

Book and Film Reviews

Author, Title

Book

Reviewer

Madeline Puckette and Justin Hammack

Wine Folly: The Master Guide

Joseph P. Newhouse

Gerard Basset

*Tasting Victory: The Life and Wines of the World's Favourite
Sommelier*

Nick Vink

Kevin Zraly

*Windows on the World Complete Wine Course:
Revised & Updated*

Roman L. Weil

Film

Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw (Directors)

The Truffle Hunters

Kenneth Shepsle

MADELINE PUCKETTE and JUSTIN HAMMACK: *Wine Folly: The Master Guide*. Avery - A Penguin Imprint, New York, NY, 2018, 320 pp., ISBN 978-0525533894 (hardcover), \$35.00.

This lavishly produced book, which won the 2019 James Beard Award in the beverage category, assumes no prior knowledge about wine and thus is aimed at persons who do not regard themselves as wine experts. Its language is clear and readable, and its graphics are numerous, impressive, and informative. Even those who, like the readers of this journal, regard themselves as having a good deal of expertise will likely find things they did not know.

The book is organized into four main sections plus a short glossary and a list of references. The first section entitled “Wine Basics” covers how wine is made, as well as how to taste it, serve it, and store it. A short second section covers pairing with food, although the third section, which describes 86 grapes and 14 wines, also has a considerable amount of information on pairing. The final substantive section covers the geography of wine in 14 major producing countries.

The first section covers five traits of wine, beginning with body. It ranks 47 red wine grapes, from Brachetto as the lightest to Zinfandel as the richest. Similarly, it ranks body among 39 white wine grapes from Melon to Chardonnay, five sparkling wines, and nine dessert wines. It also notes the interactions of the other four traits with body.

The second trait is sweetness, where the authors distinguish five levels of sweetness for still wines and seven for sparkling wines, noting that although sweetness is measured as grams of residual sugar per liter, that measure is not well correlated with one's perception of sweetness because of the interaction of the other traits with how sweet a wine tastes.

The third trait is tannin, or the polyphenols, found in the grape skins and seeds and in wooden barrels. The authors point out that the health benefits of wine come from tannin, but that wines higher in tannin will taste more bitter; they also rank 44 grapes in their tannin level.

Fourth, they consider acidity, ranking types of wine on a pH scale, with whites generally having higher acidity (lower pH) than reds. Higher acidity wines are lighter bodied and taste less sweet.

The final trait is alcohol or the ethanol level, which is typically 12–15% but can range from 5 to 22%.

Included in the first section's advice on how to taste wine is a detailed chart on aromas, which lists nine primary aromas, such as black fruit, red fruit, dried fruit, etc., with each of the nine primary aromas subdivided into more specific aromas. For example, the "black fruit" category lists within it seven fruit aromas such as black cherry, blueberry, and boysenberry. In addition to the nine primary aromas, the chart lists 14 secondary and 13 tertiary aromas. Readers are encouraged to write which of these aromas they detect when tasting wine. The first section also includes brief notes about serving and storing wine as well as how wine is made.

In addition to its information on pairings of food and wine, the second section contains brief notes on cooking with wine.

The long third section contains descriptions of 100 common wines, grapes, and blends, including tasting notes and food pairing suggestions. It uses the five traits described in the first section, ranking each of the 100 wines or grapes on a one-to-five scale for each trait. It also gives information on aromas of each of the 100 wines and grapes; my favorite was cat pee for sauvignon blanc. It offers advice on the type of glass to use to serve the wine, the temperature at which to serve it, and whether it should be decanted. There is a circular bar chart for each wine showing where it is grown and the worldwide acreage devoted to it, as well as similar varietals that one might wish to try. In several places, the book helpfully includes suggested pronunciations.

The final section—on the major wine-producing countries—has a map for each of 14 countries, showing its various grape-growing regions and the type of grape

grown in each region. For each country, it has notes on several of its wines. The notes are more extensive for some of the countries than for others. They are especially extensive for France, giving as much space to each of its wine regions as several of the other countries; there are also extensive notes for Italy, Spain, and the United States.

My only criticism of the book, which is picky, is its title. If one just came across the book while browsing and looked at its title, one might think the book was an effort to dissuade people from drinking wine. The subtitle—"A Master Guide"—belies that interpretation but could easily go unnoticed since it is in a much smaller font. The authors operate an online website and store with the same name, so perhaps naming the book after the website is an effort to publicize the store. Not surprisingly, one can buy the book at the store.

Readers of this journal may want this book for themselves, particularly for its material on less well-known wines and grapes, or as a gift for a friend or colleague who is less knowledgeable about wine but interested in learning more.

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GERARD BASSET. *Tasting Victory: The Life and Wines of the World's Favourite Sommelier*. London, Unbound, 2020, 256 pp., ISBN 978-1-78352-861-5 (ebook), \$17.99.

The publisher of this book is the first crowdfunded publisher in existence.¹ How this works is that they place books they believe are worthy on their website and invite people to pledge funding in return for small rewards—free and/or signed copies of the book, your name printed in the book as a supporter, etc. At the time of writing this review, the publisher was celebrating 10 years of existence, with 476 published books and about half that number of active projects.

According to the publication *Drinks International*, crowdfunding for Gerard Basset's memoirs was spearheaded by Jancis Robinson, and the target was to raise some £14,000.² The exercise was obviously successful because it raised more than twice this amount before the book was published in early 2020. It is now out of

¹<https://unbound.com/>

²https://drinksint.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/8142/Gerard_Basset_dies.html