

## Book Reviews

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ELIN McCOY: *The Emperor of Wine. The Rise of Robert M. Parker, Jr. and the Reign of American Taste*. Ecco, New York, 2005, 352 pp., ISBN 978-0060093684, \$25.95

Few, if any, personalities can rival the dominance exerted by Robert M. Parker, Jr. in his field today. Like Tiger Woods and Bill Gates, he occupies the rarefied air of the modern superstar. Superstardom has its price, however. His many accolades notwithstanding, his work has been punctuated over the years by outraged winemakers, defamation lawsuits, canine attacks, and even death threats.

Elin McCoy, a long-time wine writer and editor of *Food and Wine* magazine, skillfully weaves these and other tales into the first biography of the man whose career has been defined by all things vinous. Her thoroughly researched account includes many interviews with subjects spanning the chain from wine producers to final consumers, including Parker himself. The result is a highly informative book that reads like a novel.

While Parker remains the central figure, the story is embedded within the context of a global wine revolution. It is marked by the emergence of robust consumer and producer markets in the U.S., growing importance of New World production, and the relative decline of French consumption and production. As the author tells it, the long arm of Parker's influence may not have spawned the revolution, but it propelled and helped shape it into what it is today.

The book makes two main contributions. It outlines the developmental path that led to Parker's career in wine, and it marks the many ways his power has impacted the field.

Wine enthusiasts know that Parker is a towering figure and often a polarizing one. Few lack an opinion (often strong ones) about the man. Yet, the author does an admirable job in treating her subject even-handedly. Her approach is to let the facts and experiences of others tell the tale.

While not deeply psychological, the portrait lends readers useful insights about the development, motivations, and self-image of her subject. Raised in small town Maryland, he became the first from his family to earn a professional degree. As with many American families in the 1950s and 1960s, Parker grew up with soft drinks – not wine – at the dinner table. His first real exposure to wines came as a college student, when he followed his sweetheart (now wife) to France on vacation. This experience sprung his passion for wines, and he quickly immersed himself through extensive reading, forming tasting groups, and taking wine vacations. This process improved his knowledge and educated his palate.

Then in 1977, while working as a lawyer, he made a life-altering decision to launch a wine newsletter, the *Baltimore-Washington Wine Advocate* (later, the regional focus was dropped). The newsletter became a platform for wine reviews and his philosophy on wines, and contrasted with wine writers of the day with its energetic, unvarnished wine descriptions. Influenced by Ralph Nader, he saw himself as a consumer advocate for wine drinkers. At the time, it was common for wine critics to receive free wines, lavish dinners, travel packages, and payment from winemakers and distributors – a clear conflict of interest. Parker saw himself as offering a fresh perspective, unencumbered by commercial obligations, and a promise to “call them like I see them.” He has never accepted gifts or compensation from vested interests. While he has his share of detractors, few question his objectivity and outspoken willingness to declare his impressions of wines.

An early defining moment came with Parker's reviews of the 1982 Bordeaux vintage. Still a lawyer, he had not yet found widespread acclaim as a wine critic. Numerous American and European wine writers were more popular and successful. Upon returning home from

barrel tastings in Bordeaux in early 1983, Parker could scarcely contain his enthusiasm for what we saw as one of the greatest vintages in memory. His gushing assessment of the vintage in the newsletter urged consumers to buy as much as they could afford of what he called “wines destined for greatness.” The established wine writers were more reserved – the vintage would be a good one, but lacked the sophistication of 1981 and may not be age-worthy. Parker was floored at hearing these critiques, and thought that “they don’t know what they’re talking about.” As he continued to extol the ‘82s, often with vividly descriptive, almost over-the-top exuberance, he gained the attention of American wine distributors, merchants, and consumers. Retailers in particular realized that his reviews pumped up the interest of American consumers, which was very good for business. His direct style and 100-point rating scale made wines accessible to the masses that previously ignored them, thereby expanding the market. In essence, Parker put his reputation on the line with the 1982 vintage, which in retrospect, has attained greatness, as has its biggest supporter. The missed call of the same vintage by other wine writers, most notably Robert Finigan, marked the beginning of their decline. The vintage won him enough readers that by 1984, he retired from law in order to devote his full energy to wine writing.

The second key contribution of the book is its discussion of his impact on the wine world. This topic is controversial. His supporters claim Parker has wielded profoundly favorable effects on the quality of wine production worldwide, on the growth of the American wine market, and on the pleasurable enjoyment of wine consumption everywhere.

He long has railed against the use of underripe grapes that can result in excessively acidic and vegetal wines, and against filtration of wines that may strip away flavor and character. His penchant for exposing underperforming wineries has likely forced greater accountability; producers can no longer rely on their reputations and expect continued success. By most accounts, the rising quality of wine is attributable in part to these efforts.

Likewise, the American market for wines has grown rapidly during Parker’s reign. This surely has many roots, including his influence. While his predecessors wrote in restrained, somewhat stuffy styles, his colloquial, excitable reviews and simple scoring system welcomed newcomers to the wine experience. McCoy points out that his “muscular” lexicon, using terms as “massive”, “aggressive”, “potent”, and “prodigious”, may have the effect of making wine consumption more acceptable to American men, who may previously have viewed it as an effete practice. And Parker consistently has emphasized that wine should be a pleasurable sensory experience, which heightens its appeal to average consumers.

His opponents see his influence as more pernicious. They charge that Parker has simply grown too influential, such that his opinions hold excessive sway over the entire global wine trade. His disapproval or ignorance of a wine, a region, or a vintage can severely depress sales, and translate into millions in lost revenues. Conversely, his raves and 90+ scores for newly “discovered” wines, can transform a struggling operation into an overnight sensation. Distributors and retailers jockey to obtain the limited supply of anointed wines, knowing that favorable Parker reviews dramatically boost sales and revenues. Leading auction

houses as Christie's indicate that Parker's ratings directly affect prices, and essentially are the only ones that matter. Upon publication, his reviews consistently sway markets in New York, Paris, and Tokyo. This power has earned him the derisive nickname Wine Dictator.

Part of the critique maintains that Parker's outsized influence results in a homogenization of wine styles. It is widely acknowledged (including by Parker himself) that his tastes favor the bold, fruity, and concentrated wines that have proliferated in the last 20 years or so. Winemakers seeking to appease a market defined largely by Parker increasingly are shaping their wines ("Parkerizing" them) to suit his tastes, in hopes of earning a high score to propel sales. Even a growing number of vintners in tradition-steeped regions as Bordeaux and the Piedmont are playing the game. Those who resist the tide may see their market shares decline and their survival endangered. The 2004 film "Mondovino" poignantly captured this dynamic and deplored the loss of diversity of wine styles. Wines that show finesse and terroir – a unique reflection of the soil, the sun, the weather, and legacy of the particular place where the grapes are grown – are waning as legions of wine drinkers seek jammy, hedonistic blockbusters.

For these and other reasons, the French in particular have a love-hate relationship with Parker. Many French wine insiders tend to be the most vehement of Parker-bashers. Yet he is also revered as an avid promoter and lover of great French wines and estates. This latter point was fully acknowledged when President Francois Mitterrand awarded the nation's greatest prize, the Legion of Honor, to Parker in 1999. This relationship with the French highlights the complexity of capturing the full reality of the Parker phenomenon.

In many instances, it would have been helpful to include footnotes to document assertions made by the author. From an economist's perspective, more complete analytic evidence of Parker's market power would have been more satisfying, as McCoy's statements on that topic are anecdotal in nature. Research on the subject would be a welcome addition to future editions of this journal. One, perhaps inadvertent, feature of Parker's 100-point scale is that it readily lends itself to quantitative analysis of wines and vintages. This quantification of "sensory" wine characteristics contrasts with the assessment of "objective" ones (e.g., vintage, weather, appellations, etc.), yet it is likely that both types of information can help explain the dynamics of wine markets. In some cases, objective characteristics have shown remarkable explanatory power, including predicting vintage quality in Bordeaux (see Ashenfelter's Working Paper on the AAWE's website). Other work highlights Parker's scores' (sensory data) direct influence on the price of wine futures (see the Working Paper by Ali et al. on the AAWE's website).

All told, *The Emperor of Wine* paints a rich picture while avoiding an academic style in order to appeal to a broad readership. It represents an important new treatise in the field. Any wine lover would benefit from reading it, and should enhance the experience by savoring a favorite bottle to aid in contemplation of the man who changed the course of the modern wine world.

Mark Heil  
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<sup>1</sup>The views expressed in this review are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EPA.

JOHN HAILMAN: *Thomas Jefferson on wine*. University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2006, 457 pp., ISBN 1-57806-841-X, \$38.

This fascinating book chronicles the evolution of Thomas Jefferson's love and appreciation of fine wine. As such, the text is divided into the following relevant content areas: Jefferson's introduction to oenologic pursuits, judged to be somewhere in his twenties; his attempts, without much real success, to develop vineyards at Monticello when he was only 27 years old; his first wine trip to France, where he lived between 1784 and 1788; the stocking of his Paris wine cellar, between 1787 and 1788; his touring and tasting in the vineyards of the Rhine, the Mosel, and Champagne (1788–1789); his return to America (1789–1800); the wines he served as the third U.S. President (1801–1809); and his retirement years at Monticello between 1809–1826.

A central theme that permeates the pages of this book is how remarkably well Jefferson's oenological pursuits foreshadowed much more recent events. Thus, Hailman notes (p. 3) that "Jefferson's letters about wine, in the scope and variety of their curiosity, read remarkably like a Robert Parker newsletter or Wine Spectator article." Jefferson wrote a manuscript for use in Connecticut, Vermont, and New York, this during the early 1790's. He used a three tiered rating system (Good; Middling; Bad) that is considered today as a precursor to the much later development of the French Michelin in 1900.

Of much more oenologic interest, it is quite remarkable that in 1787, nearly 7 decades prior to the famous 1855 French Classification of Bordeaux First Growths, Thomas Jefferson classified the same four châteaux as such, namely, Château Margaux, Château Latour, Château Haut-Brion, and Château Lafitte-Rothschild! It is of historic note that Madeira was the most beloved of wines during Jefferson's era, with the Founding Fathers considering it their wine of choice. In fact, it was for a time considered patriotic to drink the famed Portuguese fortified wine in order to avoid having to pay taxes to the British Crown!

Continuing on the Bordeaux theme, in 1787, and over a span of a mere four day period, Jefferson wrote a comprehensive evaluation of the wines of Bordeaux, a document that is still cited and quoted as an authoritative guide to the French wine trade at that time.

Well beyond this oenologic prowess, Heilman, as well as other independent authors, provide historical data that depicts Thomas Jefferson as one who easily meets criterion as a multi-faceted Renaissance man whose skills and knowledge covered many diverse fields of inquiry. Thus Jefferson, at various periods in his life, served in the roles of architect, paleontologist, and linguist (he began studying Latin, Greek, and French when he was but nine years of age; and he was, as an adult, fluent in both spoken and written French). He was also an author, inventor, horticulturist, and musician (he was the "best fiddler and finest violinist in Virginia" – p. 14).

It is in such a comprehensive backdrop that we also begin to understand and appreciate Jefferson's commanding knowledge and enjoyment of wines from throughout the world. As Hailman notes "Jefferson became the foremost wine expert of his time, while holding

the most demanding public offices, because he was unique in his energy, talent, and ability to concentrate.” It is also noteworthy that the famous Monticello Vineyards in Napa Valley, California was modeled after Jefferson’s ideas, and produces Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs, Cabernets, and late-harvest wines that he was never able to grow successfully in Monticello, Virginia. All this said, Hailman, quite a wine connoisseur himself, describes the current 1999 Sangiovese Monticello as an “excellent” wine produced by the Italian winemaker Gabrielle Rausse in Jefferson’s home state.

During his long and very productive life, Jefferson stocked three wine cellars, one in Monticello, another in Paris, and a third in Philadelphia. He was a generous and convivial host who served the very best of wines to accompany gourmet food. He was also the inventor of three dumbwaiters, one of which, in *Lazy Susan* fashion, enabled the dirty dinnerware and glassware to immediately reach the waiting hands of kitchen staff, this to avoid the uneasiness of guests who desired to share stories that were not meant for others outside the circle of friends and colleagues to hear.

Lest one believe that Jefferson’s taste was more or less limited to French wines, it is important to stress that he also had a commanding knowledge of major grape varieties in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Jefferson’s favorite Italian wine was Montepulciano. Jefferson also lauded the carignane grape that has recently come into its own as the carignano varietal. The grape has its historical roots in Sardinia when this Italian island was a colony of the ancient Phoenicians, who then referred to native Sardinians as *Shardana*.

It is important to note, as Hailman reminds us, that during Jefferson’s era there were, in fact, no opera houses, theaters, or other such modern cultural institutions, ones that are so much an integral part of social life the world over. And so, fine wines, good dinners, and spirited conversations were the center of communal activities at that time.

It is fascinating to become acquainted with the somewhat arcane terminology that was used to order large quantities of wine during Jefferson’s era. Perhaps the most interesting was the so called pipe of wine that translated into a 110 gallon barrel which is the equivalent of 550 standard 750 ml bottles of just under 48 cases of wine.

Finally, given the somewhat now well established health benefits of moderate daily consumption of red wine, it is quite instructive that Jefferson fervently believed this to be the case (no pun intended!), as he railed against what he considered to be the poisonous and ruinous effects of hard liquor, as in the form of whisky consumption. And so as an unabashed and confirmed oenophile, I thought it might be fitting to use Jefferson’s own words, as he expressed them in a letter to a friend in France, on December 13, 1818:

“No nation is drunken where wine is cheap, and none sober where the dearness of wine substitutes ardent spirits as the common beverage. It is, in truth, the only antidote to the bane of whiskey” (p. 353).

It is befitting, although quite surprising, that Thomas Jefferson, the principal signer of the Declaration of Independence, died in 1826, at the age of 83, but on July 4<sup>th</sup>, as fate would have it!

The most recent example of our continuing to feel the “presence” of Jefferson’s oenologic influence on a global scale is the controversy first reported in a 2006 *New Yorker* article, in Appendix B of this book, and most recently in the September 3, 2007 issue of the *New Yorker*. There is now an embittered legal battle over whether or not some recent wines sold at auction are or are not originally from ones of Jefferson’s cellars. Without giving away the intrigue of it all, the importance of it is hardly diminished by the tasting and high praise given to some of these wines by such notables as Jancis Robinson and Robert Parker’ and the purchase, at astronomical prices, of some of these wines by noted wine connoisseurs. Thus, Dodi al Fayed, who died in that tragic car crash along with Princess Diana, was reported in both the *Wine Spectator* and *The New York Post* to have purchased a supposed Jefferson cellared 1784 Chateau d’Yquem, with the letters Th.J. for the staggering amount of \$56,628. It has further been reported that a 375 ml or half bottle alleged to be a 1784 Margaux bearing, once again, Thomas Jefferson’s initials, was auctioned off to the owner and publisher of *Wine Spectator* for the astonishing amount of \$30,000. This represents the fifth-highest price that anyone has been known to pay for a half bottle of wine. Quoting Hailman again, “Mr. Shanken stated that he did not plan to drink or even open the bottle, but to put it on display at the New York headquarters of M. Shanken Communications as “an important part of American history.”

In closing, I tip my oenologic cap to John Hailman for providing such a lucid, comprehensive, penetrating, and utterly delightful account of the wine knowledge and taste of one of our cherished Founding Fathers. I learned much from this book and would recommend it without reservation to all who have not yet had the sheer hedonic pleasure of savoring its contents.

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JULIA FLYNN SILER: *The House of Mondavi: The Rise and Fall of an American Wine Dynasty*. New York: Gotham Books, 2007, 452 pp., ISBN 1-59240-259-3, \$28.

This history of the Robert Mondavi experience provides remarkable detail and documentation to a tale of which most observers of California's wine scene know the main events: Cesare Mondavi's purchase of the Charles Krug Winery and the grooming of his two sons, Robert and Peter, to develop it; the over-publicized fight between the brothers and Robert's expulsion from the family enterprise; Robert's creation of his eponymous winery, making it world-class; touting Napa to make it the equivalent of France's Bordeaux or Burgundy; the internal struggles within Robert's own family; taking the winery public which, with Robert's over-expansive philanthropy, led to the brink of bankruptcy, the loss of family control, the sale of the winery, and the end of the "dynasty."

These episodes provided grist for the ingrown Napa Valley vinous mill. Siler's book shifts the stories out of the category of gossip to "fact" through assiduous pursuit of legal documents and interviews with major participants who were unusually open to her.

Robert Mondavi was a remarkable innovator and a super-dedicated proselytizer for up-scale "fine" wine, particularly from the Napa Valley. No single person can claim to have put Napa wine in its hegemonic position – it was a collective effort of dozens if not hundreds of people – but Mondavi stands out as the leading personality. An unsympathetic analyst might call him a "remarkable huckster" but his successes and his instinct for getting the story out placed him beyond such a designation, especially with the Napa cheerleaders.

Yet Mondavi was, in the detailed narrative assembled by Siler, a mass of contradictions. Although Ernest Gallo became a remarkable marketer of Gallo wines, Robert not only innovated marketing in dozens of ways – from choosing an innovating architect for the first winery built in Napa's renaissance and its location in view of highway 29, "inventing" fume blanc – but also in technical aspects of winemaking such as using stainless steel for fermenting tanks. He was cooperative with fellow winemakers but also very competitive. He built a network of employees, friends, and supporters yet was invariably concerned with touting his own personality which ultimately betrayed many of them who believed in him..

Robert also had a remarkable sense of his own capabilities that made for considerable inflexibility. This led to his battle with his brother Peter and his being cast out of the family business. This wounded him deeply but never led to opening himself to any degree of self-reflexivity. Starting his own winery, however, probably was one of the best things that could have happened to him since it opened possibilities for innovativeness that inevitably would have been more difficult had his expulsion not occurred. But he then reproduced his own family situation in his own children which also contributed to "the fall." He was generous at times to a fault yet his insistence in enshrining his name made for commitments that threatened family bankruptcy and the loss of the company.

Siler shows how his ability to find talented winemakers became crucial to the winery's success; at the same time, his dedication to creating a family dynasty made for continual turnover in those winemakers who invariably left to make their own names and reputations. Yet employment with the Robert Mondavi winery became the equivalent of graduating from "Mondavi College."

Siler provides extensive details about Robert's family-of-procreation dysfunctionality. What complicates that story is the driving goal of Robert and his children to build a dynasty. It demonstrates the dilemmas of successful family businesses coping with the succession of an innovative and energetic founder where that founder maintains iron control of his children through sustained criticism; trying to build a world-class corporation and a family dynasty simultaneously in two generations is a tough row to hoe. As a family, neither Robert nor any of his children could resolve the contradiction between the need to invest energy in constructing family solidarity and commitment – necessary for dynastic construction – with the incessant need to "grow" the company. There were many good ideas and opportunities – they were not always complementary – that led to adventures and misadventures. Taking the company public provided the structural basis for the fall and even the protections that were built into maintaining family control could not cope with the collapse of stock prices and Robert's congenital demand for public recognition (undoubtedly encouraged by his second wife).

This book is a "good read"; Siler writes her story well and engages her readers. And although it doesn't have the proper form, the Mondavi case could usefully be included as a Harvard Business School reading on the problems of family succession. And for those of us with scholarly inclinations, her extensive documentation, as noted earlier, provides a factual base to what has been a mountain of gossip.

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LAWRENCE OSBORNE: *The Accidental Connoisseur: An Irreverent Journey through the Wine World*. North Point Press (Farrar Straus & Giroux), 2004, 262 pages, ISBN 0-86547-633-0, \$25

This bibulous travelogue takes us on a delightful journey through some of the most wonderful wine regions, where the author talks to owners and winemakers and assorted random characters in search of spirituous enlightenment. On the way to Sassoferrato, he visits Antonio Terni and begins to discuss one of his recurrent themes, namely that of *terroir*: does it exist, and what is it? “Later, Chalone winemaker Don Karlsen says, “There are only two terroirs in America ... The limestone shelf ... in Chalone and the soil around Rutherford.”” (p. 94) From Italy, he leaps over to Napa to talk with Robert Mondavi, then on to Sonoma and the Santa Cruz Mountains, popping back to France, to Bordeaux, Languedoc and Rhône, and ending up in Tuscany and finally Puglia. He interweaves learned and fascinating discussions of the history of wine with that of estates and winemakers, while he comments on the copious amounts of food ingested enroute and the prodigious amounts of wine consumed. To wit: “After leaving Terni, I drove down the long aristocratic road to the Numana highway, through the sluggish rain, past burned-out silk factories to the riffy-raffy seaside strip of Numana. I was so tipsy that I missed the turnoff for Sirolo and ended up in a strange no-man’s-land of Lido di Riscoli.” (p. 19)

The range and urbanity of these accounts is amazing and his modesty about what he does or does not understand about wine is most refreshing. In particular, he is, rightly, obsessed with the meaningless prattle that experts engage in when describing wine as in “Dark purple robe, bordered with orange. A direct and seductive nose overflowing with floral notes, gingerbread, cocoa, candied cherries. A mouth which is spherical, sexy, fleshy, with refined wood. Velvety tannins flowing around aromas of fruits and moist earth, astonishing length.” (p. 99). Or, when prompted, “What could I taste in this Zinfandel? The overripe prunes and copious glycerin which I had slyly looked up in the *Wine Buyers’ Guide* beforehand? Plums and cherries?” (p. 110) I often thought it would be amusing to have a panel of tasters taste the same set of wines and then require them to write down in words what the wines taste like. Would they use the same or similar characterizations of wines (tastes of flint, rock, earth, tobacco, tar, cherries, plums, honey, cocoa, chocolate, rare meat, pig’s blood, citrus, melted asphalt, caramel coated autumn leaves and god knows what else)? He then points out, which sounds to me almost Zen-like, that “the whole principle of wine language [is] to create images of things that didn’t actually exist.” (p. 247)

The author is delightful when he punctures pretensions and has impressive knowledge in ranging from the history of wine to Heidegger and Nietzsche, to Robert Parker and to esoterica such as saving grapes from rabbits by tying tufts of human hair to vines because rabbits hate human hair more than they love grapes, or that the first wine zones in Europe were created by the Duke of Tuscany in 1716 (p. 223), etc. He finds wine experts who say absurdities like, “Burgundies are the greatest wines to drink ... . California is a joke by comparison,” (p. 209) although in a recent tasting of ours, \$100–\$150 California pinot noirs beat Burgundies in the \$300–\$600 range hands down. (See [www.liquidasset.com](http://www.liquidasset.com),

Report 75). He notes that there is an undeniable increase in the number of animal images on wine labels and warns that “the quality of a wine is probably inversely proportional to the ferocity of the animal on its label.” (p. 197) While I do not have vast experience in this matter, I note that the unferocious *Faithful Hound* from the Mulderbosch estate in Stellenbosch, South Africa, is a solid and drinkable wine but does not aspire to greatness (<http://www.wine.co.za/Directory/Wine.aspx?WINEID=53>).

The book is witty and literate, but not numerate. Just about every numeric datum that I found and checked seems to be wrong. On p. 50, the author refers to a “three-liter magnum” bottle. According to André L. Simon, *The Noble Grapes and the Great Wines of France*, (Octopus Books, LC Cat. No. 72/86098), a magnum of champagne contains 1.6 liters and a magnum of Bordeaux 1.5 liters, whereas a 3 liter bottle is called a double magnum (*Alexis Lichine’s New Encyclopedia of Wines and Spirits*, Knopf, 1977, ISBN: 0-394-48995-0). In the very interesting discussion of vine spacing in France versus California, it is noted that in France they have 4,046 vines and in California 454 vines per acre. The yield on the widely spaced (unstressed) grapes is 25 lbs per vine versus 8 lbs for the more closely spaced. It is then asserted that for the same outlay of \$2 per vine, your outlay would increase fourfold for the more densely packed system, and that your net yield would increase only 20%, neither of which ‘computes.’ At \$2/vine, outlays go from  $2 \cdot 454 = 908$  in one case and  $2 \cdot 4046 = 8092$  in the other, while net yields (assuming that the \$2/vine is an annualized cost, although the text does not say so) go from  $25 \cdot 454 - 908 = 10442$  in the first case to  $8 \cdot 4046 - 8092 = 24276$ , more than doubling. One winemaker explains that there are 275 million hectares (under cultivation) in Languedoc. But there are 258.8 hectares per square mile, which means that in Languedoc there must be 1,062,596 square miles under cultivation. But the area of all of France is only 211,372 square miles, which also ‘does not compute.’ But these are minor glitches. The book is not only informative, interesting and rich in the memories of all who have a voice in it, but is also thoroughly pleasurable to read and is highly recommended.

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JAMES M. GABLER: *Wine into Words: A History and Bibliography of Wine Books in the English Language*. 2nd revised edition, 2004. Bacchus Press, Hard Cover, xix, 503 pages, Illustrated, ISBN 0-9613525-5-8, \$75

How do you review a bibliography? This was the first question James Gabler's revised, and enlarged, bibliography of wine books raised for this reviewer. This book is certainly a prodigious effort, but the question remains, just how do you judge the contents, value, and quality of a bibliography?

My first thought was to check for completeness. Is there anything important left out of this bibliography? Admittedly, one must define precisely what it is intended to include, but Gabler is very careful to do this in detail at the beginning of the volume. My answer is that, except for a few very recent items, no doubt published too late for inclusion, not very darn much has been left out! In short, Gabler gets a high grade (oops, perhaps better to use the 100 point wine rating system, see entry G32925), say a 95, for completeness.

My second thought was to check for accuracy. Here the author has to be given extraordinary marks, perhaps a 100! After I received the first review copy of this book it was promptly followed by a letter from the author explaining that there were errors in the copy that had been sent, and that a new printing would be arriving shortly! The next version I received looked very similar to the first copy to me, but nevertheless this review is based on the corrected copy. Put bluntly, this is an astonishing effort and, after looking high and low, I can find no inaccuracies (though I am sure someone could if they looked hard enough—despite my score of 100, no one is perfect!).

My third thought was to check for consistency. Here I could find some fault. For example, one of my favorite books is Amerine and Roessler's *Wines: their sensory evaluation* (entry G7766). Roessler, a distinguished statistician at the University of California, Davis, collaborated on this book with Amerine, a distinguished enologist at the same university. In general, co-authored books are listed under the name of the first author in Gabler's bibliography, which is the case here. However, for some entries there is also an entry for the second author, which indicates the location of the complete entry. However, there is no such entry for Roessler. Thus, if you knew only that Roessler was one of the authors of the book you were after, you would be out of luck and unable to find a reference to the book in this bibliography. Okay, I admit this is a picky objection, so I still give Gabler 94 points for consistency.

One extremely nice touch to this book is the Introduction, written by Kevin Starr, California State Librarian for many years, now emeritus. The erudite Starr, though he admits to being no enophile, did know many of the famous characters whose works appear in this bibliography through his long connection with California scholarship about the wine industry. Starr's Introduction serves to show us how a truly professional bibliographer "reads" such a document. It is hard to describe in brief terms Starr's preferred method, but the basic recommendation is to pick a subject that you find fascinating and then let it lead you to other entries. This certainly worked for me.

There is little doubt that this is a book for wine lovers, but it is most especially a book for those who collect wine books. After all, it provides a virtually complete list and annotation of what such specialized bibliophiles would want in their libraries. In Gabler's own notes to his bibliography he kindly gives a contact for a society of such specialized book collectors. The group is called the *Wayward Tendrils*, which publishes the *Wayward Tendrils Quarterly* (\$20 in the US, \$25 in Canada, PO Box 9023, Santa Rosa, CA 95405, or make email contact with publisher Gail Unzelman at [tendrils@jps.net](mailto:tendrils@jps.net)). No doubt the next step for a wine book bibliophile, after they have purchased Gabler's bibliography, is to join the Tendrils.

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