California's Santa Barbara County – all open for visits and tasting – played starring roles in *Sideways*, as did the characters' wining and dining hangouts

Kalyra Winery

Owned by Australian winemaker Mike Brown, this small Santa Ynez winery is named after the Aboriginal word for "a wild and pleasant place." In *Sideways* it is where Jack meets free-spirited pourer Stephanie, with whom he soon becomes romantically acquainted. The Kalyra wine portfolio is adventurous and varied. The winery's white list includes Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Semillon/Verdelho, Pinot Bianco and Scheurebe. The extensive red portfolio covers Nebbiolo, Sangiovese Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and more. www.kalyrawinery.com

Fess Parker Winery

Dubbed Frass Canyon in the film (and not exactly portrayed in a positive light), Fess Parker Winery is the location where, on learning that his novel has been rejected, and having a pourer refuse to serve him a full glass as solace, Miles guzzles greedily from the communal spit bucket. In reality, Fess Parker has a solid reputation for Pinot Noir and Syrah. *The Wine Advocate* gave its 2010 red blend The Big Easy 91 points, elaborating, "With loads of upfront appeal, the 2010 The Big Easy dishes out plenty of chocolaty dark fruits, leather, ground pepper and asphalt aromas to go with a full-bodied, voluptuously textured palate." www.fessparker.com

Firestone Winery

Named after the family of the legendary tire innovator Harvey Firestone, which

once owned the property, Firestone Winery in the Santa Ynez Valley is where Jack and Stephanie duck out of a boring winemaking lecture to get friendlier in the barrel room, and where the four newfound friends stop off for an idyllic picnic amongst the vines. The winery is perhaps best known for its palatable Chardonnay. www.firestonewine.com

Foxen Winery

Foxen Winery is where Jack and Miles sneakily help themselves when the pourer goes to help another customer. This boutique winery is located on land once owned by William Foxen, an English sea captain who purchased most of what is now Foxen Canyon (about 9,000 acres) in the late 1800s. Co-owner Dick Dore is the great-great-grandson of Foxen, and since 1985 has been making solid Pinot Noirs. www.foxenvineyard.com

Solvang Restaurant

A favorite breakfast spot in the area (and where Miles and Jack take coffee while having yet another squabble about how to spend their vacation), Solvang Restaurant is adored for its traditional and delicious Danish pancakes called aebleskiver, which are served topped with powdered sugar and raspberry jam. www.solvangrestaurant.com

Los Olivos Wine Merchant & Café

Miles, Jack, Maya and Stephanie enjoy dinner and several exquisite bottles of wine at award-winning Los Olivos Wine Merchant & Café, forming new friendships before things go terribly wrong. The Wine Merchant carries more than 500 wines and offers the best from the many terroirs of central California's coast. www.losolivoscafe.com

Hitching Post II

Jack and Miles spend several evenings at the Hitching Post in Buellton, chatting with amiable bartender Gary and flirting with Maya. Along with outstanding steaks, ribs and chicken, the Hitching Post II serves up smoked duck breast, ostrich, homemade soups, tasty pastries and more. In *Sideways*, Miles and Jack develop a taste for the Highliner – the restaurant's own brand of Pinot Noir from its Hartley Ostini Hitching Post Winery. www.hitchingpost2.com



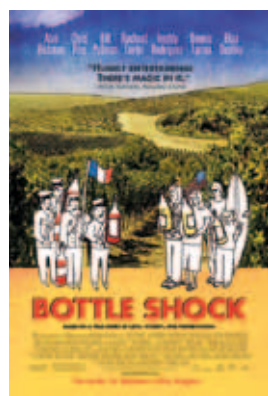
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: AN ALLURING VINEYARD; THE DANISH TOWN OF SOLVANG; A SANTA BARBARA WINERY'S RESERVE ROOM

relationship quickly deteriorates and Jack's off-the-leash behavior threatens to shatter their friendship forever.

Directed by Alexander Payne (*Election*, *About Schmidt*) and adapted from Rex Pickett's novel of the same name, *Sideways* features too many side-splitting moments to count (early on their trip, Miles attempts to educate Jack on the finer points of wine tasting, ostentatiously describing a glass of Pinot Gris at one small Santa Ynez winery as boasting a "soupcon of asparagus and just a flutter of nutty Edam cheese"). Plus, though something of a slow burner at the box office, *Sideways'* gradual acceptance as a cult movie had a profound effect on wine-buying habits across the United States. Miles's vocal love of Pinot Noir and growling antipathy for Merlot (at one point he passionately declares, "If anybody orders Merlot, I'm leaving") led to dramatic increases in sales of the former to the detriment of the latter. The "*Sideways* effect" is still being felt to this day.

Also impressively, *Sideways* made a star out of Santa Barbara wine country, and travelers to California who would previously have plumped for the Napa and Sonoma valleys now had another option. Even today, a decade after the two oddball pals leaped into Miles's bashed-up convertible Saab, the Visit Santa Barbara tourism bureau provides a free tour brochure and map that highlights 18 locations from the movie so that visitors can follow in Miles and Jack's bumbling footsteps.

Boutique wineries and fine-dining restaurants are included, of course: Australian-owned Kalyra Winery is where Jack falls for livewire "wine-



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: POSTER FOR *THIS EARTH IS MINE*; *CORKED*; CALIFORNIA'S WINE COUNTRY REGULARLY PLAYS A STARRING ROLE AT THE CINEMA; *BOTTLE SHOCK*

In more than a few movies wine has served as far more than a prop, is crucial to the plot and actually plays a starring role

pour chick" Stephanie (Sandra Oh), and the Hitching Post II is where waitress Maya (Virginia Madsen) slowly gains shy Miles's affections. When Jack escapes from one complicated romantic liaison, he flees naked through an ostrich farm. The real OstrichLand USA sanctuary, located outside the

quaint and Danish-styled Californian community of Solvang (which even has its own windmill), is home to more than 50 of the feathered critters. When Miles and Jack get into a tussle with a group of fellow golfers, they do so on the world-class River Course of the picturesque Alisal Guest Ranch Resort.



California, possibly more than any other vacation destination, has starred in its fair share of exceptional wine movies. In the 1959 classic *This Earth is Mine*, English woman Elizabeth (played by Jean Simmons) comes to live with her wealthy winemaking aunt and uncle in the state during the 1930s. Her relatives attempt to marry Elizabeth off to another wine dynasty to consolidate their command over the industry. *A Walk in the Clouds* (1995) stars Keanu Reeves as a soldier returning from war to fall for the beautiful daughter of a California winemaking family.

Corked (2009) is a comical mockumentary that follows four contrasting characters as they compete to win the fictional Golden Cluster trophy. The flick explores the lengths they will go to be judged "best in show." In *Bottle Shock* (also 2009), Alan Rickman (Severus Snape in the *Harry Potter* movie series) plays real-life English wine merchant Steven Spurrier who, in 1976, took the best Napa Valley wines to Paris for a blind taste test against French tipples. One reviewer noted that, though *Bottle Shock* might not be absolutely accurate, it contains "some of the best fly-over shots of Napa Valley you'll ever see. Your heart will skip like a little kid, especially if you're drinking buttery Chardonnay."

But, for this writer at least, *Sideways* wins hands-down in the wine-movie Oscars. Its bittersweet humor, gentle pacing and flawed but lovable characters make it a must-see before that next grape-themed vacation. So slide in that DVD, crack open a bottle of Miles's favored Pinot Noir, kick back on the sofa and dream of California. It's the way forward.

GRAPE ESCAPES

An inspiring wine movie can provide ideas for your next overseas vacation. Here are just three celluloid corks to get you in motion



FRANCE A Good Year (2006)

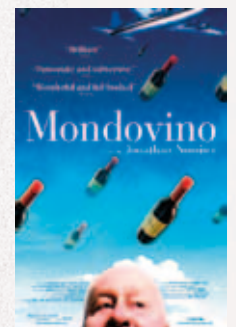
In this heartwarming romantic comedy, Russell Crowe plays unethical British investment broker Max Skinner, who inherits a chateau and vineyard in postcard-perfect Provence. Gradually, while the hardheaded businessman attempts to renovate the property for a quick sale, he succumbs to the slower pace and romantic routines of French country life.

Helmed by famed director Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner*, *Gladiator*), who for 15 years owned a property in Provence, *A Good Year's* French scenes were mostly shot in locations the filmmaker described as "eight minutes from my house." The restored hamlet of Le Domaine de la Coquillade (pictured above), which nestles nearby, provides vacation lodging in six sumptuously furnished residences, the oldest dating back to the 11th century and all located in the center of the 30-hectare Aureto Vineyard. www.coquillade.fr

THE WORLD Mondovino (2004)

With its title meaning "world of wine" in Italian, American filmmaker and trained sommelier Jonathan Nossiter's epic *Mondovino* explores globalization's impact on traditional winemaking regions characterized by their terroir. Can small, single-estate wineries, this thought-provoking documentary asks over more than two hours, survive in a rapidly changing world?

Shot on three continents and in five languages over a three-year period, *Mondovino* whisks the armchair wine traveler to numerous locales they might like to visit – and soon, perhaps, before generations-old and artisanal winemaking ways of those areas disappear forever.



ITALY The Secret of Santa Vittoria (1969)

Based on the best-selling novel of the same name, *The Secret of Santa Vittoria* tells how, during World War II, a small Italian town's mayor (played by Anthony Quinn) discovers that German forces want to commandeer its substantial stores of wine. The desperate townspeople hide a million bottles in a cave before the occupying army's arrival, offering up only a few thousand bottles, but the wily

German commander knows there must be a lot more. A dramatic battle of wits ensues.

The Secret of Santa Vittoria was shot in the picturesque villages of Anticoli Corrado, just a short drive east of Rome. The real Santa Vittoria winery, which was founded 300 years ago and still produces wines today, is actually located a few hundred miles north, in the small agricultural town of Foiano della Chiana in beautiful eastern Tuscany (pictured).

The estate boasts 35 hectares of vineyards and its vacation accommodation takes the form of five tastefully furnished apartments in a restored 18th-century farmhouse surrounded by vines, olive trees, and wheat and sunflower fields in the rolling hills of the unspoiled Chiana Valley. www.fattoriasantavittoria.net

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STATE OF THE ARTISAN

ICONIC ITALIAN WINEMAKER ANGELO GAJA TELLS
LISA PERROTTI-BROWN HOW DEVOTION TO FAMILY,
PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE AND NO FEAR OF PERSONAL
SACRIFICE HAVE MADE HIS GAJA WINERY ONE OF THE
MOST RESPECTED IN THE WORLD

GLOBALLY RENOWNED FOR bringing the northern Italian wine-producing region of Barbaresco into the international spotlight, Angelo Gaja is fondly recalling how his French grandmother introduced him to the concept of being an artisan when he was an 11-year-old boy. “She introduced quality and dedication to our family,” Gaja says. “My grandmother told me in French that the first step to being an artisan is *faire* [the French verb for ‘to make’ or ‘to do’]. And the second step is *savoir faire* – to know exactly what to do; to be dedicated to a goal. But it is not enough in life to become an artisan. The third step is *savoir faire faire* – to teach the family. And the fourth is *faire savoir* – to transfer all of this into the market.”

Passing through Singapore on a recent tour of Asia that also took him to Japan, mainland China and Hong Kong, the man widely known as “the King of Barbaresco” clearly feels the success of his Gaja Winery, which is located in the Piemonte region in the Italian district of Langhe, owes much to the wise words of his forebear, as well as to the ongoing endeavors of his kin. “When my grandmother told me this, I didn’t understand at all,” the 73-year-old continues. “I had to know for myself. To explain to consumers that the tannins may be hard when you drink this wine alone, but when you match it with food it is fantastic.

“Elegance. What does it mean? That the wine is not dominating the palate, it finishes clean and gives you the ability to taste and retaste. When my father told me again about being an artisan when I was older, then I understood.”

So tightly are winemaking and family intertwined at Gaja, in fact, that it’s impossible for the patriarch to discuss his creations without mentioning blood ties. And with good reason – the Gaja empire extends

back to Angelo’s great-grandfather, Giovanni Gaja, who established the winery in 1859. Since then, five generations have been the cornerstone of this great label and responsible for its development into the major global player it is today. Gaia Gaja, Angelo’s eldest daughter, joined the family business in 2005 and now covers export for Asia. Lucia, his wife of more than 40 years, runs the office, while second daughter Rossana covers Italy and his 20-year-old son, also called Giovanni, is currently studying in Milan.

In the history of Gaja’s development and continual improvement from generation to generation, Angelo, who formally took over the family winery in 1961 when he was aged just 21, is perhaps most famous for going against the wishes of his father (yet another Giovanni in the flourishing Gaja family tree) in the 1970s. Formally trained as a winemaker in Alba and Montpellier, well-travelled and eager to make his mark on the family business, Angelo introduced ground-breaking innovations to the winery and the region, such as replacing Nebbiolo vines with Cabernet

THE PATCHWORK LANDSCAPE
OF NORTHERN ITALY’S
LANGHE DISTRICT





THE COMMUNE OF BARBARESCO

Sauvignon at a prime location in Barbaresco, and the use of new oak French *barriques*.

"It was my father who told me our goal is to produce wines of character, personality and style," Gaja says. "We try to make a wine that is unique. Character is derived by the grape variety, and that belongs to everybody. Personality comes from the producer,

the winemaker. This is something that can be recognized. Style is the way the wine is communicated in the market. Gaja has a simple, classic, modern label. We have no website. This seems to be a bit crazy today. I prefer not having this auto-celebrity thing. The critics and the consumers decide what we are. Style is the way of giving these messages to the market."

In 1996, Angelo again created a stir by opting out of the Barbaresco and Barolo regions' DOCG quality control system, thereby necessitating removal of the regions' names from his labels. "The artisan needs freedom," Gaja says firmly. "DOCG was introduced in 1981 because before this the wines were never pure Nebbiolo. Before there was always some percentage of other

"I have two duties to my family: to set examples as good as possible in life, in work, in everything, without forcing them to do the same as me. And to teach my children to protect and cultivate passion"

Angelo Gaja

varieties. So my dream has been to go back to the old ways. Gaja wines have not been declassified."

Gaja adds that when he made his move, changing the status from DOCG Barbaresco and Barolo to DOC Langhe for his top single-vineyard Barbaresco and Barolo labels, it gave him the freedom to blend Nebbiolo with other grape varieties. "People speculated I would introduce grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot to Barbaresco and Barolo," he says. "I did not want to do this but just wanted to have the freedom to use a small percentage of other indigenous varieties. We use only Barbera. Just a small percentage. The curiosity of our consumers is in discovering these wines."

And five decades at the forefront of winemaking excellence have left Gaja with very passionate views on what it means to be a genuine artisan. "It is taking control of the vineyards," he exclaims. "It is to be available to make sacrifices. To be able not to bottle bad vintages. To not bottle lesser wines under second or third labels. We must sell grapes of lesser quality or sell these wines in bulk, but not to put these wines under the Gaja label.

1980, 1992 and 2002 were all vintages not bottled at Gaja.

"Restaurants may say, 'How can you not supply a vintage? Why don't you buy some wine to sell?' We can't. And I cannot say these were low quality vintages. I have to say specifically what went wrong. The other quality of being an artisan is to stay within a certain production size and not get too big. We don't want to increase the size of the winery. We have stayed the same size for 25 years. And finally, as artisans we must remain a family business. To be an artisan is to pass from one generation to the other."

As Gaja stands to wrap up our conversation (he has to prepare for a tasting he is to present), he seems reticent to let the topic drop. "Family is there for future generations," he adds. "I am 73 years old and I know that I have to step back and give way to my children. I have two duties to my family: to set examples as good as possible in life, in work, in everything, without forcing them to do the same as me. And to teach my children to protect and cultivate passion. This is the most important element for artisans. Through passion the artisan becomes stronger. Passion is like windscreen wipers. It doesn't stop the rain from falling, but it allows you to drive on. Much of your business depends on luck and you need passion to get you through difficult times."

Though he may not be the wealthiest man in the wine world, it is tempting to believe that, with his devotion to his family and his wide-ranging achievements, outspoken Angelo Gaja may be among the richest, and with typical Italian warmth he bids farewell, posing and answering one of life's most elusive questions as a parting gift. "Does happiness have a secret?" he asks with a youthful glint in his eye. "I think maybe it is to continue to desire what we already have."



THE GAJA FAMILY (FROM BACK): ANGELO, GAIA, LUCIA, ROSSANA AND GIOVANNI

GAJA WINES ARE IMPORTED BY:

Hong Kong: Altaya Wines; www.altayawines.com

China: ASC Fine Wines; www.asc-wines.com

Japan: Enoteca Wines; www.enoteca.co.jp

Singapore: Pinnacle Wine & Spirits; www.pinnaclewinespirits.com

United States: Terlato Wines; www.terlatowines.com

United Kingdom: Berry Brothers & Rudd; www.bbr.com

TOP OF THE BARRELS

THE EMPLOYMENT OF OAK IN WINE STORAGE AND AGEING HAS A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE RESULT. **ROBIN LYNAM** INVESTIGATES THE EXTREME IMPORTANCE OF THE UNASSUMING BARREL

IT'S A SIMPLE FACT OF LIFE THAT good wine cannot be made without good grapes. It's also true of many fine wines that they cannot be created without fine oak, and the role played by the barrel maker, or cooper, in establishing the style of the world's best wines is significant to the oenologist, affecting color, flavor, tannin profile and texture.

"Winemakers know the coopers that they like, and they all have different styles," says Amanda Parker, director of Hong Kong-based independent wine consultancy IntoVino Ltd. "The variables include where the oak is from, how old it is, how long it is aged for, how they season it, and the 'toasting' [exposure to fire during the barrel-making process]. There are important differences, even within a species, and coopers understand the trees and the planks of wood well enough to sense those differences. Producers use a range of coopers, and that adds to the complexity of blending."

Wooden barrels have been employed for the transport and storage of goods since ancient times, and probably began to be used for wine in about the third century AD. At

some point, it was noticed that the barrels had an effect on the wine's development and, gradually over time, producers learned to use their barrels as tools. Cooperage today is an advanced skill, but many of its fundamentals have scarcely changed since the Middle Ages.

The cooper's craft consists in selecting good wood, splitting it into staves, drying them over a period of 10 to 36 months (the process is called "seasoning"), heating them over fire to make them pliable, binding them with metal hoops, and sealing each end of the vessel with a barrel head also made



PETER STUART

white wines in which evidence of oak ageing was preposterously prominent led to the emergence of "Unoaked Chardonnay" as a new wine category. What the producers of such wines tend not to stress is that leaving oak out of

New French oak barrels cost, on average, around US\$1,000 a piece – about double the price for barrels made of oak from the United States or Eastern Europe

from oak. It's harder than it sounds.

Not all wines are matured in wood before bottling, however, and for some New World white wines the absence of a wood influence has actually become a positive selling point. During the 1980s and 1990s, in fact, the prevalence of many Australian

the wine-maturation process saves them large sums of money, particularly if French oak is the winemaker's preferred option. New French oak barrels cost, on average, around US\$1,000 a piece – about double the price for barrels made of oak from the United States or Eastern Europe. The



PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

investment is not a one-off, however, and the barrels are generally used more than once, but with use even French oak loses its ability to impart character.

Partly for cost reasons, Parker points out, few winemakers will mature a vintage exclusively in new oak. “The better the quality of the vintage, the more new oak you would use,” she says. “The wine needs the structure and ability to absorb the character of the oak. If you are using 100 per cent new oak, it’s a big cost. Most people use a combination of new oak and second-fill barrels which are still able to impart wood character.”

So what are the options open to winemakers who are choosy about the origin of their barrel staves? Historically, acacia, chestnut and various fruitwoods have also been tried, but with less satisfactory results than oak. The forests that supply the world’s wineries are mostly in France, North America and Eastern Europe, and only certain varieties of the tree are deemed suitable for interaction with wine.

In botanical language, these are *quercus robur*, also called common oak, and *quercus petraea*, or the white oak or sessile oak, both of which grow in France, most notably in the forests of Allier, Limousin, Nevers, Tronçais and Vosges. *Quercus petraea* is the more widely used of the two, and wood from the aforementioned forests commands the highest prices. *Quercus robur* is also found in Eastern Europe, and that source has the advantage of being significantly cheaper than France. North American *quercus alba* is also less expensive.

For premium wines, however, the usual first choice is French oak because of its tighter grain and subtler effect on taste and aroma, but other varieties also inspire winemaker loyalty, points out Peter Stuart, founder and



“For premium wines the usual first choice is French oak because of its tighter grain and subtler effect on taste and aroma, but other varieties also inspire winemaker loyalty”

PHOTO GETTY IMAGES

managing director of South-Africa based company Carteirra, which works with winemakers in its home country, as well as in France and California, to produce wines to private customer specifications. Clients are advised by the winemakers but choose both the grape variety from which their wine is made, and the type of barrel used for maturation themselves. “Carteirra’s South African winemaker, Niels Verburg, is a strong advocate of Eastern European oak, which imparts subtle, nutty flavors into the Shiraz wines of Walker Bay,” says Stuart. “American oak imparts significant flavor into a wine and is known to contribute flavors such as dill, coconut and vanilla.”

Though US winemakers tend to prefer French oak, Parker points out that American wood is popular in Spain. “Vanillin as a chemical compound is more prevalent in American oak,” she says. “With some traditional Riojas you can really taste the vanilla character, and the sweeter character, of the American oak versus the more restrained character of French oak in French wine.”

So how exactly does the oak influence the wine? “Wine is stored in oak barrels primarily to naturally

age the wine and allow the slow and controlled ‘softening’ and integration of flavors,” says Stuart. “However, barrel oak also adds both aroma and flavor compounds to wine during this maturation process. Fundamentally, oak lactones have coconut flavors and aromas, and the toasting of barrels by either burning with fire or using heat radiation contributes the smoky or charred flavors and aromas of a wine.”

Individual coopers use different degrees of toasting on their barrels, and some coopers offer custom toasting to order. Sometimes wines matured in one type of oak are blended with wines matured in a different type. Another option is hybrid barrels, with different oaks used for the heads and staves respectively. Hybrid barrels and customized toasting are among options offered by US-based World Cooperage, which has been in business since 1912 and in recent years has pioneered computer-aided “barrel profiling” to produce barrels with definable flavor profiles. While small family cooperages still exist, multinational companies such as the Oeneo Group, which owns two large French cooperages, Radoux and Seguin Moreau, now dominate the business. The latter is the largest

producer of French-oak wine barrels.

Used French oak and new oak from Eastern Europe have less influence on flavor and aroma than new French oak, but still make an important contribution. “The other influence is introducing oxygen into the wine,” says Parker. “If you’re using old barrels, or Hungarian oak or Slovenian oak, which has a much more neutral character, you are really using it just as a vessel to provide oxygen. In [French region] Alsace the barrels are very large and they are hundreds of years old. They’ve allowed a layer of tartrate crystal lining to form as the wine has rested, so you don’t get any influence of the oak, but you get the benefit of the oxygenation.”

Barrel size, Parker adds, is another factor in determining oak influence. “Generally, the bigger the barrel the less contact you have with the wine,” she says. “The smaller the barrel the more contact, so there is more influence with a small barrel.”

Wine barrels are available in many sizes, but typically contain 225 liters – the standard in Bordeaux, where they are called *barriques*. In Burgundy, a wine barrel is called a *pièce* and holds 228 liters. Winemakers, it should be noted, in both Burgundy and Bordeaux embrace the influence of oak on their wines. In Italy, by contrast, the Slovenian-oak *bottes* used to mature Barolo wines are neutral in character and can contain anything from 500 to 15,000 liters or more.

However oak is used, it plays an important role in the development of most of the great red wines of the world, and many of the whites. If they were not matured in those carefully crafted expensive barrels they would be very different products. “Oak really is about style,” says Parker. “From a consumer point of view, it’s about style preferences.”



AMANDA PARKER

CHEATING WITH OAK

Given the high cost of oak barrels, it is hardly surprising that winemakers have explored other means to achieve the same effect in cheaper receptacles. Among these is the use of oak chips, shavings, cubes or essence. These can be used either to add extra “oakiness” to a wine being matured in a used French-oak barrel, or in a new American or Eastern European barrel, or to impart some oakiness to wine that is not being exposed to wood at all.

French-oak chips are often added during fermentation, but the oakiness they impart is often unbalanced, although it can be corrected to some extent by blending with unoaked wine. Wines made with oak chips generally have less bottle ageing potential than those that have matured in oak casks, but there are no legal restrictions to prevent the practice.

“To me, the difference as a taster is that oak needs to be one of many elements that you taste,” says Amanda Parker, director of Hong Kong-based independent wine consultancy IntoVino Ltd. “If a wine has been made with something like an oak essence, it’s as if you have a layer of oak, and then a layer of fruit. It’s not integrated, and that’s the key to using oak in wine: getting integration.”



OAK CHIPS



DAVID COX

WHISKY AFTER WINE

One way in which wineries can recoup some of the cost of expensive oak barrels is by selling them on after the wood character useful for wine has been leached out of them.

When wine takes from the wood, it gives some of its own flavor back, and distillers of single malt Scotch whisky like to age or mature the spirit in casks that have contained wine. Sherry casks, for instance, have been used by the industry for decades, and The Macallan Distillery in particular is noted for its “sherry wood” character.

In recent years, however, many distillers have adopted the practice of “cask finishing” – taking mature whisky and giving it an additional period of maturation in casks that have previously contained wine. Port and Madeira finishes were among the first to become popular, but experiments in using barrels that have previously contained Bordeaux, Burgundy and Sauternes have also proven successful.

In some respects it could be said that these hard-working casks really come into their own when maturing spirit rather than wine. While its influence on wine is supposed to be gentle, cask conditioning is the decisive factor in determining the flavors and aromas of Scotch whisky.

Some years ago, the Edrington Group, which owns The Macallan, conducted research into the effect of wood on whisky, according to David Cox, Edrington’s director of fine and rare whiskies. “The research indicated,” Cox says, “that some 60 per cent of the final character of The Macallan came from the flavor compounds within the oak wood soaking into the maturing spirit over the long years of maturation.”

WORKING WONDERS

WHAT MAKES *THE WINE ADVOCATE* SO HIGHLY REGARDED AMONGST THE HUNDREDS, IF NOT THOUSANDS, OF OTHER WINE PUBLICATIONS AND WEBSITES? PUT SIMPLY, IT DOES ITS JOB, AND DOES IT WELL

IN 2014, *THE WINE ADVOCATE* IS essential reading for wine professionals, wine aficionados and those who simply enjoy the occasional quality drop. The publication's detailed consumer advice, unbiased reports and tasting notes – all produced by genuine experts in the field – have seen its reputation soar for practical and trustworthy opinions on the world's finest wines. Today, *The Wine Advocate* boasts an incredible 50,000 paying subscribers worldwide.

Consistency, no doubt, has played a major role in *The Wine Advocate's* success. Since its formative days in

the late 1970s, the publication has landed every two months to contain regionally focused reports that mainly offer wine reviews of new releases, but also produce important vintage retrospectives and occasionally single label verticals and producer profiles. Occasional "Wine Value" reports focus on a more general range of great value wines, usually priced under US\$25.

The number of wine reviews published six times a year varies, ranging from 2,000 to more than 4,500 depending on the issue. The goal is to include, over the course of a year, the

entire world of major wine regions, with smaller regions reviewed every two to three years.

Essentially, *The Wine Advocate* works, and its hard-earned reputation for utility can be chalked up to five core attributes: Its logical and readable **FORMAT**; its impartial and meticulous **REVIEWS**; its detailed **RATING SYSTEM**, which has become the industry standard; its substantial **INTERNET PRESENCE** and embrace of innovative app technology; and, perhaps most importantly of all, its rigorous **CODE OF ETHICS**.

SIMPLICITY
OF USAGE
THE FORMAT



THE WINE ADVOCATE’S REPORTS usually include an introductory article followed by the wine reviews. The introductory article offers an in-depth view on the recent vintages or vintage that is being reviewed. This take is not copied from regional or producer-created marketing collateral, and the vintage reports are reviewers’ expert opinions based predominately on their tastings and taking into consideration their regional visits and interviews with winemakers and grape growers.

Such an introductory article may also contain information about current trends within the region, the recent happenings at key producers, and the pricing and current state of the market for those regions’ wines.

CRUNCHING
THE NUMBERS
THE RATING SYSTEM

The Wine Advocate’s founder, Robert M. Parker, Jr., created a new rating system with the first issue. It remains unchanged to this day. Almost every wine review produced by The Wine Advocate, therefore, carries a rating – otherwise known as a score or Parker Points®. The rating is, in essence, the reviewer’s quantitative commentary on the relative quality of the wine at the time of tasting.

The system employs a 50-100 point scale because Parker believed – still believes – that 20-point rating approaches could not provide enough flexibility, resulting in compressed and inflated wine ratings. Since its inception, Parker’s 100-point scale has become the industry standard.

The Wine Advocate claims to be resolutely critical in its approach, preferring to underestimate a wine’s quality rather than to overestimate it. The numerical ratings are utilized to complement the tasting notes, which are the primary means of communicating judgment.

- 96-100:** Denotes an “extraordinary” wine of profound and complex character displaying all the attributes expected of a classic wine of its variety. Wines of this caliber are worth a special effort to find, purchase, and consume.
- 90 - 95:** An “outstanding” wine of exceptional complexity and character. In short, these are terrific wines.
- 80 - 89:** A “barely above average to very good” wine displaying various degrees of finesse and flavor, as well as character, with no noticeable flaws.
- 70 - 79:** An “average” wine with little

distinction except that it is a soundly made. In essence, a straightforward, innocuous wine.

60 - 69: A “below average” wine containing noticeable deficiencies, such as excessive acidity and/or tannin, an absence of flavor, or possibly dirty aromas or flavors.

50 - 59: A wine deemed to be “unacceptable.”

It must be noted that the numeric rating given is a guide to how the reviewer considers the wine to rate vis-à-vis its peer group (style, region or grape variety, perhaps). The score reflects the quality of the wine at its best. Wines from obviously corked or defective bottles are disregarded and tasted again from a fresh bottle whenever possible. Many of the wines reviewed have been tasted multiple times, in which case the score represents a cumulative average of the wine’s performance in tastings to date.

Most importantly, The Wine Advocate stresses that the written commentary (the tasting note) is a better source of information regarding the wine’s style and personality, its relative quality, and its value and aging potential than any score could indicate.

Further, and adding even more detail to The Wine Advocate’s Rating System, a score in parentheses indicates that the wine was tasted from barrel and is presented as an estimated score range – (90-93), for example. A plus (+) sign may also follow a score, indicating a wine that the reviewer believes has potential to improve over a period of time in bottle, and may warrant a higher score in a future tasting.

HEART OF
THE MATTER
THE REVIEWS

Every The Wine Advocate review includes a tasting note that describes the style, character and personality, and quality of the wine, as well as a rating and a recommended drinking window. If available, the review will also list the suggested retail price of the wine as reported by the wineries and importers. It will also name the importers. Reviews will often also include a comment on whether or not the wine offers good value in the context of the market.

In short, The Wine Advocate reviews aim to convey all the relevant information readers require in order to make informed purchasing decisions.



PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

EXTENSIVE
ACCESS
THE INTERNET

In 2002, The Wine Advocate launched the exhaustive eRobertParker.com website, offering readers even greater access to detailed wine reviews and more at a touch of a button. The website archives issues of The Wine Advocate dating back to 1992, but perhaps even more valuable is the website’s database of more than 240,000 (and growing) tasting notes that are available to search across a wide number of criteria. The database is updated monthly with fresh additions from The Wine Advocate’s team of reviewers.

Building on that cutting-edge success, in 2012 the Robert Parker Mobile App was launched for Apple, Android and Windows platforms, providing subscribers with easy access to the entire eRobertParker.com database of tasting notes – anytime, anywhere.

Other popular features of the website include an interactive bulletin board whereby subscribers can connect directly with Parker and other reviewers. A comprehensive Vintage Chart rates vintages for every major region of the wine world, with many regions offering critical scores going all the way back to 1970. The website is also updated daily with entertaining lifestyle features (including the Hedonist’s Gazette of food and wine articles), videos and more.

TRUSTED
FORMULA
CODE OF ETHICS

Parker has unambiguously stated that he believes that the role of the critic is to render judgments that are reliable. They should be based on extensive experience and on a trained sensibility for whatever is being reviewed. In practical terms, this means critics should be, above and beyond all else, independent.

To this end, The Wine Advocate covers all travel, accommodation and sustenance costs associated with reviewing wines for its reports. Reviewers are not permitted to accept any gifts or gifts in kind from wineries or any person associated with the sale, distribution or promotion of wines. Furthermore, The Wine Advocate and the website eRobertParker.com are purely subscriber funded and supported, with no reliance on advertising revenues.

Ultimately, The Wine Advocate’s target audience is the wine consumer, not the wine trade. While this philosophy has, on occasion, been misinterpreted by some in the industry as aloofness, such independence ensures the publication delivers hard-hitting, candid and uninfluenced commentary when and where it matters most.



TEAM PLAYERS

WHO ARE BEHIND THE MOST INCISIVE AND USEFUL REVIEWS IN
THE WORLD OF WINE? INTRODUCING *THE WINE ADVOCATE*'S
INFORMED AND PASSIONATE REVIEWERS



LISA PERROTTI-BROWN
Editor in Chief

Reviews the wines of Australia and New Zealand

For many years, the only reviewer for *The Wine Advocate* was Robert M. Parker, Jr., the publication's founder. He remains to this day *The Wine Advocate*'s go-to authority for the red and dry white wines of Bordeaux, as well as the wines of northern California, including the Napa Valley and Sonoma. Parker also acts as a critic-at-large, conducting vertical tastings and horizontal tastings of older vintages of Bordeaux, California and elsewhere, and reports on wines he deems of exceptional value from across the globe.

The wine world, however, has grown massively in scope and significance over recent decades, and consequently *The Wine Advocate* has expanded to employ the expertise of seven more fulltime reviewers who cover every major region globally. Collectively, the team delivers more than 20,000 new wine reviews a year.

Born and raised in rural Maine in the United States, Lisa Perrotti-Brown's wine career began when, living as a struggling playwright in London, she stumbled into a job as manager of a wine bar more than 20 years ago. She went on to pursue wine studies at London's Wine and Spirit Education Trust and work in wine sales and marketing before relocating to Tokyo in 2002, working as a buyer for one of Japan's top fine wine importers and as a wine educator at Tokyo's Academie du Vin.

Perrotti-Brown moved to Singapore in 2008, working as contributing wine editor for *Cuisine & Wine Asia* magazine and as a wine educator for the Sofitel Hotel Group (Southeast Asia), and began writing a column for Parker's website, eRobertParker.com. Later that year, she achieved her Master of Wine qualification and the Madame Bollinger Medal for excellence in tasting, as well as the prestigious Tim Derouet Award. She joined the team in 2010 and was appointed editor in chief for *The Wine Advocate* and eRobertParker.com in 2012.

Perrotti-Brown lives in Singapore with her British husband Richard, their daughter Mia, their "mad" Border collie and an adopted street dog.



JEB DUNNUCK *Reviewer*

Reviews the wines of the Rhône Valley (north and south), southern France, the Languedoc-Roussillon region, Washington State, and central and southern California

An aerospace engineer by training, Jeb Dunnuck grew up on a farm in Indiana where milk was the beverage of choice. In 1996, when living abroad and traveling through Europe, he first became interested in fine wine.

Having extensively explored the wine regions of Europe and the US with his work, Dunnuck developed a passion for the wines of the Rhône Valley and the Rhône Ranger Movement in California and Washington. To gain a better understanding of the business side of the wine industry, he took a temporary retail position in 2006.

Dunnuck launched *The Rhône Report* publication and website in 2008 and began releasing a quarterly newsletter reviewing Rhône-variety wines from around the world. Completely independent, the publication soon gained in popularity.

In 2013, Dunnuck gave up engineering and now writes full-time for *The Wine Advocate* and eRobertParker.com. He resides in Colorado, with his wife Traci and two dogs, where he pretends to rock climb and race a bicycle.



MONICA LARNER *Reviewer*

Exclusively reviews the wines of Italy

A Los Angeles native based in Rome, Monica Larner's family first moved to the Italian capital thanks to her father's role as director of photography on the 1983 TV mini-series *The Winds of War*.

She earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees in journalism (the MA with a minor in Italian studies) from Boston University and New York University respectively. After a stint working for Italian daily *La Repubblica*, and four years as a reporter in the Rome bureau of *BusinessWeek*, Larner spent two years as a staff writer with *Italy Daily* of the *International Herald Tribune*, where she penned her first wine column.

A certified sommelier, in 2003, Larner became *Wine Enthusiast* magazine's first Italy-based correspondent. Over the course of 10 years, her tasting responsibilities grew to 3,000 Italian wines per year (totaling 16,000 published reviews overall).

Larner has been awarded the Best International Journalist Silver Grape Leaf award three times – more than any individual – by the prestigious Comitato Grandi Cru d'Italia, an association of 130 top wine producers. She joined *The Wine Advocate* as its fulltime Italian reviewer in 2013.



LUIS GUTIERREZ *Reviewer*

Responsible for the wines of Spain, Chile and Argentina

Coming from an IT background and with more than two decades of experience working for a large multinational company in Madrid, Luis Gutierrez is a founder of elmundovino.com, the most prestigious wine website published in Spanish. He wrote and tasted for the publication since its creation in 2000, as well as for publications belonging to Spain's *El Mundo* newspaper, and various wine and gastronomy publications in his home country, Portugal, Puerto Rico and the United Kingdom.

Gutierrez was awarded the prestigious Cavaleiro da Confraria do Vinho do Porto prize in 2004 and contributed most Spanish entries in the 2008 book *1,001 Wines You Must Try Before You Die*. He is also a co-author of *The Finest Wines of Rioja and Northwest Spain*, which won the 2011 André Simon Special Commendation Award in London. In 2012, Gutierrez received the Spanish National Gastronomy Award for journalism from the Spanish minister for tourism.

Gutierrez shares his free time between his family and wine. He lives in the Spanish capital with his British-Irish-Italian wife and their three children.



DAVID SCHILDKNECHT *Reviewer*

Reviews the wines of Germany, Austria, Champagne, Oregon, Alsace and the Loire

David Schildknecht logged more than a decade as a wine retailer in Washington, DC before moving his operations and family of six to the banks of the Ohio River, establishing the wide-ranging wine program at Kentucky-based The Party Source in 1993.

From 1997 to 2002, he divided his time between reporting from Austria, Germany and Hungary for *Wine & Spirits* and the *International Wine Cellar*, and importing wines of France for Ohio-based wine importer and distributor Vintner Select. Almost from the beginning of his career as a merchant, Schildknecht has published articles on wine, starting with a 1984 piece on Alsace for the long-departed magazine *Friends of Wine*.

Schildknecht has been a James Beard Award finalist for his wine journalism, and recipient of the Vinea Wachau's 2006 Steinfederpreis. He also authored the material on German wines in the 3rd edition of the *Oxford Companion to Wine*. In recent years, his astute observations and opinions on wine have appeared in *The World of Fine Wine*, as well as on eRobertParker.com, among others.



MARK SQUIRES *Reviewer*

Responsible for the wines of Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as the dry table wines of Portugal

Mark Squires was a lawyer in Philadelphia, class of '78, when he began traveling extensively in France in 1981. His hobby of pairing good wines with good food rapidly became an obsession.

Formerly the forum leader on Prodigy's Wine Forum, Squires has been teaching wine courses for more than 15 years, and has published numerous articles in various magazines and newspapers. His main form of output became electronic in about 1995, when he established his own website. After a few years, Squires added a popular bulletin board, which is now housed on eRobertParker.com. His website attracted international attention, both among readers and other media outlets.

Squires has been reviewing wines professionally for approximately a decade, and his reviews have been cited in major publications. He was assigned to cover Portugal's dry wines for *The Wine Advocate* in 2006. His territory of coverage has expanded greatly since then.



NEAL MARTIN *Reviewer*

Focuses on the wines of Burgundy (including Chablis), Beaujolais and South Africa, port and other fortified wines, and the sweet white wines of Bordeaux

A graduate in management science from the UK's Warwick University, Neal Martin started his working career with Lloyds of London before packing his suitcase for Tokyo in 1994 to work as an English teacher and explore another culture. On returning to the UK in 1996, an opportunity arose within a Japanese export company. He soon found himself procuring on behalf of his client "an inordinate quantity of unheard of wines such as 'Latour' and 'Petrus.'"

Martin enrolled on a Wine and Spirit Education Trust certificate course, and the first dozen tutorials ignited his passion for wine. Four years later he achieved his diploma, and in 2003 he began his independent website, wine-journal.com, that acquired a readership of more than 100,000 within three years. Robert Parker soon purchased the website and hired Martin as a reviewer.

Martin's self-published first book, *Pomerol*, received the prestigious 2012 André Simon John Avery Award, as well as the 2013 Louis Roederer Wine Writers Chairman's Award. He lives in the UK with his Japanese wife Tomoko (herself a gifted taster) and daughters Lily (vintage 2005) and Daisy (2007).

OPENING ACTS

SO, YOU'VE SPLASHED OUT ON THE FINE WINES AND THE SPARKLING RIEDEL GLASSES, BUT IT CAN PROVE A PRICEY BLUNDER TO NEGLECT THE HUMBLE CORKSCREW. FROM THE SLEEK AND SIMPLE TO THE HIGH-TECH AND THE ZANY, **CHARMAINE CHAN** SUGGESTS 10 TOP DESIGNS GUARANTEED TO POP YOUR CORKS



Trust the Swedes to come up with the **Sagaform Bar Penguin** corkscrew, the elegance of which far surpasses that of the waddling bird that inspired the design. A replacement spiral is included. www.sagaform.com



Can't finish that second bottle? Then plug it with the rubber handle of **Eva Solo's** manual corkscrew. www.evasolo.com

Pierce. Twist. Keep twisting. Drink. **Peugeot's** Salma Basalte corkscrew features not only an "endless" mechanism to remove the cork but also a foil cutter to strip off the bottle's adornment. www.peugeot-saveurs.com

Fifteen years of development went into the making of **Sveid's** corkscrew, often cited as the world's most expensive. Constructed from aviation titanium, with a fingertip lever of 18-carat gold, one will set you back €50,000 or more. www.sveid.com



The stepson of venerated Danish designer Arne Jacobsen, Peter Holmblad has a creative pedigree that shows in his simply beautiful wine opener. The satin-polished stainless steel corkscrew, first created in 1974, is part of **Stelton's** classic line of products. www.stelton.com





The utility of **Brabantia's** Quickpulls will not surprise. Designed to handle small and large bottle necks, these corkscrews also feature a centering ring to prevent those irritating wide-of-the-mark bores. www.brabantia.com

Invest in one of these wall-mounted corkscrews and upending kitchen drawers to find your tools will be a thing of the past. Made by French company **L'Atelier du Vin**, the 32cm-tall utensil needs only two actions: lever down to penetrate the cork, and up to extract it. www.conranshop.co.uk



We wouldn't mind having **Chateau Laguiole's** olivewood corkscrew peeping out from our back pocket. Advantages are the warmth of the wooden handle and the brand's history, which dates back to 1829 with the birth of the iconic Laguiole knife. www.laguiole.com

Like other tools in its Blade wine series created with Danish brand Menu, **DesignWright's** Waiter's corkscrew features a cylindrical body that flattens at one end to form a bottle opener, a pouring spout, or twist or pull handles. www.designwright.co.uk

Turn **Anna G's** bobbed head to insert the screw and watch her pliant arms rise. Alessandro Mendini's playful corkscrew, named after a friend, has been such a hit since its release in 1994 that it is now part of an extended family of smiling kitchen objects. www.alesi.com

MADE OF STONE

THE SOIL AND ROCK OF THE BEAUTIFUL LOIRE VALLEY, NOTABLE FOR ITS MAGNIFICENT CHÂTEAUX, HAVE EXERTED PROFOUND INFLUENCE ON ITS WINES. DAVID SCHILDKNECHT PONDERES THE GRANDIOSITY AND INTIMACY OF THE REGION

THE MEDIEVAL CHÂTEAU DE CHINON ONCE SERVED AS A RESIDENCE OF FRENCH AND ENGLISH KINGS



THE LOIRE RIVER FLOWS FOR ALMOST 700 miles, in the process draining more than a quarter of France, and much of that stretch is justly celebrated for its magnificence. Immense stone châteaux dot much of the landscape and monumental bridges thrust or arch their way across broad stretches of shimmering water under a sky that is vast and open, whether luminous, cumulous, darkly frowning or (more

often, it seems, than any other place on planet Earth) rainbow-filled.

To travel the Loire's length is to be awed by all of this, as well as by the vistas that open up in those relatively few places along its length characterized by massive bluffs – like those around Savennières – or high hills like those of Sancerre. It's no coincidence that those two villages are sources of renowned wines. Nearly

everywhere along the Loire wine is grown, and much of it is justly famed.

Yet the Loire is not just characterized by places that evoke awe and superlatives. If anything, more typical are the stretches in which this great river has divided itself into many smaller streams. Sheltered eddies, enveloping bowers, and bucolic fields are commonplace here, as are tiny villages whose beauty lies in their details.

The Loire's wines are anything but grandiose, loud or ostentatious. In their many ways, they all seem to express an intimacy matched by the openness of the people who grow them

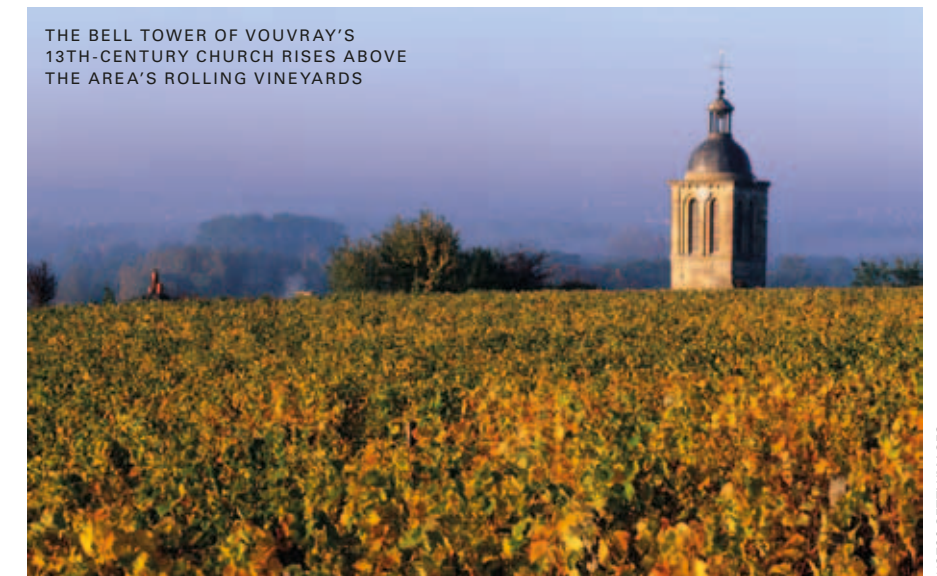
And the Loire's wines are anything but grandiose, loud or ostentatious. In their many ways, they all seem to express an intimacy matched by the openness of the people who grow them. What's more, with scant exceptions, the Loire's vinous gems are among the world's great wine bargains, sometimes sold at prices dangerously low for the well-being of their growers or the future of their appellations, but certainly at levels designed to keep any *vigneron* modest, however rightfully proud he or she may be of the wines.

Given that it traverses a large part of one of the world's most densely planted wine-growing nations, it is perhaps not hugely surprising that along the Loire's

length grow red and white, still and sparkling, lightweight and (occasionally) dense wines from an enormous array of grape varieties. But what's more amazing is the frequency with which a single sector of the Loire can harbor such distinctively delicious diversity.

Chenin Blanc grown near Tours – specifically in the appellations of Vouvray and Montlouis – is rendered sparkling as well as still, and ranging from bone dryness through nectarous sweetness, but especially in-between: from the luscious, food-friendly “hidden sweetness” of what's locally termed *sec tendre* through semi-dry, to richness with balanced sweetness known thereabouts as *moelleux* (with

THE BELL TOWER OF VOUVRAY'S 13TH-CENTURY CHURCH RISES ABOVE THE AREA'S ROLLING VINEYARDS



PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES



VINEYARDS OF CHINON GROW SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPRESSIVE CABERNET FRANC



A TRADITIONAL STONE-AND-BRICK WINE CELLAR OF THE LOIRE

PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

the same root and connotations as “marrow”). A few establishments in the Touraine cultivate the rare, often (but not always) delicate and florally perfumed black variant of Chenin, known more commonly as Pineau d’Aunis. Yet very nearby are villages – notably Bourgueil and Chinon – that grow some of the world’s most imposing and age-worthy Cabernet Franc.

The diversity of the Loire’s wines has cultural as well as geographical origins. Successive waves of viticultural migration are what deposited, among Loire reds for examples, the Cabernets better known from Bordeaux, Burgundy’s Pinot, but also Gamay, familiar from Beaujolais.

In the wine appellation of Cheverny – home to the eponymous stone-built château that is among France’s most famous – red wine is bottled using any or all the above. The culture of countries that over the centuries have been the Loire wine growers’ customers have also left strong marks. It was Dutch traders beginning in the late 16th century whose interest and wealth prompted many vinous developments whose results we still enjoy today, including the nobly sweet wines from Chenin that are now among the Loire’s gems.

Loire vineyards and cellars are the ideal places to be introduced to the mysteries of terroir. The notion that taste – and not just that of wines – varies profoundly according to the exposure and soil of the place where a crop is grown nowadays permeates Western food culture. Skepticism about the influence of location and geological underpinnings on the aromas, flavors, and textures of wine is no longer the intellectual default position among “New World” wine growers and



oenophiles, let alone in fashion. On the contrary, talk of terroir is now so frequent and so loose that it threatens to become trivial or vacuous. But the Loire’s growers will see to it that the notion of terroir gets put back down-to-earth where it belongs.

The Loire is a great laboratory for testing terroir not just because the grapes grown here can give such different results in nearby sites but because these differences are what so many Loire *vignerons* revel in, and they are keen to communicate that pleasure as well as to watch tasters’ faces light-up as they have an “aha!” experience. Of course, this approach is also good business sense. Can’t decide which single-vineyard wine you prefer? Then buy some of each. Want to perform this same magic show for your friends at home? Same answer.

Nobody knows in any detail what it is about the soil and its geological origins or precisely how these impinge

on plant metabolism to results in such formidable differences of taste. But there are at least a few scientifically sound hypotheses, and even as you marvel at the scenery and the often magnificent edifices along the Loire, you will – oenophile that you are – pick-up some striking hints about just how this might work.

Buildings rendered from the classic, nearly 100 million-year-old Loire marine sediment known as *tuffeaux* seem almost to radiate a glow of their own over and beyond reflecting the sun’s rays. As not only this region’s handsome above-ground structures but also its thousands of miles of cellars and its troglodytic villages literally carved from stone testify, *tuffeaux* is amazingly easy to carve – just take a sharp fingernail to some – yet capable of structural support that lasts for centuries. What’s more, spend just a little time down in one of those cellars or cliff-hanging dwellings and it will dawn on you that the walls are breathing. Afterward, the experience of a “normal” cellar or house will feel like you shed cotton for polyester. This stone, for all of its strength, is amazingly low-density and micro-porous.

In some places, though, you’ll encounter buildings and cellars of schiste: walls from great gray slabs of it, with matching slate-like roof tiles. Château in the Loire’s schiste belt – in complete contrast with their more famous and glamorous not to mention luminous *tuffeaux* relatives – have the look of foreboding castles no matter what you do to brighten them, and regardless of when they were built. Heft it, tap it, scratch it, walk-around inside a cellar or room built from it, and you’ll recognize that schiste is *tuffeaux*’s alter-ego, not just in its darkness and density but in the way it seems to suck up and

Buildings rendered from the classic, nearly 100 million-year-old Loire marine sediment known as tuffeaux seem almost to radiate a glow of their own over and beyond reflecting the sun's rays

THE IMPOSING YET ELEGANT CHÂTEAU DE CHAUMONT WAS FOUNDED AS EARLY AS THE 10TH CENTURY



THE DISTINCTIVE SPIRAL STONE STAIRCASE OF CHÂTEAU DE BLOIS

refuse to give back the sun's light. And that's a huge hint as to how these two ancient compressions of sediment function in a vineyard.

Tuffeaux acts in perfect balance as a sponge to slake the thirst of vines, yet drains readily so that their feet will never get wet. Its luminosity projects the sun's rays back up into the canopy and its grape clusters. Schiste resists rain and holds heat, which gives it different advantages – and liabilities from *tuffeaux*, depending on the vintage. And just such opportunities and limitations – conferred on the builders of the Loire's grand châteaux and on winemakers by the site in which their vines grew – are what constitute the area's influential terroir.

SECRETS OF THE TERROIR REVEALED

At the Loire Valley's Domaine de l'Écu (www.domaine-ecu.com), owner Guy Bossard has for many years labeled his top Muscadets according to the type of soil in which they grow, adding a little photo-inset on the label to help convey a vivid impression of gneiss, orthogneiss and granite in whose finely weathered remnants his vines root. The taste differences are at least as striking.

At Domaine Pierre Luneau-Papin (www.domaineluneaupapin.com), various wines are labeled for their vineyards of origin. In fact, in some sub-regions of the Loire it's hard to find any serious grower who does not bottle numerous site-specific wines from a single appellation.

Classic locations at which to experience arrestingly delicious terroir differences are Domaine François Chidaine (www.francois-chidaine.com) for Montlouis and Vouvray, or Domaine Huet (www.huet-echansonne.com) in Vouvray. With Cabernet Franc, winemakers Yannick Amirault (www.yannickamirault.fr) in Bourgueil, or Bernard and Matthieu Baudry, will guide you through multiple bottlings with appropriate soil samples.

In Sancerre, visit Domaine Vacheron, and winemakers Stéphane Riffault and Gérard Boulay. And lest there be any doubt that soil is efficacious in the realm of nobly sweet nectars, too, check-in with Philippe Cady in the little Layon village of Saint-Aubin-de-Luigné, whose Coteaux du Layon Saint-Aubin is grown on schiste while Chaume is grown in chalky soil.

Many of the above-mentioned wineries and growers have tasting rooms but an appointment should always be made or a call placed in advance before any visit. Have fun exploring the Loire!

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

IN ONLY A MATTER OF DECADES, ASIAN AFICIONADOS HAVE EMBRACED WINE WHOLEHEARTEDLY AND NOW DRIVE THE COLLECTABLE MARKET. BUT HOW DOES ONE START OUT IN ACCUMULATING FINE WINES? ED PETERS EXPLORES THE OPTIONS

WINE HAS INSPIRED MORE THAN a few aphorisms in the Western world, from polymath Benjamin Franklin's much-quoted insistence that "the discovery of a wine is of greater moment than the discovery of a constellation – the universe is too full of stars" to author Robert Louis Stevenson's pithy observation that "wine is bottled poetry." Recent trends in Asia, however – first to drinking wine, then to appreciating fine wine and most recently to collecting – may indicate that the dictionary of quotations needs editing.

"Increasingly, Asian investors are appreciating the value of fine wine," says Loi Pok Yen, CEO of CWT Limited, who will be opening a six-level, 10-million-bottle wine vault aimed specifically at collectors in Singapore in the spring of 2014. "Recent reports acknowledge growth in the Asian market in terms of wine investment, appreciation and consumption, and it is predicted that Asian wine imports will reach US\$1.5 billion by 2017."

Loi is not the only voice trumpeting wine's burgeoning popularity in the region. Robert Beynat, former CEO of Vinexpo Overseas, notes, "Asia is growing four times faster than the rest of the world in terms of increased consumption in volume and value, and China grows faster than the rest of Asia."

The amount of money that collectors are laying out on both wines for laying down and for more immediate enjoyment is substantial. In 2012 in Hong Kong, collectors spent US\$425 million on wine, with about US\$232m of it at auction. Research from Vinexpo and the International Wine and Spirit Competition has shown that between 2012 and 2016, wine consumption in China is

"Recent reports acknowledge growth in the Asian market in terms of wine investment, appreciation and consumption, and it is predicted that Asian wine imports will reach US\$1.5 billion by 2017"

Loi Pok Yen, CEO of CWT Limited



expected to grow by 40 per cent.

On what might be described as the frontline of wine appreciation, hotel sommeliers, restaurant managers and wine merchants have found themselves in a unique position to observe the paradigm shift from customers whose prime concern was once the choice between red and white to the drinkers of 2014 who display an intimate knowledge of even quite obscure vintages.

"In the three years that I have been in Hong Kong, I have certainly seen a huge trend in the interest of both locals and expatriates towards Burgundy wines, both red and white," says Hubert Chabot, head sommelier at the internationally famous Mandarin Oriental hotel. "However, before Burgundy wines, everyone was excited about Bordeaux wines, as avid collectors actively purchased them. This subsequently resulted in a drastic increase in price to be able to sustain the market. This price increase meant that collectors and clients moved towards wines from Burgundy that are now more competitively priced. Time will only tell if these wines can sustain their present price due to their demand."

Anyone thinking of establishing their own cellar, whether for sheer

drinking pleasure, or with an eye on taking advantages of shifting prices in the future, should first turn to a reliable source of advice. "As wines are made to be drunk, I would advise to collect them primarily for enjoyment and to share with friends who share the same passion," says Hubert Li, a former actuary who started collecting wine in 2007 and who now runs the Hong Kong Wine Vault in a classic case of turning a hobby into a full-time job.

"Of course, there are opportunities where investment gains on wines can be rewarding over the medium or long term, but I would treat that as a little bonus for earning your free drinks."

Not unexpectedly, Li advises that before starting out, wine collectors should ensure they have a good environment to store the fruits of their new passion, especially given Asia's often humid conditions. "This could be a wine cabinet or a wine cellar," he says. "Wines are fairly delicate and ideally should be stored between 11C-17C, with minimal temperature fluctuations. This is the natural temperature range for underground cellars in the old wine regions, which over the centuries have proven to be the ideal condition for aging wines."

Unfortunately, Li says room or office



SIMON TAM

HAMMER TIME

Wine collectors are increasingly turning to major auction houses to boost their cellars, and the gavel has been coming down on some increasingly pricey lots



“One of the most exciting moments of Christie’s Hong Kong Fine and Rare Wine Autumn Auction 2013 was the sale of a case of 1978 Romanée-Conti, which achieved US\$476,280 – a world auction record for Romanée-Conti and a world auction record for a case of wine of 12 bottles,” says Simon Tam, head of wine for

Christie’s China. Significantly, Tam adds that while bidders included aficionados from Europe and the Americas, the top 10 lots were all bought by Asian private buyers. “Rather than trading or investment, they are buying for pure enjoyment,” he says.

While classics such as the finest Bordeaux and Burgundy are still very popular with Asian collectors, they are also buying wines from the legendary terroir of Champagne, Spain, Barolo in Italy and Australia, showing the diversifying tastes of the market. And given the increasing wealth of its middle class, the term “red China” now has an entirely new meaning.

“The number of wine bidders from China from 2008 to 2012 grew by 1,550 per cent at Christie’s,” says Tam. “We also achieved strong results for wines at Christie’s inaugural Shanghai auction last September. All the lots, including Château Latour, Château Lafite, Château Mouton and Château Margaux, were sold above our estimates, indicating great potential for the wine market in China.”

temperatures during Asian summers can be too hot and cause wines to age too quickly, losing fruitiness as a result. “A protruded cork or a rubbery smell often indicates the wine has suffered from heat damage,” he says. “Wines should also be stored sideways on at humidity between 60 and 80 per cent to keep the corks moist, and should be kept out of sunlight.”

Wine storage has proved a successful business for Li, and his vault has expanded greatly in recent years. And there has been no shortage of oenophiles keen to store their collections somewhere reliable. “The majority of our customers are bankers and professionals like lawyers and doctors aged between 30 and 50, and we also have some very successful entrepreneurs,” he says.

A major question facing fledgling wine collectors is how much to invest? While personal net worth is obviously the deciding factor, a solid “starter pack” from around the world doesn’t have to involve forking out sums that look like international phone numbers.

“We have had customers starting their collection with US\$40,000-US\$65,000, and this is a very good budget to obtain a full range of wines for regular parties and dinners, as well as rare gems for special occasions and investment, too,” says Li. “I would strongly recommend buying wines by the case of six or 12 bottles where possible for two reasons: one, wines

would age over time and it is fun to revisit the wine once every few years to see how it has evolved; two, wines by the case are easier to sell.”

One of the chief pleasures of collecting wine is not necessarily being dictated to by prevailing trends, argues Li, and indulging personal whim and penchants. “The preference on wines is indeed very much a personal taste, but if you are planning to collect wines that can age for a decade or more, I would go for wines from the ‘Old World’ regions, especially France, Italy and Spain,” he says. “In particular, I would start with red wines from Bordeaux classified growths, as it is a region that is relatively easy to understand, easy to appreciate and also well recognized. It is also rather easy for matching Chinese food.

“However, some younger Bordeaux vintages can be quite tannic, and therefore, I would recommend vintages that are relatively ready

to drink, like 2011, 2007, 2004 and 2001, or the greater vintages that have mellowed down or have gained complexity with age, like 2003, 1998 and 1996. I would also add some champagnes as the perfect aperitif, as well as Burgundy white wines to the collection to match seafood.”

Li’s Hong Kong Wine Vault will be mirrored in Singapore this spring with the opening of Loi’s Singapore Wine Vault. Located along Fishery Port Road in West Singapore, the facility is set to be one of the largest wine storage facilities in Southeast Asia. Once completed, the US\$159m vault will cover 750,000 square feet. It will also feature state-of-the-art security systems, individual temperature-controlled cellars and be designed to restrict any light penetration. Such a major investment is a sure indicator that wine collecting is more than a passing fad in Asia.

Finally, many nascent wine collectors find an organized wine tour makes for a great way to pick up in-depth knowledge about their new pastime. Based in England, Arblaster & Clarke run tours to both the old and new worlds, and catering to both old and new wine fans.

“Asia is one of our major overseas markets and primarily our top-level wine tours of Bordeaux and Burgundy appeal the most, though our wine cruises and opera and wine tours have also been popular,” says Emma Pike, the company’s marketing manager.

Seeing and understanding the actual locations where wine is made, and talking to guides, growers and like-minded drinkers, lays the foundation for laying down a great collection, Pike adds. And while undoubtedly of practical use, the information gleaned is surely also a whole library’s worth of bottled poetry.

SIMPLE TRUTHS

Seasoned wine collectors, having learned from experience, are quick to point out a few things to take heed of while building up a healthy collection

* The temptation to hoard is great, but there will always be more wine, so crack open a bottle or two if you feel like it.

* Buy wine that suits your personal lifestyle and not necessarily always what the experts recommended.

* There will be disappointments. Just as you can’t judge a book by its cover, a bottle’s label isn’t always a 100 per cent guarantee of perfection.

* While there is a tendency in Asia to go for reds, also pay attention to whites. German Riesling, Australian Semillon and fine white Burgundy are all well worth investigating.



PHOTO GETTY IMAGES



SURFACE PLEASURES

THE WINE WORLD IS SOMETIMES ACCUSED OF HAUGHTINESS, BUT CREATIVE WINERIES ARE EXPLODING THAT MYTH WITH QUIRKY LABELS THAT DRAW UPON POP CULTURE, LEGENDS, CINEMA AND HUMOR. **DIANA D’ARENBERG** SELECTS SOME OF THE MOST AMUSING

YOU DART INTO A WINE SHOP WITH only minutes to spare before heading to a dinner party. Frantically you dash around the aisles, desperately trying to find something nice, but you’re overwhelmed by an endless selection of Cabernet Sauvignons, Pinots, Bordeaux, Burgundies, Chardonnays... What vintage to buy? From which winery? Much last-minute handwringing and handset Googling ensues.

Let’s be honest here. For the wine connoisseur it’s relatively easy to make a smart purchasing decision. For the less enlightened of us, the label plays a significant role. After all, if the wine isn’t that great, at least you have something to look at that’s a conversation starter. And if you, like this writer, fall into that category you are certainly not alone. According to Geordie Willis, brand director at venerable wine merchant Berry Bros. & Rudd, “Wine consumers, particularly those with limited wine knowledge, buy with their eyes.”

Judging a wine by its label is not an entirely superficial and misguided endeavor, however. That small piece of paper should convey much you need to know about a wine: the vintage, grape and region. But for a number of vineyards in the modern day, it has also become a space on which to convey the character of the wine, as well as the winemaker’s philosophy

and sensibilities. What’s more, long after the bottle has been drained, a striking label is a memento of pleasures enjoyed. “The labels articulate the role of the merchant,” says Willis, “to be the closest link between those who make the wine and those who drink it.”

So many wineries have savvied up to the potential of an arresting label, in fact, that you could call it a trend. As in any type of branding, wine labels differentiate a product from the competition. But, adds Willis, “the onus is on the designer to create a product or label that is desirable and seductive, that lives up to the wine within.”

With this in mind, *Matter of Taste* scoured the shelves to unearth the most eye-catching and impressive labels out there. Those that follow raised smiles, and the occasional eyebrow.

Strait Jacket

Strait Jacket Wines of Western Australia opted for eccentric labels for its Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc Semillon and Shiraz wines. The frenziedly scrawled labels are intended to reflect the “barking mad” and “obsessive” nature of the winemakers, not – as one might initially suspect – the creative mind of a designer after having sampled one too many in the name of research. According to Strait Jacket Wines: “At our winery, during vintage time the winery can often reflect a madhouse and the Strait Jacket series of wines are inspired by the essence of our unhinged winemakers.”



Pont des Arts

Pont des Arts is the labor of love of two young Frenchmen – Chateau Margaux’s China brand ambassador, Thibault Pontallier, and Arthur de Villepin (the son of former French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, no less). The brand’s tipples fuse the two Hong Kong-based friends’ passions for art and wine with an East-meets-West aesthetic, perhaps most notably by commissioning Paris-based Chinese modern-art master, the late Zou Wou-Ki, who was a friend of De Villepin’s family, to design six labels. If you missed out on the artist’s work before the auction market got too hot, you can at least enjoy his distinctive and vibrant abstract shapes and daubs splashed across Pont des Arts’ bottles instead.

Killibinbin

The Killibinbin range of wines, produced by the Brothers in Arms winery in the Langhorne Creek region of South Australia, includes a Cabernet Sauvignon and a so-called “Scream Shiraz,” as well as wines mysteriously dubbed “The Shadow” and “Scaredy Cat.” The labels are every bit as intriguing as their monikers, featuring terrified damsels, hardboiled private eyes, frights aplenty and more than a touch of noir that classic-movie buffs will adore. The company behind the Killibinbin labels, Adelaide-based branding and graphics outfit Mash Design, has come up with some of the most innovative wine labels on the market today.

Two Blind Mice

Two Blind Mice Wines of Australia’s Yarra Valley desired a label that was contemporary, cool, “even a little edgy” and memorable for its 2011 Shiraz, and put the job out to the public in a label-design competition. Melbourne-based Dezinstore’s left-field interpretation was based on an optician’s eye chart, which might have been lots of fun after a couple of glasses. The eventual winner, however, was a clever label by Dizziness Design of France that incorporated braille.



Linnaea

Featuring detailed illustrations that fuse fauna and flora with modern-day people, the offbeat labels of Australia's Linnaea Vineyards reflect the founders' desire to make "intelligent wines from some of the world's most interesting wine regions." The husband-and-wife team of winemaker Michelle Edwards (creator of wines for wineries in Australia, Italy, France and the United States) and agricultural scientist Daniel Fischl (who has spent nearly 20 years researching grapes and as a viticulture consultant in Australia, China, Italy, the US and Israel) clearly wear their love of science and natural history on the sleeves. Linnaea Vineyards' labels are lovely enough to peel off and collect.



Matsu

The sustainable Matsu Winery in Spain's Toro region wanted visually to link its products to its history and so adopted a personal approach to labeling. Three portraits were taken by Barcelona-based fashion and advertising photography team Bèla Adler and Salvador Fresneda to adorn the winery's products and convey three generations of experience. The resulting label trilogy conveys tradition while also appearing effortlessly contemporary. The wines, by the way, are called El Pícaro (which translates from the Spanish as "The Rogue" or "The Rascal," with the wine having been described as like a young man – "valiant, impertinent, and uncontrollable"), El Recio (essentially "The Tough Guy") and El Viejo ("The Old Man").



Francis Coppola

Veteran Hollywood movie director Francis Ford Coppola (perhaps most famous for his Vietnam War epic *Apocalypse Now* and his sprawling *The Godfather* trilogy) has channeled his seemingly boundless creativity over recent decades into winemaking. Bottles of Francis Coppola Reserve organic wines from the auteur's Francis Ford Coppola Winery in California feature distinctive artworks created by film production designer Dean Tavoularis. The pair met during the making of *The Godfather* in the early 1970s and have continued to collaborate over the years.



Vinos de los Muertos

From Southwest Wines of New Mexico in the US come blends with unique packaging that has, rather bizarrely, been inspired by the Mexican holiday Dia de los Muertos – the “Day of the Dead” – that takes place every November when friends and family gather to remember and pray for loved ones that have passed away. The garish labels for the Vinos de los Muertos (“Wines of the Dead”) draw on the traditions and tattoo culture of the festival. According to the winemakers, “We all share an undeniably mortal life-cycle. Some also similarly say wine is a living, breathing entity.” If that to-die-for bottle needed in a hurry is for a Halloween party, look no further.



Boarding Pass Shiraz

The bottle of the Boarding Pass Shiraz by South Australian-based but now defunct R Wines was decorated with exactly that – a tongue-in-cheek label reminiscent of an imaginary airline’s travel pass, with all the wine information replacing the flight details. Pleasingly, while not quite a no-frills budget deal, the Boarding Pass Shiraz was affordably priced, and *The Wine Advocate’s* founder Robert M. Parker, Jr. rated the 2007 vintage at 91 points. The perfect duty free airport purchase, perhaps.

Sine Qua Non

Cult winery Sine Qua Non of California is known for its limited-production wines that go by such kooky names as Queen of Spades, Twisted & Bent, Imposter McCoy, The Bride, Poker Face and Red Handed. So coveted are Sine Qua Non’s wines, in fact, that there’s a waiting list to obtain them. The wines arrive in uncommonly shaped bottles with distinctive labels featuring founder Manfred Krankl’s own artwork. *The Wine Advocate’s* Parker has described Krankl as “one of the most creative and multi-dimensional winemakers on Planet Earth.” More than just a pretty label, then.



Burn Cottage

Also by Mash Design, the gothic-inspired imagery that adorns labels for biodynamic New Zealand vineyard Burn Cottage reflects both the aesthetic sensibility and philosophy of the vineyard’s owners. The labels draw on the fairy tale *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily* (published 1795) by German writer and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which explores how the life of the senses and the aspirations of the human can meet. The story, it is said, informed the work of Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, who was an early advocate of biodynamic and sustainable agriculture. Steiner’s convictions, in turn, have influenced Burn Cottage’s approach to winemaking.

ACCOUNTING FOR TASTE

THE WINE ADVOCATE REVIEWS AS MANY AS 20,000 WINES EVERY YEAR, AND EACH MEMBER OF ITS EIGHT-PERSON REVIEW TEAM BOASTS CLEAR AREAS OF EXPERTISE, PREDOMINANTLY DEFINED BY COUNTRY OR GEOGRAPHICAL REGION. A SAMPLE SELECTION OF CURRENT-RELEASE WINE REVIEWS FOLLOWS, HIGHLIGHTING JUST A FEW SCENE-STEALING BOTTLES FROM 2013. THE DETAILED REVIEWS REPEATED HERE FIRST APPEARED ON THE WINE ADVOCATE'S PAGES AND THE EROBERTPARKER.COM WEBSITE. THESE WINES WOULD MAKE EXCELLENT ADDITIONS TO ANY WELL-STOCKED CELLAR. ENJOY!

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

REVIEWER

Robert M. Parker, Jr.

The Wine Advocate's founder and critic-at-large



PRICE*
\$305-\$999
TYPE
RED
RATING
100

Beausejour Duffau 2010 St.-Emilion

The 2010 is a more structured, masculine and steely version of the utterly compelling 2009. Tasting like black raspberry confiture with subtle notes of graphite and crushed chalk along with enormous floral notes, the wine displays a slightly smoky character but a voluptuous attack, mid-palate and finish. It is full-bodied and massively endowed, with every component perfectly etched in this extraordinary wine, which should be drinkable after seven-eight years of bottle age and last for a half-century or more. This is brilliant stuff. Composed of 73 per cent Merlot, 23 per cent Cabernet Franc and 4 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon from yields of 21 hectoliters per hectare, the alcohol is the highest ever registered at Beausejour-Duffau, coming in at 15 per cent, but remarkably, the pH is modest and the acids relatively elevated, giving the wine an astonishing freshness and precision that is hard to believe in view of its power, density and length. Anticipated maturity: 2025-2055+.

PRICE
\$100
TYPE
RED
RATING
100

Turnbull Wine Cellars 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Fortuna Vineyard Oakville

The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Fortuna Vineyard is perfection! This extraordinary wine offers up notes of crème de cassis, graphite, truffles, blueberries and blackberries as well as a colossal mouth-feel with no sense of heaviness, layer upon layer of fruit and glycerin, astonishing purity and a finish that lasts 50 seconds. A magnificent effort that should turn out to be one of the great modern classics of Napa Valley, it should age effortlessly for two to three decades. Drink 2013-2043.

PRICE
\$120
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
95

Peter Michael 2010 Chardonnay Cuvée Indigène Knights Valley

In 2010, the Chardonnay Cuvée Indigène stands out for its exotic bouquet. Passion fruit, lychee, nectarine, wild flowers and peaches are some of many notes that come alive in the glass. Surprisingly weightless for a Peter Michael Chardonnay, the Cuvée Indigène impresses for its balance and superb sense of proportion. In 2010 the Cuvée Indigène is a model of purity and elegance. Even better, it should enjoy a broad window of drinkability. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2022.

VETERAN VINES OF NAPA VALLEY

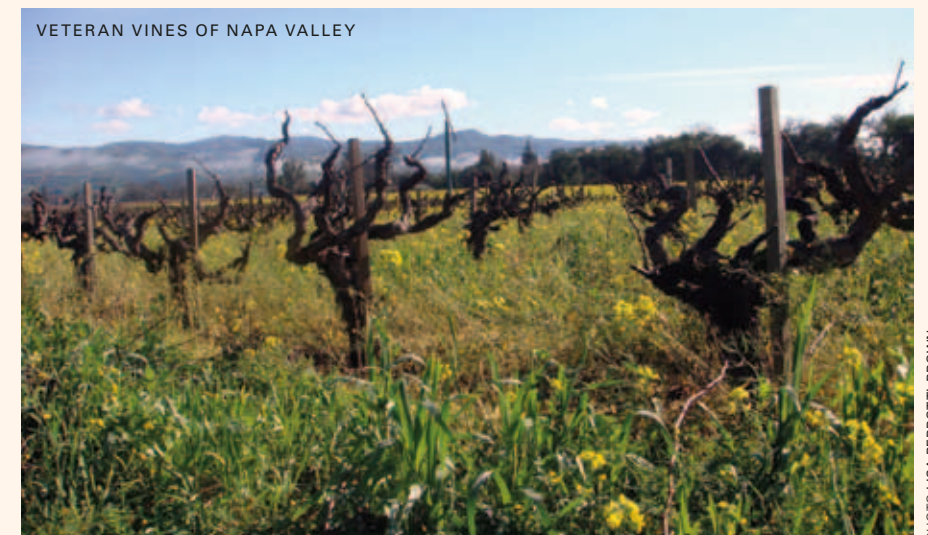


PHOTO: LISA PERROTTI-BROWN

* All quoted prices are in US\$

REVIEWER

Lisa Perrotti-Brown

Australia and New Zealand



PRICE
\$33-\$37
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
95

Kumeu River 2011
Hunting Hill Chardonnay
Kumeu / Auckland

Wow! The 2011 Hunting Hill Chardonnay shows off an incredible nose of exotic fruits, spices and savories

including mango, guava, pineapple paste and yeast extract over touches of brioche, cashews, fresh ginger, cinnamon toast and coriander seed with a whiff of honeysuckle. Medium to full-bodied, rich and seductive in the mouth, this Chardonnay is one for the hedonists as it offers an array of tropical fruit and spice flavors balanced by racy acidity and a finish with great length. Drink it now to 2021+.

PRICE
\$199
TYPE
RED
RATING
99+

Jim Barry 2010 Shiraz
The Armagh Clare Valley

Deep garnet-purple in color, the 2010 The Armagh Shiraz flaunts a gorgeous aromatic red and black fruit core intermingled with

clove, chocolate box, and eucalyptus aromas that are still very primary. Bottled under screw cap, it has a really fine palate that is very elegant yet powerful. With vibrant acid, firm and very fine tannins, the flavors are rich and layered with spices coming through on the long finish. Drink it from 2015 to 2030+.

PRICE
\$105-\$159
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
97+

Giaconda 2010
Chardonnay
Beechworth

The 2010 Chardonnay is intensely scented of apricots, pineapple paste, crushed

cashews and lightly buttered toast with suggestions of preserved ginger, mandarin peel, struck match and meal. The palate packs stone fruit and citrus flavors into a medium-bodied package that has a lovely, silken texture and a crisp acid line. It finishes with layer after layer of nutty and toasty richness. Delicious now, it will certainly reward patience and drink to 2019+.

PRICE
\$106
TYPE
RED
RATING
94+

Rippon Vineyard 2011
Tinker's Field Pinot Noir
Central Otago

Pale to medium ruby purple-colored, the 2011 Tinker's Field Pinot Noir is intensely scented of red currant jelly,

cherry compote and black cherries with nuances of violets, smoked bacon, charcoal and underbrush. Light to medium-bodied and elegantly fruited in the mouth, at this stage the flavor layers are tightly wound around the frame of medium to firm, grainy tannins with just enough acidity before finishing with great length. Drink it 2015 to 2022+.



PHOTO LISA PERROTTI-BROWN

REVIEWER

Neal Martin

Burgundy, Beaujolais and South Africa, port and other fortified wines, and the sweet white wines of Bordeaux



PRICE
\$110-\$177
TYPE
SWEET WINE
RATING
95-97

Château Climens
2011 Barsac

Tasting through individual lots, I was struck by their purity and tautness, developing engaging floral aromas with aeration, with

occasional notes of yellow plum and ginger. On the palate, once again there is a common theme of purity and crisp acidity, although they alternated between a lighter and a more mellifluous style. One or two significant lots demonstrated enticing spicy notes that define great Climens. There is certainly enormous potential here, one that beckons an intense, vivacious Barsac underpinned by freshness and focus.

PRICE
\$42-\$200
TYPE
FORTIFIED
RATING
97-99

Fonseca 2011 Vintage
Port Douro

The Fonseca 2011 is typically more forthcoming on the nose compared to the bashful Croft: a strident bouquet

with lifted scents of freshly picked blackberries, kirsch, crushed stone and a dash of Hoi Sin and oyster sauce. It is very well-defined, very focused and direct. The palate is silky smooth with not a rough edge in sight, though not a typically voluptuous Fonseca because of the keen thread of acidity and the structure that lends this mighty

Port wonderful backbone. A slight viscosity on the finish lacquers the tongue and indicates a core of sweet fruit is ticking away underneath that will surely explode several years after bottling. A tincture of salted licorice on the aftertaste is very attractive. This will turn out to become an outstanding Fonseca, the growing season taming its exuberance with spectacular results. So much potential, but just 6,000 cases were produced. Tasted May 2013.

PRICE
\$47
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
93

Cape Point Vineyards
2012 Sauvignon Blanc
Reserve South Africa

The 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve still feels a little reticent and tightly wound on the nose, although the

definition and minerality has certainly been carried over from the superb 2011. The palate is intriguing: very complex with subtle peach and apricot notes that are perfectly intertwined with the tense citric backbone. This reminds me of tasting the Dog Point Section 94: New Zealand's finest Sauvignon Blanc. This is right up there but will have even more to offer with another 12 months in bottle. Drink 2014-2020.

PRICE
\$719-\$2K
TYPE
FORTIFIED
RATING
98-100

Quinta Do Noval 2011
Vintage Port Nacional
Douro

The Quinta do Noval Nacional 2011 is one of the most breathtaking, nascent Vintage Ports

that I have ever met. The label should state a health warning: – “Sensory Overload” – since the bouquet is endowed with copious dark berry fruit, minerals, bay leaf and cloves that manifests like a slow-motion explosion from the glass. The palate is velvety-smooth on the entry, but do not let that kid you. Wave after wave of intense ripe black fruit lap along your sensory shoreline – indescribably harmonious with extremely well-judged acidity. There is a crescendo of flavors that build towards a sensual, date and raisin-tinged, magisterial finish that I can only analogize to the dramatic E-major chord that concludes The Beatles’ *A Day In The Life*. In fact, Lennon and McCartney’s magnum opus probably sums up the 2011 Nacional better than any descriptor I can think of. Tasted May 2013.

REVIEWER

David Schildknecht

Germany, Austria, Champagne, Oregon, Alsace and the Loire



PRICE
\$90
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
100

Markus Molitor 2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Three Star Mosel

When you occasionally write “100 points” beside the name of some wine

– signifying that you can’t imagine fermented grape juice more profoundly delicious – it might seem practically self-contradictory to deny it pride of place in a year’s end best-list. But the context of this release – over and beyond what I tried to capture in a breathless tasting note and a numerical score – is a vital part of what renders it so exciting. It doesn’t represent a miniscule amount of Riesling off-the-charts in must weight and residual sugar, and only attainable by a wealthy few; but rather, roughly 1,400 bottles (as measured in 750 ml. units) that retailed for less than \$100, and whose contents blow you away with subtlety, not exaggeration.

PRICE
\$70
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
96

Domaine Dublère (Blair Pethel) 2010 Chablis Preuses

I’ve had a few even-more profound young Chablis over the past decade – though not that many. What sets

this one apart is not only its sheer quality but two of the heartening things it demonstrates: Even among the finest wines from top-rated vineyards in renowned wine growing regions there are still bargains. And there are almost always wine growing talents flying under the radar (for a time at least) in such places. It was hard to decide, among examples from Chablis, between this Preuses from a U.S. ex-pat and Canadian Patrick Pieuze’s 2012 Blanchot. And Australian Chablis-vintner Marc Cameron could easily have taken honors in a category for greatest pioneering ventures tasted, with his 2012 Bourgogne Épineuil, a Pinot from outside Tonnerre, ten miles west of Chablis. (And yes, the 2010 Dublère Preuses is still for sale – I very recently bought some.)

PRICE
\$90
TYPE
RED
RATING
97

Comte Abbattucci 2011 Cuvée Collection: Ministre Impérial Jacques-Pierre-Charles Abbattucci Corsica

I singled-out Jean-Charles Abbattucci’s red from

diverse, obscure Corsican grape varieties among last year’s most exciting vinous experiences, but it’s impossible to resist doing so again this year and vintage, especially in hope that – for around the same \$90 as would have bought you a bottle of Molitor’s 2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr “three star” Auslese – more readers will test my claim that “until you experience this cuvée for yourself, you will be missing out on [things] you didn’t realize red wine could deliver.”

REVIEWER

Mark Squires

Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as the dry table wines of Portugal



PRICE
\$24
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
93

Soalheiro 2012 Alvarinho Vinho Verde

If you haven’t caught up to what modern Vinho Verde can do, try this. (Anselmo Mendes provides a fine alternative.) Relatively

cheap for wine (if not for Vinho Verde), and it ages. Crisp, focused and pure, with just a bit of a lemony note early on, it is a beautifully wrought, very precise and very concentrated Alvarinho. It is intense, yet transparent and expressive. It lingers wonderfully on the finish, showing more and more grip as it goes along. Drink now-2022.

PRICE
\$90
TYPE
RED
RATING
95

Lemos and Van Zeller 2008 “CV” Douro

This was part of a vertical and had been seen before, but it remains one of my favorites of this specialty bottling.

The 2008 CV is another example of a fine performance in a somewhat inconsistent vintage. It is an outstanding 2008 – one of the wines of the vintage. It will be a sleeper no one picks on paper, but it seems awfully fine to me and I’d still give it the nod over the more obvious 2007. With time, in fact, this 2008 has fleshed out. It shows more depth and fullness than it originally seemed to display, along with the beautiful structure it originally displayed. It is nice that it is a full point

in alcohol less than the 2007, too. What makes this a bit different in general is its earthiness. It has less of the sweet fruit, more steel and earth, all of which gave it more character and complexity early on. You can drink this now, but as with the 2007, I would suggest waiting another couple of years for better results. Drink now-2030.

PRICE
\$30
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
92

Domaine Sigalas 2007 Assyrtiko Barrel Fermented Santorini

I tend to like my whites and my Assyrtiko un-oaked, but I’m tired of hearing how

oak destroys Assyrtiko. The 2007 Santorini Barrel Fermented is another example – as much as some of us sometimes hate to admit it – of very fine, oaked (six months) Assyrtiko. It is aging gracefully and developing well. While the wood certainly gives this a different aromatic – no cream or vanilla here, though – it does not keep the Assyrtiko down. The acidity easily cuts through the wood. This maintained a surprisingly fresh feel and sunny demeanor for as long as I tasted it (over a couple of hours). It does add very fine depth, however, and some pure power on the gripping finish. It should be a great wine to match with stronger foods. Drink now-2018.

PRICE
\$50
TYPE
SWEET
RATING
94

Clos De Gat 2006 Muscat Sycra Judean Hills

Upon re-tasting this, I was thinking that this might be my favorite Israeli wine of all time. Alas, and as expected, it

is made in small quantities and might be a one-off to boot. The 2006 Muscat Sycra is a blend, only 85 per cent Muscat of Alexandria with 15 per cent Viognier blended in, all aged for four years in French oak. It is fortified and hits 14 per cent alcohol (versus initial labeling at 16 per cent; the winery told me recently that was erroneous). It certainly is demonstrating its class and general age-worthiness. Rather tightly wound and beautifully focused, it is penetrating on the finish with some grip, a little tannic pop and intensity of flavor. It is well-balanced, not sloppy sweet, but fresh and delicious, with that delightfully exotic medley of flavors that I noted the first time around. Drink now-2023.

REVIEWER

Jeb Dunnuck

Rhône Valley, southern France, the Languedoc-Roussillon region, Washington State and central and southern California



PRICE
\$199-\$368
TYPE
RED
RATING
98+

Quilceda Creek 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley
Rich, backwards, structured and massively concentrated, the 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon

comes mostly from the Champoux Vineyard (also from Galitzine, Klipsun, Palengat and Tapteil) and is comprised of 99 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon and 1 per cent Merlot that spent 22 months in all new French oak. Offering up plenty of crème de cassis, coffee bean, toasted spice, pencil shavings and violet-like qualities on the nose, it has palate staining levels of extract and tannin that come through on the mid-palate and finish. Gorgeously full-bodied, layered and textured, with perfect balance, this awesome Cabernet needs to be forgotten for five-six years and will have two to three decades of longevity. Drink 2018-2030.

PRICE
\$144-\$300
TYPE
RED
RATING
100

Leonetti 2010 Cellar Reserve Walla Walla Valley

Even better than the straight Cabernet Sauvignon, with additional richness and texture, yet without any added weight or heaviness, the perfect 2010 Reserve is comprised of 52 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon, 30 per cent Merlot, 9 per cent Cabernet Franc and 9 per cent

Malbec that spent 22 months in new and used French oak. Inky purple in color and gorgeously rich and pure, it slowly gives up notions of smoked black currants, espresso, liquid flower, licorice and graphite that flow to a full-bodied, concentrated, plush and seamless 2010 that is perfectly balanced, has no hard edges and an incredible finish. It's a monumental bottle of wine that will drink well at an early age, yet age effortlessly for two decades or more. Drink now-2030.

PRICE
\$145
TYPE
RED
RATING
97

Alban Vineyards 2009 Syrah Lorraine Edna Valley

Also totally brilliant, the 2009 Syrah Lorraine's Vineyard possesses incredible purity and focus with its crème de cassis, black raspberry, vanilla, spice box and licorice-styled bouquet flowing to a full-bodied, seamless wine that has no hard edges, building tannin and an overall perfect blend of richness and elegance. It's approachable now, but given the overall density, will also age effortlessly for 15+ years. Drink 2015-2024.

PRICE
\$62
TYPE
RED
RATING
98

Torrin 2010 Akasha James Berry Vineyard Paso Robles

My favorite of the lineup and a totally knockout effort that will stand toe-to-toe with the best wines of the vintage, the 2010 Akasha is 95 per cent Syrah and 5 per cent Grenache that spent 18 months in 60 per cent new French oak. Offering up incredibly pure crème de cassis, tobacco, chocolate, crushed flowers and hints of scorched earth, it flows seamlessly onto the palate with a full-bodied, massively concentrated, yet oh so fine and focused texture that's hard to beat. Still tannic and youthful, give it another handful of years in the cellar and enjoy over the following decade or longer. Drink 2015-2030.

REVIEWER

Monica Larner

Italy



PRICE
\$140
TYPE
RED
RATING
95+

Aldo Conterno 2009 Barolo Colonnello Barolo

The 2009 Barolo Colonnello is destined to occupy a special place in my heart as it turned out to be the first sample in my opening blind flight as Italian reviewer with The Wine Advocate. Darkly concentrated and rich, it sets the stage beautifully for 2009 Barolo thanks to its enormous grace, power and elegance. Where it really wins praise, however, is in the mouth. It shows solid grip and firm tannic tenacity that is bold and muscular without going over the top. It moves steadily over the palate in an exceptional manner. The bouquet opens to wild cherry, black licorice and drying notes of crushed white pepper. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2030.

PRICE
\$258-\$695
TYPE
RED
RATING
98

Dal Forno Romano 1997 Recioto Della Valpolicella

The magnum 1997 Recioto della Valpolicella is a tremendous wine that catapults you to a whole new level of intensity and is, honestly, unlike anything you will ever taste. It pours out of the bottle with inky, impenetrable blackness and the thick consistency of olive oil. Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara grapes are harvested and air-dried for up to half a year, then aged carefully in 100 per

cent French oak. The bouquet opens in slow motion. Tones of chocolate, hickory smoke, prune, cinnamon cake, prune, black plum, root beer, crushed granite and licorice have the bright intensity of primary colors on a painter's wheel. The mouth-feel is solid, thickly concentrated and delightfully sweet. The most magical aspect of the wine is how that sweetness hits your senses. It's as if you don't expect it: It creeps up on you suddenly. There is a tight tannic backbone that keeps the wine stitched firmly together. Almost indestructible, a wine like this will age longer than most. Drink 2015-2045. This wine is impenetrable, indestructible.

PRICE
\$90-\$140
TYPE
RED
RATING
97+

Fontodi 2010 Flaccianello Della Pieve Vino Da Tavola Tuscany

Now to a superstar of Italian enology: The 2010 Flaccianello della Pieve will take your breath away. This is a seriously beautiful Sangiovese-based wine with the kind of intensity and aromatic purity you only experience every 1,000 wines or so. There's a lot to say here. First, the wine's beautiful appearance shows dark garnet colors with highlights of ruby and purple gemstone. The bouquet delivers a steady and seductive evolution with dark cherry, chocolate, spice, tobacco and sweet almond all seamlessly balanced one against the other. Its

texture and inner fabric is rich, velvety and firm. There's a brilliant spot of acidity that hits you at the back of the mouth and helps the wine from feeling too heavy or dense. In fact, outstanding elegance is what ultimately sets it apart. The temptation to drink it now is huge, but those still young tannins definitely need a few more years to unwind. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2035. It is all beauty and balance.



PHOTO LISA PERROTTI-BROWN

REVIEWER

Luis Gutierrez

Spain, Chile and Argentina



PRICE
\$137
TYPE
FORTIFIED
RATING
97

González-Byass NV Fino Cuatro Palmas Jerez

The name is a little misleading here as this is so old that it is really an aged Amontillado.

The whole Palmas line-up (and the Tío Pepe en Rama) from González-Byass is outstanding, but the Cuatro Palmas is otherworldly! Averaging 40 years of age it is really an Amontillado, and a superb one. Bright amber-colored with a powerful nose of hazelnuts intermixed with some sweet-fruity notes of peaches and cherries that make it very attractive. The medium-bodied palate reveals the sharp flavor of mushrooms and damp albero in a rare balance between bitter and salty. A really great Amontillado. Drink 2013- 2022.

PRICE
\$50
TYPE
RED
RATING
97

Casa Castillo 2006 Pie Franco Jumilla

Pure Monastrell from Jumilla, from un-grafted vines planted in 1942, that combines power and elegance but at the same

time remains truly Mediterranean-style. The 2006 Pie Franco is a monumental wine. It has the complexity of a bottle-aged wine, some gameness, smoky, notes of cured meats, iron, blood, paprika

and leather, with elegant rusticity. Medium-bodied palate, laced texture, pure, clean, delineated. A wine that shows the true elegance Monastrell is capable of, and in my opinion one of the great red wines from Spain. It seems to have reached a plateau where all elements are balanced but will probably have a very long and slow evolution. It seems to be the perfect moment to drink this wine, but I'm sure it will last. Drink 2013-2023.

RAFAEL PALACIOS AT HIS O SORO VINEYARD



PHOTO LUIS GUTIERREZ

PRICE
\$131
TYPE
WHITE
RATING
95

Rafael Palacios 2011 Sorte O Soro Valdeorras

A pure Godello white from Valdeorras sourced from a single vineyard that is a breakthrough wine for Spain's table whites. The

2011 O Soro is a demanding wine. It has a reticent nose that needs time and air. Yellow, bright straw-colored. Delineated, pure, precise, with a sharp, straight nose, it takes time to start showing some notes of almonds. It's aged on the fine lees so it's very smoky and mineral, with aromatic herbs, star anise, and other balsamic notes. The palate is sharp, with clean acidity and a velvety texture, reminiscent of a white Burgundy, mineral laden and powerful. It has some tactile sensations that remind me of a top-class Chablis. It's impeccably made, with great acidity. Drink 2014-2020.



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WHEN PALATE MEETS PALETTE

A GLASS OR TWO OF WINE HAS PROVIDED CREATIVE LUBRICATION TO ARTISTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY, AND ON OCCASION FEATURED IN THEIR ENDEAVORS. **DIANA D'ARENBERG** NOMINATES EIGHT MASTERPIECES THAT CELEBRATE THE BOTTLED MUSE IN PAINT

ART AND ALCOHOL HAVE LONG enjoyed a tense relationship that has inspired creativity but also, sadly, sometimes destroyed it. There are songs dedicated to wine, poems written under its influence and countless paintings inspired by its loosening of the creative cogs. But while wine has fuelled the imaginations of many accomplished artists, it has also been the actual subject, or played a significant role, in several works of art, from religious images in chapels and churches to contemporary pieces commanding top prices at auction.

Alcohol, in fact, defined an entire era of painting in the late 19th century, when the bohemian *demimonde* of Paris ran fast and loose (remember the hollow-eyed faces of excess staring out at us in works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec). The happy marriage of art and wine, however, was perhaps best celebrated in 1945, when Baron Philippe de Rothschild began to

commission artists to design wine-bottle labels. An art collector himself, Rothschild commissioned some of the greatest modern and contemporary artists, including Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Jean Cocteau, Salvador Dalí, Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud.

Just last year, in fact, neo pop artist Jeff Koons' design for the 2010 vintage was unveiled. Currently, this is the most expensive of the Pauillac first-growth château's last 10 vintages, recently trading at more than US\$9,000 for a 12-bottle case.

And once you've filled the cellar with such fine tipples, perhaps it's time to adorn its bare walls. *Matter of Taste's* money-no-object wish list of eight wine-friendly paintings from history follows, taking in everything from the creative innovations of the 15th and 16th century Renaissance to the experimentally cubist and the boldly expressionist to the gloriously irreverent pop art of the 1960s and '70s.



Bacchus (1595) – Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, is depicted – in typical Caravaggio fashion – as less an immortal, godlike figure and all too unashamedly human and flawed in this 16th-century painting. The artist had a habit of using street urchins, tavern dwellers and friends as models, and he painted figures as they were, warts and all, introducing an element of gritty realism that earlier artists might have glossed over.

Bacchus here is represented as a seductive and tipsy youth – his fingernails dirty, his skin flushed pink and in a state of disheveled undress. A large glass of red is held out almost as an invitation to the viewer to join him, but it is an invitation to a party long over. The crown of wilting leaves that decorates his head and the basket of seen-better-days fruit allude to both the transience and impermanence of life and beauty, but also hint at the excess of the night before.

Caravaggio not only painted one of the most cited and recognized dedications to Bacchus and the sacred vine, but also imbibed more than his fair share, leading to a life plagued by bar brawls, debt and evasion of the authorities.



Self Portrait With a Bottle of Wine (1906) – **Edvard Munch**

Norwegian expressionist painter Edvard Munch was known for painting intense psychological tension and drama. His iconic composition *The Scream* – created in four distinct versions in both oils and pastels – is one of the most instantly recognizable images in art history. In May 2012, a pastel version sold for US\$119.9 million at auction.

Like many of Munch's works, this self-portrait is a representation of the artist's psyche. A solitary man sits at a table in an almost empty restaurant, conveying a feeling of loneliness and uncertainty. Frantic almost vertiginous brush strokes, and the clash of dull greens and blues with the warmer tones of yellow and red, serve to create a mood of oppression. Across from the despondent figure sit a bottle of wine and a glass – his only companions and his solace.

PHOTO GETTY IMAGES

“

While wine has fuelled the imaginations of many accomplished artists, it has also been the actual subject, or played a significant role, in several works of art, from religious images in chapels and churches to contemporary pieces commanding top prices at auction”



Grapes D.D. (1979) – **Andy Warhol**

The undisputed king of pop art, Andy Warhol was masterful at fusing art with just about everything, from celebrity and rock'n'roll to royalty, media and, pleasingly, wine. He paid tribute to the tippie with his series *Grapes D.D.* – a set of six screen-prints in multiple color combinations – that features varieties of merlot and chardonnay grapes. Warhol also designed the 1975 Mouton Rothschild label.

The Last Supper (late 15th century) – **Leonardo da Vinci**

The Last Supper was a commission from renaissance genius Leonardo da Vinci's patron, Ludovico Sforza, the duke of Milan, as part of renovations to that city's Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. The mural shows Jesus and his disciples seated on one side of a long table littered with wine glasses, plates and bread, and the figures are in animated discussion as Jesus announces that one of them will betray him. *The Last Supper* has attracted much historical and theological debate over the years, giving rise to many Holy Grail theories centered on the famed chalice that is notable by its absence in the painting.



PHOTO GETTY IMAGES



The Hangover (1889) – Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Celebrated for his vibrant depictions of the bohemian cabarets, decadent dancers and heady nightlife of Paris at the close of the 19th century, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is quoted as saying, "Of course one should not drink much, but often." With a style influenced by Japanese woodblock prints but also indebted to impressionists Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas, he produced anybody of work reflective of the times and world in which he was immersed.

Perhaps there is no more apt a title for a painting depicting the morning after a great party than *The Hangover*. Also known as *Portrait of Suzanne Valadon* (an artist in her own right – Valadon was first woman elected to the prestigious Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts), the painting depicts the subject sitting in profile and looking resignedly, a half-empty bottle of red wine and a glass before her.

La Bouteille de Vin (1926) – Pablo Picasso

A great innovator and a prolific painter, printer, sculptor and draughtsman, Spaniard Pablo Picasso contributed to several artistic movements during his lifetime. As a pioneer of cubism, he attempted to reconcile the two-dimensional with the three dimensional, resulting in many fragmented and spatially rearranged paintings. His *La Bouteille de Vin* is a textbook example.

A still life that draws inspiration from Dutch artworks of the 17th century, the painting features a bottle of wine at its center, while fruit, food, glasses and sheet music are arranged on the table. A bon vivant himself, Picasso passed away in 1973 while he and his wife Jacqueline entertained friends with dinner in the south of France. His final words were, "Drink to me, drink to my health, you know I can't drink any more."



The Drinkers (1890) – Vincent van Gogh

Troubled Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh struggled with this colorful oil-on-canvas adaptation of Honoré Daumier's black-and-white woodblock print *Physiology of the Drinker: The Four Ages*. Like the original work, the painting depicts weathered figures, this time peasants in the field rather than laborers in a tavern, drinking after a hard day's work, both to sate their thirst and to drown their sorrows. In the background, the chimneys of industry can be seen smoking, a reference to the industrial context of Daumier's original work.

The deliberate clash of nature and industry creates tension and dissonance enhanced further by Van Gogh's swirling brush strokes, distortion of form and bright colors. The painting was one of many created in the artist's manically productive year before he tragically ended his own life.

“The deliberate clash of nature and industry creates tension and dissonance enhanced further by Van Gogh's swirling brush strokes”



Still Life with Wine Bottle (1904) – Alexej von Jawlensky

A leading figure in modern art, Russian expressionist painter Alexej von Jawlensky was greatly admired for his lush and boldly colored paintings in the opening years of the 20th century. This elegant composition is, as the title suggests, a still life depicting the two necessities of the sacrament and the most basic of needs (for some) – wine and bread. Two glasses of red sit on the table in a state of abandon, as symbolized by the crumpled napkin lying beside the bottle and the chair pushed away from the table. Strangely, though the glasses are full, the bottle appears to be untouched.



MONVINIC

HIT THE SPOTS

WHEREVER WE FIND OURSELVES, THE CALL OF THE GRAPE ENHANCES ALMOST ALL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES. GARY BOWERMAN SEARCHES OUT A “DAZZLING DOZEN” OF THE WORLD’S PREMIER CITY WINE BARS

A GLASS OF WINE PAIRED WITH a cheese or cold-cut platter is the perfect way to relax after a city sightseeing tour, overseas business meeting or upon an evening arrival in a new destination. To help you prepare for your next trip, *Matter of Taste’s* selection of the world’s 12 savviest wine spots takes a journey through Asia, Europe, North and South America, with stops in Australia, South Africa and Dubai. Bon voyage!

Barcelona **MONVINIC**

Impressively once described as a “temple to connoisseurship,” Monvinic opened in 2008 near the landmark Plaza Catalunya at the north end of Las Ramblas. The daily changing menu features up to 50 global wines by the glass or half-glass from the impressive cellar, and a team of sommeliers assists guests on the best pairings with award-winning chef Sergi de Meià’s modern Catalan dishes that include wild duck fricassee with stuffed pumpkin and veal tail served with Jerusalem artichokes. Monvinic also offers a wine reference library, a venue for wine tastings, and a shop featuring thousands of bottles from across the globe. www.monvinic.com

San Francisco **THE HIDDEN VINE**

Originally opened in a small hotel near Union Station in 2005, The Hidden Vine relocated to the city’s financial district in 2011 and has been a favored haunt for San Franciscan oenophiles ever since. Located in a subtly-lit red-brick space with a homely farmhouse feel, The Hidden Vine boasts a wine list that features around 180 wines, with 40 available by the glass, and is particularly strong on Cabernets from the local

wine-producing areas. The menu of cheese plates, flatbread pizzas and charcuterie is embellished with organic ingredients from the nearby Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market. The Hidden Vine also has a wine club, and hosts tasting evenings focused on wine regions. www.thehiddenvine.com

Buenos Aires GRAN BAR DANZON

Wine and steak are two of the Argentinian capital's famed culinary attractions, and Gran Bar Danzon specializes in both for a packed house each night. Choose a table or sit at the long bar with wine and food specials marked on chalkboards, and peruse the fine selection of Champagnes, Chardonnays and Cabernet Sauvignons, although locals tend to tuck into the excellent Argentinian Malbecs and Pinot Noirs. When hunger strikes, the kitchen will prepare exquisite tenderloin carpaccio over parmesan cheese brisée pastry with truffle vinaigrette grilled portobellos, or grilled rib-eye steak with potato and chorizo cake, string beans and tomato salad. www.granbardanzon.com.ar

Cape Town OBLIVION

Popular for its youthful crowd, weekend breakfasts, leather couches and warming open fire in winter, Oblivion aims to make serious wine drinking fun and accessible. An extensive list of locally grown and global wines aside, it boasts seriously photogenic views of Table Mountain from the rooftop terrace, which was made for sundowner sipping. The menu ranges from gourmet pizzas and burgers to main plates like slow roasted lamb shank with creamy mashed potatoes, honey roasted vegetables and red wine jus, while free Wi-Fi is offered for laptop-wielding imbibers. Oblivion hosts a free Fall Wine Festival each March, showcasing a carefully curated selection of South African wine growers. www.oblivion.co.za

Shanghai LE BISTRO DU DR WINE

This rustic-chic, French-owned wine bar and bistro occupies a revamped two-floor townhouse in Shanghai's soulful former French concession. The unpretentious interior décor, with

polished wood floors, exposed brick and walls made of wine bottles, features materials salvaged from local demolition sites. Downstairs, a mixed clientele of locals and expats gathers around the rectangular wooden bar counter and in comfy leather armchairs to sip an affordably priced selection of global wines, though with a distinctive French bias, and up to six brands of Champagne. Upstairs, the moodily lit bistro serves cold-cut platters, pizzas and shucked oysters. *No website. 177 Fumin Lu, Jing'an District. Tel: +86 21 5403 5717.*

London TERROIRS

Paying homage to Parisian wine bar culture, Terroirs is located between Trafalgar Square and Covent Garden in the heart of London's West End. This split-level bar offers a carefully cultivated list featuring wines from small organic and biodynamic vineyards, mostly in France and Italy, but also Spain, Lebanon and Georgia. Also offered are eight Champagnes, plus Jerez Sherries and ciders from Normandy. At the ground-floor bar, the cooking is distinctively French, with



dishes including Alsatian sausage in lentil broth, while heartier cellar servings range from grilled Orkney scallop to Aberdeen Angus beef T-bone, roasted bone marrow and fried pommes anna. www.terroirswinebar.com

Paris O CHATEAU

A five-minute walk from the Louvre, O Chateau is an equally essential Parisian experience as the Eiffel Tower or Champs-Élysées. The wine list runs to around 500 labels, with 50 wines served in 15 different shaped Riedel glasses. Bilingual sommeliers assist guests with their wine choices and food pairing, which is an alluring part of any visit. A cordon bleu-trained head chef creates everything from cheese and charcuterie platters to *prix fixe* menus. Best of all, the low-slung, half-oval bar is a gloriously informal place to enjoy a glass of fine wine or perfectly chilled bubbles. www.o-chateau.com

Sydney VELLUTO CHAMPAGNE & WINE BAR

Few neighborhood wine bars are dressed to impress quite as decadently as Velluto. Directly opposite Fitzroy Gardens in Potts Point, Velluto's interiors reside somewhere between a boutique hotel and a period movie set, with antique furnishings, gilded mirrors and dark velvet drapes. The Champagne cellar features up to 15 labels, including a 1999 Pommery



Louise Cuvée, with five pours by the glass. The eclectic wine menu charts an intriguing journey from boutique wineries in the Loire and lower Austria to Mendoza, New South Wales and Marlborough, and an inventive cocktail menu for non-wine drinkers adds to the appeal. www.velluto.com.au

Dubai CAVE BAR

Smart and slinky, this mezzanine-level wine bar at Conrad Dubai attracts a well-heeled clientele of "see and be seen" Dubai drinkers. Designed as a contemporary take on a stone cave, it features an open-door cellar housing about 500 international wines, lounge beds, fireside armchairs and leather-padded private coves. The self-styled "Parisian soul food" cuisine offers foie gras macaroons, duck prosciutto and a pork charcuterie, and there's also a popular weekend wine brunch. Dubai's rising cachet with global wine producers means Cave is also able to host regular wine tastings with big-brand winemakers and critics. www.conraddubai.com

Florence LE VOLPI E L'UVA

Invitingly situated between the Ponte Vecchio and Pitti Palace, this atmospheric enoteca with a floor-to-ceiling display of wine bottles has satisfied the wine cravings of Florentines and visiting sightseers for nearly 20 years. Named after a fable

called *The Fox and the Grapes*, its menu offers 40 or so wines by the glass from across Italy, plus a Chablis, Bordeaux and Südtiroler Sauvignon, which can be paired with aged cheeses from France and Italy and cured meats from Tuscany. The horseshoe-shaped bar is a great place to sip a hearty Italian red and garner some "off the beaten track" Florence tips from amiable residents. www.levolpieluva.com

New York ABV

This warehouse-chic Upper East Side wine bar and craft brewery draws a hip crowd from across Manhattan. Raw brick walls, leather banquettes and giant chalkboards create an informal ambience, while more than 50 labels showcase lesser-known global wineries from around the globe. Served by the glass are six European and North American reds and whites, plus sparkling wines from the Loire, New Mexico and California. An extra boon is the culinary menu, which is as eloquent as it is appealing. Signature dishes range from yellowfin tuna crudo with spicy ginger-scallion, cucumber and black cumin seeds to fish Tacos with roasted poblano, guacamole, kimchi slaw and queso fresco. www.abvny.com

Hong Kong TASTINGS

In a city renowned for its cocktail lounges rather than its wine-bar culture, Tastings has upped the viticulture appreciation quotient since opening in 2008. Offering more than 150 labels from both Europe and the New World, it serves around 40 by the glass, half-glass or 25-millimeter "taster." Technology plays a prominent part in the experience thanks to an Enomatic wine dispenser that protects opened bottles from oxidation. The food is fun, too, with sharing plates of wine-glazed chicken drumsticks and zucchini fries with a honey mustard dip. True to its name, regular tastings are also hosted to introduce new wines to Hong Kong's resident and visiting oenophiles. www.tastings.hk



A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE TASTING!

ANECDOTES FROM THE WINE ADVOCATE'S REVIEWERS ON THE ROAD



WHEN IN ROME *with Monica Larner*

"A box of wine samples was mistakenly delivered to my neighbor in Rome. He dresses up as a gladiator each morning to pose for photos with tourists in front of the Forum. The incarnation of Spartacus – hairy legs, strappy leather sandals, metallic chest plate and helmet with nose guard – showed up unexpectedly at my front door. 'Do these belong to you?' he asked, handing over the missing package. And with a flip of his red velvet cape, he was on his way."

LOST IN TRANSLATION *with Lisa Perrotti-Brown*

"Travelling around some of the far-flung wine markets and producing regions of Asia, with me speaking just a smattering of the local languages,

has resulted in some comical misunderstandings. Once I was at a trade fair in China and I walked up to a Chinese winery's booth requesting to taste their wine. The representative told me they had no wine to taste. I pointed to a bottle of their wine on the stand and asked, 'What about that one?' I was told it was just for display. Patiently I explained I was a critic and needed to taste a wine to review it. The rep then seemed to understand and went away, returning minutes later with a full glass. Sampling the wine I said suspiciously, 'This smells and tastes like Australian Shiraz,' to which the rep retorted, 'It's a wine!'

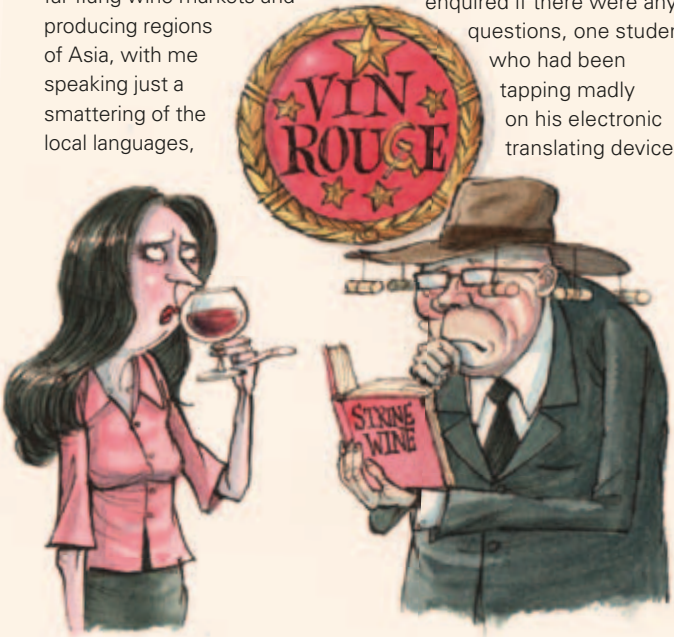
raised his hand and asked, 'So does this fault only affect wines that are discounted in stores?'"



KING OF THE CASTLE *with Luis Gutierrez*

"I asked the Consejo Regulador (Regulatory Council) of the Monterrei appellation in Spain's Galicia to help me set up a tasting of the wines from their wineries. They have offices and they usually have a tasting room but unfortunately they had just opened a brand new restaurant in their building, and their tasting room had a permanent smell from the kitchen. So they told me not to worry – they had another place, which ended up being the tower of the 12th-century Monterrei Castle! Of course, there was no double-glazing, air conditioning or central heating when they built the ancient structure, so I really experienced tasting the wines at room temperature – the room temperature of a medieval castle!"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY HARRISON



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