

that compendium includes a concordance table linking its regional names with those used in the *Atlas*.

Unsurprisingly, France still fills the first 100 pages. It is followed by Italy (35 pages), Germany (25), Spain (20), Portugal (15), and the rest of Europe (40). Thus, the so-called Old World comprises two-thirds of the map pages—which is almost exactly their share of global wine production and exports. The New World (North America, South America, Australia/New Zealand, and South Africa) make up the next 100 pages, and Asia (Japan and China) is given 6 pages and 5 maps. The final 25 pages contain a very detailed index and a Gazetteer to help the reader find, for example, the map with their favorite chateau.

## References

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## André Hueston Mack. *99 Bottles: A Black Sheep's Guide to Life-Changing Wines*

Abrams Image, New York, 2019, 255 pp., ISBN 978-1-4197-3457-1, \$24.99.

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André Mack's career path is highly unusual: a Black child born into a military family who became a waiter/wine server/sommelier at two good restaurants in San Antonio, a sommelier at two of the best restaurants in the world—the French Laundry in Yountville, California, and Per Se in New York City—and then the founding owner/winemaker of Maison Noir, an Oregon winery.

The cover of *99 Bottles* advertises it as an “entertaining, unconventional wine guide,” but the book really is more of an autobiography—the author's account of his unique career path told through 99 vignettes of two to four pages each about events along this journey. The book is a wine guide only in the sense that each vignette involves some beverage—usually wine, but sometimes bottled water, juice,

beer/ale/malt liquor, or distilled spirits. Most vignettes describe the beverage associated with the event, but often this description is brief and not an important part of the story. In many cases, the beverage is simply a member of the vignette's supporting cast.

The book is organized into an introduction and six chapters. Each chapter corresponds to a stage of the author's career. The first covers Mack's college years (finding a career). Then one chapter is devoted to each of the four restaurants in which the author worked as a waiter and/or sommelier. The last chapter recounts his life as a winery owner.

The introduction sets the stage by first harshly criticizing other wine guides for being pretentious and pedantic, then explaining the author's belief that appreciation for wine (as well as other beverages) is strongly affected by personal experiences, both good and bad, that are associated with encountering it. This belief explains why the chapters are organized around stops along the author's career path and why each vignette integrates a story about an event in the author's life with the characteristics of a beverage that was part of the event.

Each vignette is infused with information about the beverage associated with the event. Each vignette also includes a "flash card" with a few words that describe the taste of the associated beverage and a recommended pairing. The taste descriptions are simple and sometimes are jokes. In nearly all cases, the "pairing" in the flash card is not with food but with an event: watching a specific movie or TV show, listening to a particular recording, or attending a type of gathering. Some (but not nearly all) vignettes include a paragraph set aside in a box entitled "What Is X" (where X is the beverage in the vignette). While these boxes contain a bit more information about the featured wines, in most cases, the additional information in the text and boxes is disjointed and incomplete.

For example, the second vignette is about the author's first job, selling cheap cologne in a parking lot. After his first sale, Mack treated himself to Boone's Farm Apple Wine. The taste is described as Kool-Aid, and the pairing as "joyriding in a 1992 Ford Mustang GT 5.0 listening to Houston's own Geto Boys" (p. 2). The text of the vignette states that "Boone's Farm wasn't good" but was better than "other kinds of cheap malt liquor" because "its primary attribute is sweetness" which "works for a lot of people..." (p. 17)—that is, Boone's Farm is in the book because it is pleasantly associated with his first successful stab at holding a job.

At the other end of the quality scale is 1983 Chateau Margaux, which the author describes as "the best wine I have ever had" (p. 162). The taste description is "Sandalwood, wet dirt, and crème de cassis," and the recommended pairing is "Meeting your girlfriend's parents for the first time" (p. 163). The "What Is" insert states that Margaux is a commune in Haut-Médoc, that the area is known for its great terroir, that the wines from the commune are known for being "elegant and sensual" (p. 163), that Chateau Margaux is the best winery in the commune, and that Chateau Margaux is made primarily from cabernet sauvignon and merlot. The text in the rest of the vignette explains that 1982 is regarded as a better year in Bordeaux but that at Chateau Margaux, 1983 was the best vintage ever. The author concludes from this anomaly that classifying a wine as great is subjective so that "your favorite wine does not need to match the general consensus" (p. 163).

Some vignettes discuss the challenges of assembling a wine list for a high-end restaurant, which separates a sommelier from a good wine server. For example, the entry for Chablis from Domaine François Raveneau reveals how the author built a wine list at Bohannon's in San Antonio. Mack began by examining wine lists at great restaurants around the nation. This exercise revealed that every list included a Raveneau Chablis. Further research revealed that Raveneau was the benchmark against which all Chablis wines were evaluated. When Mack first tastes a Raveneau, he finds "unparalleled minerality – flinty notes that bring you to your knees...." (p. 52). He then discovers that Raveneau wines are difficult to obtain. To receive an allocation, he is forced to buy other wines from the same distributor. Thus, Raveneau is included in the book in part because it is a great winery but also because it taught him an important lesson about the wholesale wine market. And, to accommodate the length restriction for a vignette, the fact that Raveneau makes wines from several vineyards of differing attributes and status is never mentioned but implied only by the fact that the wine that is pictured is from Montée de Tonnerre.

My overall assessment of the book is that the vignettes are often interesting and occasionally humorous, but unfortunately do not add up to a coherent book. The author's total commitment to the proposition that wine preferences are derived from the circumstances in which a wine is consumed leads to a disjointed, haphazard overview of wines. *99 Bottles* is not a wine guide if you have not had the same life experiences as the author, which, of course, nobody has. For the same reason, the book is also not an account of the travails of being a sommelier at two of the world's best restaurants. That is, *99 Bottles* is not the counterpart for sommeliers to Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential* (2000) for chefs, because it is not organized around the tasks of managing an extensive wine list and the skills and education that are required to become a master sommelier. For someone knowledgeable about wines, the value of the book is that many of the vignettes are entertaining to read, even if they convey no useful information about the wines that they discuss.

## Reference

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