

KEVIN ZRALY. *Windows on the World Complete Wine Course: Revised & Updated*, 35th ed. Sterling Epicure, New York, NY, 2021, 464 pp., ISBN-13: 978-1454942177 (hardcover), \$35.00.

My first draft of this review elicited a colleague's comment that I should not go to the corner occupied by the Grumpy Economist, which is already covered, so I will take on the mantle of the Honest Oenonomist. While this book is neither "complete" nor solely a "course," it has merit as a reference book and a coffee table showpiece.

Here, the book does well. It has a first-rate index, contains an entertaining 43-page personal history of the author's involvement with wine, includes a first-course lesson/chapter, which provides 28 well-done pages about grapes, weather, fermentation, wine chemistry, aging, bottles,¹ glasses, and wine labels. Three of those pages show striking photographs. This recurring theme—pages devoted to photographs, not to teaching nor to reference material—contributes to coffee table status. In my opinion, the best teaching material in the book is the 19.5 pages devoted to the physiology and biology of taste and smell.

After its introduction, the book provides more course lessons: Prelude, America, France, Spain, Italy, Australia/New Zealand, South America, Germany, Sparkling, Fortified, Other Countries, and Quiz questions on the preceding chapters.

In the classroom, many of us "teach to the test." So, a sample of Mr. Zraly's quiz questions gives a flavor of what the course teaches. Name the ten top states in wine consumption per capita [in the U.S.]. Name one chateau from each of the five growths [of Bordeaux]. What are the three most important white wine villages in the Cote de Beaune? Name the four different quality levels of Chianti. What were the first grapes planted in Argentina? What are the three major types of Champagne?

Why do I find that the book functions best as a reference/coffee table book rather than a text to accompany a course? As one example, the 24 pages of the chapter on French red wines and Bordeaux includes 6 pages of attractive photographs. Another two pages list the names of the 1855 classified growths. All in all, I found that 40% of the material in the chapter is reference material. Where does this leave me? With 55% of the overall book allocated to pictures and reference, only 45% provides course teaching. Even as a reference book, it sometimes behaves strangely. Suppose you want to know what foods go well with chardonnay. The index directs you to pages: 96, 245, 334, and 347. Page 96 recommends oysters, crab, trout, and salmon, while the last of these favors sirloin steak.

¹ I did not go looking for errors, but I spotted some anyway. Mr. Zraly tells us (pp. 24–25) that a Jeroboam contains four regular-sized (.750 liter) bottles of wine. It fails to note that, while that is true for Burgundy, often in Bordeaux, it holds six. Michael Broadbent, cited as a contributor to *Decanter* magazine (p. 349), died six months before the publication date of the book, which is noted on page 344.

Let's look at another chapter. The one on Sparkling wines caught my eye. This chapter does a good job teaching about the locales in Champagne, the Méthode Champenoise, and different styles of Champagne while providing a taxonomy of twenty-five well-known houses classified from light-delicate to full and rich.

How many Champagne labels can you name? I cannot get to 10. Did you know there are thousands? I first read about Champagne in Michael Broadbent's (1980) *Great Vintage Wine Book* in the 1980s and decided that if Winston Churchill liked Pol Roger, that was good enough for me. I could not tell the taste difference, but I bought it and liked it. It was only years later that I learned from Gary Westby of K&L Wine Merchants that no-name labels could taste as good as famous ones. The book says that there are "more than 260 Champagne houses," and the pie chart on the same page implies that those houses comprise 80% of the total number, so there must be about 325. Where are the thousands of other labels? I assume that Champagne labels and growers differ, but the course does not offer an explanation.

Horizontal and vertical comparisons of wines are familiar to readers of this *Journal*. The book recommends at least three such comparisons of two or more wines in each chapter, but not one suggests a "triangle test," which has become standard in the testing/tasting world (Weil, 2007). Mr. Zraly may not prefer such tests, but should not a complete course alert readers to their existence and merits (or demerits)?

Readers of this *Journal* will be interested to know that the course omits oenometric research findings from its teachings. There is a discussion of the effects of weather on wine, but there is no mention of the now-classic work of Ashenfelter and others using auction prices to identify the relationship between weather and wine quality (Ashenfelter, 2010). Elsewhere, the course discusses wine words and descriptors but does not question whether anyone can reliably describe, then replicate, wine tastes and smells (Lehrer, 2009). The book also describes and illustrates the steepness of the growing hills in Germany, but unfortunately does not mention the analysis, which has estimated the degree days hitting the grapes on those hillsides as a function of the steepness and orientation of the hillsides, and then has related the degree days to the higher prices the wines fetch, and hence the higher quality of the wine (Ashenfelter and Storchmann, 2010). I do not know whether Mr. Zraly is unaware of oenometric research or whether he finds it irrelevant. I will not speculate, as I am trying not to be grumpy.

Based upon many discussions over the years with oenophiles and with those who have relatively little interest in wine, here are just a few questions I believe ought to be addressed in a course about wine (but are not in this book). How do I deal with wine in a restaurant? What should I do when the waiter hands me the cork?² What do I do

²In the past, because unscrupulous restaurateurs were putting fake labels on cheap wines, reputable wine-makers began to brand their corks to cut down on such counterfeiting. Hence, the server would open the bottle in front of the customer and hand over the cork for inspection. Where the mythology around sniffing

if I do not like the wine? Should I buy and lay down wine? Or buy later at auction? What should I know about cost-effective home wine storage?

An advantage of this book's being revised annually is that you can buy recent editions on the used book market (e.g., at www.abebooks.com) for about half the cost of the latest edition. You will still get most of the good stuff the 35th edition offers. On the other hand, if you want a solid, inexpensive reference book, I recommend early editions of Jancis Robinson's (2006) *Oxford Companion to Wine*.

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MICHAEL DWECK and GREGORY KERSHAW (Directors). *The Truffle Hunters*. Written by Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw. Produced by Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw. Distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, 2021, 1 h 24 min.

Nominally, *The Truffle Hunters* is a film about the search for an elusive, bulbous fungus for which foodie connoisseurs are prepared to pay astronomical prices. The highly prized white truffle, or Alba truffle, is found in the forests of Piedmont. (The black, or Périgord, truffle is found, and increasingly cultivated, in southwestern France and is less highly prized, but not exactly chopped liver.)¹ The truffle, itself,

the cork arose, we do not know, but page xiii of the book features a photo of a young Kevin Zraly pretending to smell a cork. The photo appears to be posed, so we can hope he knew better.

¹ According to Danilo Alfara, in a highly informative article, the truffle botanically is a species of mushroom. See <https://www.thespruceeats.com/what-are-truffles-5179896>.