

Hugh Johnson and Margaret Rand: *Hugh Johnson's Pocket Wine Book 2022*

Mitchell Beazley and Octopus Publishing, London, 2022, 336 pp., ISBN 978-1784727963, \$14.99.

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If you are a certifiable wine geek, with multiple volumes by Jancis Robinson and Robert Parker lining your bookshelves, back issues of *The Wine Advocate* filed chronologically in binders, and a cellar-tracking spreadsheet occupying space on your hard drive, you can probably do without the latest edition of the *Pocket Wine Book*. But if you are someone with a healthy interest in food and wine—either a neophyte beginning to discover the joys of the grape or a curious but less-than-fully obsessed oenophile—you will benefit from owning a copy.

First published in 1977, the 2022 version follows the same format as its predecessors. You will need a rather large pocket to accommodate the book at this point, as this once-slim volume has swelled to more than 300 pages of very small print. Its creator, Hugh Johnson, has turned the editorial reins over to experienced wine writer Margaret Rand, and 2022 marks the first edition produced entirely under her direction. The general approach and overall structure of the book remain unchanged, however, and Johnson's guiding philosophy—that wine should be enjoyed as much as studied—remains intact.

As in past years, the book begins with a quick recap of “The Year in Wine,” noting the chief events and characteristics of the most recent vintage (2020 in this edition). Rand and Johnson each contribute brief introductory essays and spotlight “Ten Wines to Try for 2022.” Next comes a succinct summary of the principal grape varieties and a section offering advice for pairing wine and food.

The bulk of the *Pocket Wine Book* is a survey of the world's wines by country or region, containing brief entries on principal styles, varietals, and noteworthy producers. No single volume could include every significant winemaker, of course, but the number of wines and wineries cataloged here is still impressive. A simple notation system gives the reader plenty of useful information about each wine, including which vintages were especially successful for a given property, which years are now deemed ready for drinking, and which wines provide good value within a given price range. Openly dismissing the 100-point rating system used by Robert Parker and others—a decision one can only applaud—the *Pocket Wine Book* rates each wine from 1 star (“plain, everyday quality”) to 4 stars (“outstanding, compelling”). The rankings reflect the contributors' preference for balance, freshness, and uniqueness over power, extraction, or oak, in line with current wine-making trends.

France still receives the greatest attention in this edition, with 61 pages devoted to its wines (plus a separate 22 pages on Bordeaux). Italy ranks second (31 pages) and

the United States comes in third (29). Even so, the book's 32 far-flung contributors have made an admirable effort to keep track of what is happening nearly everywhere fine wine is grown. If you are ever dining in Malta and find yourself confronted by a cellar list of local producers, the *Pocket Wine Book* would be your friend. Rand ends the volume with a bracing essay on "the ten best things about wine right now," and her upbeat assessment may encourage you to reach for your corkscrew and pour a glass in celebration.

For some readers, the most useful section of the book will be its recommendations for matching wine with a wide range of foods. Based on a lifetime of sipping and tasting, Johnson's opinions are firm but not dogmatic (apart from a stern warning that "watercress makes every wine on earth taste revolting" (p. 34). Even if my own tastes occasionally diverge from his, I have found his advice to be sound across a wide range of main ingredients, cuisines, herbs, spices, and cheeses. Above all, Johnson wants the marriage of food and wine to be free from anxiety. As Johnson wrote in the 2021 edition: "Matching wine and food matters, but don't get hung up on it."

That pragmatic, hedonic philosophy neatly captures the book's enduring appeal. Some writers make appreciating wine seem like hard work; Johnson and now Rand remind us that it is fundamentally about pleasure. Knowing more about the wines we drink, when to pull the cork, and how to pair them with food enhances our enjoyment, and being able to allocate one's wine budget intelligently is a useful skill. The *Pocket Wine Guide* can help you do all of these things, which is why I have ordered a copy for my two millennial children. I cannot think of a better endorsement than that.

Reference

Johnson, H. (2021). *Hugh Johnson's Pocket Wine Book 2021*. London: Mitchell Beazley and Octopus Publishing.

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Steven Spurrier: *A Life in Wine*

Académie du Vin Library, Ascot, Berkshire, United Kingdom, 2020, 288 pp., ISBN 978-1913141073, \$45.00.

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A second viewing of *Mondovino* (Lima and Schroder, 2009) and an obituary in the *New York Times* (Asimov, 2021) piqued our interest in the man behind the