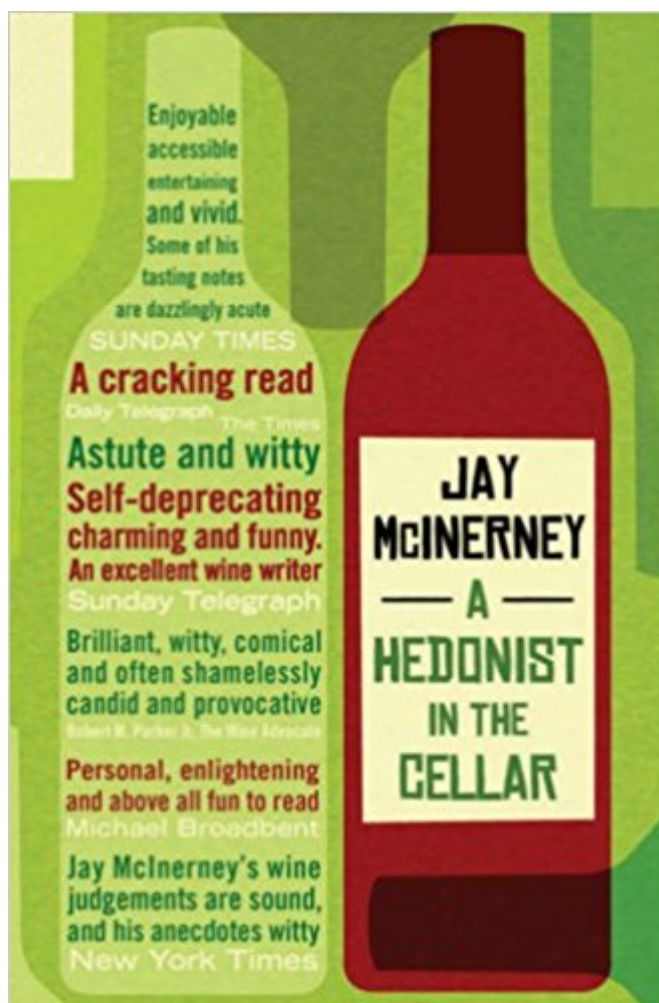


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A Hedonist In The Cellar: Adventures In Wine. Jay McInerney



Synopsis

Jay McInerney, internationally celebrated author of *Bright Lights, Big City*, turns his hand here to his lifelong love affair with wine. Peals of wisdom are offered on the subjects of the best wine for romantics, the parallels between Californian wines and floundering Hollywood stars, the choice of wine for the author's own debauched forty-eighth birthday party, the 'high-testosterone grape' that is Colin Farrell, absinthe, 'the wild green fairy', and what wine is best drunk with chocolate. At the same time McInerney is a genuine connoisseur, taking the reader on a tour through the wine regions of the world and imparting tried and tested advice on grapes and vintages, bouquets, noses and finishes.

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Customer Reviews

Those who find most wine writing hopelessly recondite will eagerly quaff novelist Jay McInerney's *A Hedonist in the Cellar*, a collection of his essays originally published in *House & Garden*. Whether talking about a California chardonnay ("like a Ginsu blade concealed in a peach"); the wines of the Cote Rotie ("like Fitzgerald, [its] reputation was almost moribund at mid-century"); or the super Valpolicellas of Italian vintner Giuseppe Quintarelli ("his [wines] should be opened only in the presence of gods and stinky cheeses"), McInerney brings a novelist's gift and idiosyncratic wit to his personal investigations, which touch on the Rieslings from the Finger Lakes, the "forgotten whites" of Bordeaux, new developments in the wines of Chile and Argentina, spirits like Armagnac and artisanal champagnes, and much more. McInerney is a stimulating appreciator, so readers poring through his essays happily absorb viniculture and modus operandi, among other technical matters.

In essays like "Translating German Labels" and "How to Impress Your Sommelier," they're also prepped in buying and ordering. A wide-ranging tour of the wine world in sum, Hedonist is for all wine lovers, who will find in it much of what's been missing from so much other wine and food writing: the wit to do it well. --Arthur Boehm --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Those who've ever thought wine writing was a bit sniffy will find McInerney's cheeky and informative squibs on wine a generous, almost ham-handed pleasure. In this collection of short essays, reproduced from his monthly column in House & Garden, the increasingly avid reader is enveloped in the various wines he tastes. It's sexy. But it's not just wine that's sexy here, it's also the people who have "caught the wine bug" and dedicate themselves to making their own labels. McInerney (Bright Lights, Big City; The Good Life) ferrets out the small winemakers, investigates their ethos and tastes their efforts with the same glee and tireless interest he dedicates to the big bottlers. This sense of discovery permeates each essay as he links the wine to its history, where the grapes come from and the culture that goes into its making. Readers will learn more than even the most dedicated oenophile can use, but everyone can be inspired to find the next bottle of something special for any occasion. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I love the author's loose style. It makes reading about wine more approachable for those like myself just jumping into the tank. Excellent.

This is a fabulous book for wine lovers, from beginners to connoisseurs. The series of vignettes are funny and very informative. We're pretty far along with wine, but we learned a lot of great stuff while being entertained. It's a book you want to give all your wine-loving friends for Christmas.

This was a gift. No complaints.

A great writer, a great collection of stories on wine.

McInerney is a bon vivant, and his excursions to the world of wine always have as much to do with people as with drinks. Each story is independent and illuminating for anyone who loves the world of wine.

What a prolific writer he is!

When I was younger, I didn't like wine. My young adult self took great pride in the dropped jaws that ensued when I said, smugly, "I don't like wine." Not even white? "Ew, no." That smugness quickly disappeared when the listener inevitably, equally smugly, said, "Well, you're too young to appreciate wine. It's an acquired taste." Later, as I got older, I grew to enjoy white wines, but not red. And still, whenever I expressed my preference, I received that same smug response: "Well, you're too young to appreciate red wine. It's an acquired taste." Now, I enjoy both red and white wines, so perhaps it was an acquired taste, but let me tell you, nothing is more infuriating than having someone lord their opinions over yours as being superior. Oh, I'm sorry, did I say superior? I meant acquired. While reading *A HEDONIST IN THE CELLAR*, I was reminded of those smug people who told me that wine was an "acquired taste." Those people who would pick up a bottle full of liquid that, to me at the time, smelled almost overpoweringly of cleaning solution and would boast about blackberries, and old leather, and stone fruit. McNery writes like someone who thinks that his opinion is better than yours. Perhaps this isn't actually the case; it is quite possible that he is a charming, wonderful person when you're sitting down and having a meal with him (as he does quite frequently apparently with the endless list of famous friends and vintners and restaurateurs - and oh, by the way, did you know that he's friends with author Julian Barnes? Don't worry if you don't; you will be reminded several times - although I can't say I blame him. Julian Barnes is an exceptionally talented author). However, in the book it is constant name-dropping and brand-dropping. Occasionally, he will slip into French. While perusing the reviews, it seems that this affected style of writing is what put off the nay-sayers and I get that. Here are some passages that I feel best illustrate what I mean: I have experienced some stunning food-and-wine pairings involving black truffles and Cahors (60). A few years back I shared a bottle of truffly, rosemary- and Montecristo-scented 1969 with Kermit Lynch in the cellar of the domaine and guessed it to be fifteen years younger (69). The '59 Chambertin that Gagey poured with dinner was still brimming with sweet red fruit and hauntingly complex, somehow reminding me of a Val d'Ay sonnet (130). The aromatic complexity of a forty-year-old Cheval-Blanc in a great vintage such as '64 or '55 is like a catalog of minor vices: tobacco, menthol, coffee, truffles, and chocolate, to name a few (155). When I had lunch at the restored sixteenth-century chateau this past spring with Clarence's granddaughter, Joan, the Duchess of Mouchy... (163) Sometimes, it honestly felt like you could turn this book about wine into a drinking game. Take a swig from a wine box every time the author says "my friend [famous person]" or "truffles." Only, on second thought, don't do that, because that could definitely cause

alcohol poisoning. However, it wasn't all bad. There were a few chapters I quite liked. Here are some:

The Shedistas of Santa Barbara: talks about some of the small wine producers who can't afford the big, vast, sprawling wineries and vineyards like you see in Napa, and operate out of sheds. I have been to places like these in San Francisco. They are charming but odd (and often have good or at least interesting wine).

How to Impress Your Sommelier, Part One and No More Sweet Talk, or How to Impress Your Sommelier, Part Two: These two chapters focus on German and Austrian Rieslings, respectively. I love Rieslings, therefore I loved these chapters. Validate me - how I crave it!

The Semi-Obscure Treasures of Alsace: This one is about Alsatian Rieslings, and how they are the "most versatile food wines in the world." Perfect for pairing with spicy Chinese food.

Jilted Lover: This is about Auberon Waugh, Evelyn Waugh's son, and he is basically the Dorothy Parker of wine critics (and, much like Parker, removed from his position for being too incendiary). This book made me want to dig up some of Waugh's writings, and learn more about him.

"A Good and Most Perticular [sic] Taste": In which McNery trolls his friend by pretending to be the wine whisper. It's actually pretty funny.

Bacchanalian Dreambook: This one was nice, too. It's about a Parisian (McNery would probably say Parisien) restaurant that, according to Wikipedia, "contains more than 450,000 bottles [of wine]". Did you hear that choked-up gasp? That was me. The wine list is apparently 400 pages long.

Fish Stories From Le Bernadin: This was another helpful chapter about pairing wine with fish (psssst...Rieslings).

What to Drink with Chocolate: Again, another helpful chapter, and more in line with what I was expecting when I picked up this book in the first place.

The Wild Green Fairy: The last couple chapters are about misc. wines and this one is about absinthe. I thought this was interesting because I tried absinthe for the first time just after I turned 21 (along with several other alcohols. I learned that I liked vodka and rum and the farther tequila and scotch stayed away from me, the better), and it has such a unique taste. I've never had anything quite like it. Absinthe has a bit of a bad rep because of some unfortunate cheap imitations that caused death because of toxic adulterants (namely antimony, I believe).

Also, I loved the shout-out to my buddies Gewürztraminer and Rioja, two delicious but vastly underrated wines. He even gave props to that much-derided pumpkin-spice-latte of wines, rosé. He often referred to it as Bandol wine, but let's be honest. You can call a PSL "that seasonal coffee with cinnamon and cloves," but it won't hide your shame. Let's call a rosé a rosé and own it.

So that concludes my exhaustive rehashing of *A HEDONIST IN THE CELLAR*. As far as nonfiction about food goes, it wasn't awful. I want to stress that. The writing was excellent: it is accessibility in which it fails. At least for this PSL/rosé-swilling food-plebeian. McNery is writing for a very specific niche demographic, and while this book may resonate for the "acquired taste" folks who not only

enjoy but can also afford wines that cost as much as used cars, that isn't something that a lot of us can relate to. But then, who knows? Maybe my thoughts on this style of writing will change in a few years. Maybe this book is an "acquired taste." When I'm rich and famous, I'll be sure to check back.

2 to 2.5 out of 5 stars

The book is broken down into eight chapters, devoted to his favorite wines, winemakers, sommelier stories, pairings, ending with what we should end with after a night of wine tasting:

“Bubbles and Spirits” But, instead of writing the same old drivel about Napa Valley being the crown achievement of California winemaking — duh — he takes us to places not as familiar. For example, in the last chapter McInerney doesn't spend much more on Champagne than he does on Armagnac, Chartreuse and Absinthe. Other examples are his columns on Tocai Friulano, Soave, Amarone, Bandol, Sagrantino di Montefalco, Cheval-Blanc and Kosher wines. As a true wine 101er, not all of these are familiar to me, or, I expect, most of my readers. It's easy reading and the learning just makes you want to taste something new. I dog-eared several pages (Yes, that term actually means something. I turned the tip of a page down as I didn't have enough book markers and I owned the book) that I liked in particular. Here are some drops of McInerney wisdom: Writer Auberon Waugh segued from his own work and also wrote a wine column for Tatler. His columns are collected in a book called Waugh on Wine and is known, as McInerney put it, to produce “the liveliest and most pungent wine writing of the century.” He got into trouble using the word “anal” and commonly said wines were “filthy” or “disgusting.” Another pal McInerney quotes is Kermit Lynch, a wine store owner in California that doesn't carry California wines. Lynch, per McInerney, said “Why is it that most men don't like fat women but they think they like fat wines?” His column on monks making Chartreuse was a real history lesson for this vinophile. If you don't know where Chartreuse came from, or even what it is, read McInerney's take on it. McInerney's column, “The Mountain Men” The Smith Brothers of Smith-Madrone, takes him on a journey after he discovers a surprise 97 Riesling, made by the brothers, inspired him learn just how an American Riesling from Napa valley “could taste this complex.” McInerney thinks out of the box, I only wish I could climb in there with him.

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