

A compendious survey of a vinous revolution gets to the bottom of France's garden

Jacqueline Friedrich
Earthly Delights from the Garden of France: Wines of the Loire, Volume I, The Kingdom of Sauvignon Blanc—Sancerre, Pouilly-Fumé, and the Sauvignon Satellites

Self-published, \$34.50 / £22.99, www.lulu.com

REVIEWED BY
DAVID SCHILDKNECHT

When Jancis Robinson MW contributed a blurb in well-earned praise of Jacqueline Friedrich's groundbreaking 1996 *Wine & Food Guide to the Loire*, it began, "I've waited 20 years for this book." Sadly, it has taken more than another dozen for Friedrich—who divides her residence between Paris and the Loire—to update in book form her coverage of the still underappreciated wines that she appropriately dubs "earthly delights from the garden of France." Even now, those of us who have fervently waited are being only partially rewarded. That isn't because this new opus fails in its task—far from it: Friedrich has written a prodigious compendium brimming with wit and insight, as well as being methodologically ground-breaking—but rather because it is "only" one of four Loire volumes she now projects, with two more to cover, in depth, Touraine and the western Loire followed by a one-volume "abridgement."

Nobody who loves the Loire or is seriously devoted to the consumption or propagation of Sauvignon Blanc will want to be without this "Volume 1,"

and frankly, a wider potential readership would be ill advised to forgo the pleasure and tutelage to be derived from reading it, or—no doubt—its two detailed successors. (A valuable, ever-expanding trove of notes on wines from the entire Loire is meanwhile available at www.jacquelinefriedrich.com; and those seeking an overview with deft thumbnail sketches of Friedrich's favorite producers should locate her uniquely useful and absolutely aptly named—yet shamefully quickly out-of-print—2006 *The Wines of France: The Essential Guide for Savvy Shoppers*.)

Sauvignon: noble cépage

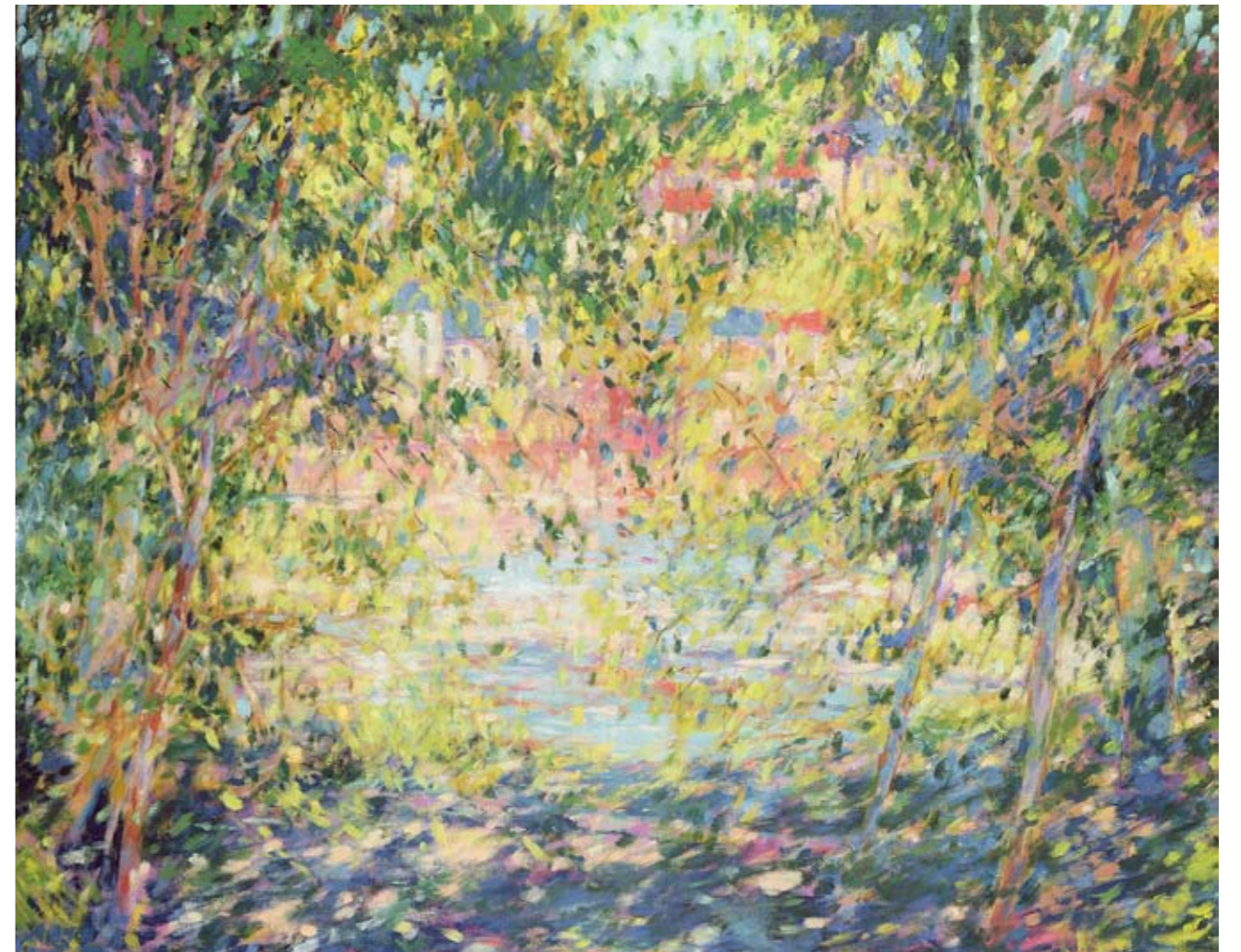
Friedrich had already regretted the wealth of material that fell to the cutting floor in the course of rendering her 1996 guide, and her desire to offer her readers greater depth on this occasion was compounded by the rapidly swelling ranks of seriously quality-conscious Loire growers, a proliferation nowhere more evident than among eastern Loire practitioners of Sauvignon. In her historically, meteorologically, geographically, and viticulturally informative—albeit in the following respect not uncontroversial—introductory chapter, she intimates not only that "great Sauvignon" was for her an oxymoron back when she wrote her original guide but that, in fact, her subsequent growing appreciation of Loire Sauvignon went hand in hand with its emergence as a noble *cépage*, led by Didier Dagueneau (to whose memory Friedrich has dedicated this volume). Some stout defenders of Sauvignon may want to challenge this contention, as well as Friedrich's concomitant omission from her top category of the Cotats, Edmund Vatan, or indeed any other denizens of Chavignol. (She accords that distinction to Didier Dagueneau; Girard & Pierre Morin; Jonathan

Pabiot; Claude & Stephane Riffault; and Domaine Vacheron.) And Friedrich's treatment of comparisons with Chablis crus as the highest possible praise may chafe some partisans of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé as well; but the soil, after all, is on her side; anything that can impress upon wine lovers the profound beauty of the finest Loire Sauvignons is to be welcomed; and what better familiar analogy is there?

In the detail

The heart of Friedrich's book contains often detailed accounts, at times irreverently but seldom irrelevantly anecdotal, and nearly always informed by correspondence or conversations with their proprietors, of more than 160 eastern Loire domaines, generally supplemented by tasting notes on multiple cuvées and from as many as four recent vintages. What's more—and here, Friedrich can arguably be credited with a significant methodological innovation—periodically, detailed accounts of what she dubs "slow tasting" appear, consisting of multiple tasting notes on the contents of the same bottles over time. To be sure, this implies slow reading as well. But the overall effect is often to convey a sense for the grower's style such as one too seldom garners from the prose of wine writers, and that more than justifies not just the reader's patience but also the inevitable "datedness" of the notes and the significant percentage of these that treat wines long since sold out at the cellar door. (What notes there are in these pages on wines from vintage 2010 were taken already the following January, well before much of that vintage was bottled.)

In a frank fashion familiar from her two earlier books—but still as rare to the ranks of wine authors as it is welcome—Friedrich supplies an at



Simon Blackwood, *The Loire Near Sancerre* (oil on canvas, 20th century). Great Sauvignon from Sancerre and elsewhere in the Loire is no longer "an oxymoron"

times humorous compilation of "winespeak," including "a very personal lexicon" that will guide the reader in interpreting her sensory descriptions and judgments. Her numerous categories for rating domaines, it must be cautioned, are not intuitively mutually exclusive and comprise an idiolect of their own. Two of these: "hypernatural" and "other"—the former an in-and-of-itself-brilliant 2006 (*Wines of France*) coinage for high-wire, fashionably low-sulfur risk-takers—are each employed but once in this book, the latter accompanying a painfully detailed account of the author's failure to obtain answers—much less samples or an invitation to visit—from the estate of Baron de Ladoucette. Of course, we will doubtless encounter more vinificatory extremists in future volumes and perhaps even a few more refuseniks (though scant

readers even among Loire experts are likely to identify many estates other than Ladoucette's about whose wines Friedrich is not recently informed).

Most of the appellations covered in this volume also produce wines from Pinot Noir, and although that grape doesn't figure in her title, Friedrich is generous (though rightly, not always lenient) in her coverage of its eastern Loire offspring. She promises that the Sauvignons and other wines of the "orphaned Orleanais" will be treated in her second volume, to be otherwise devoted to Touraine; and while she has not assigned to any projected volume wines from the Auvergne (nearly as intriguing as they are obscure)—which, while in the Loire's "Far East," would understandably not have suited a book treating "The Kingdom of Sauvignon"—draft chapters covering the relevant appellations can be found on her

aforementioned website. Suggested food pairings liberally and at times mouthwateringly litter the text, and the closing compilation of places to eat and stay in the eastern Loire maintains Friedrich's admirable benchmark in wit and detail.

As standards of Loire Sauvignon quality continue to rise along with the level of recognition accorded by wine devotees and even self-styled collectors to the denizens of that "kingdom" in praise of which Friedrich's latest book was written, her work is apt to be viewed as a milestone and signpost of singular significance, scarcely a century, it should be noted, after Sauvignon gained a toehold in Sancerre.

Disclosure: The current reviewer is acknowledged by the book's author for "constructive [...] discussions" during its writing.

Asceticism and gluttony: from the Eucharist to the Hallelujah Diet

Ken Albala and
Trudy Eden (editors)
*Food and Faith in
Christian Culture*

Columbia University Press, \$19.99 / £12.99

REVIEWED BY STUART WALTON

The pre-eminent act of consumption in Christianity is the liturgical practice of the Eucharist, in which the communion bread and wine either symbolize or are literally transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. During Lent—or in the Eastern Orthodox Church, one of the perennial Lents that occur throughout the ecclesiastical year—it has been the centuries-old tradition to fast or observe some other more or less rigorously defined dietary restriction. In medieval times, these latter were a civic obligation, enforceable by the ecclesiastical courts. Today, they are largely a matter of personal conviction, other than in monastic communities, where they may be prescribed on Wednesdays and Fridays and on certain saints' days, as well as during Lent.

Essentially, however, that's it. One of the peculiarities of the 1st-century Judaic Galilean sect that was to rise to world-historical significance following the execution of its progenitor and the tireless efforts of his early proselytizer, Paul of Tarsus, is that it isn't especially interested in questions of dietary regulation. The Jews had their *kashrut*, Hindus venerated the cow, and Buddhists tended to be vegetarian. Muslims would later have their own schedule of foods that were ritually unclean. But Christians had it on the authority of their own spiritual leader that "[n]ot that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out" (Matthew 15:11).

It would, therefore, seem that a collection of scholarly essays on the question of eating, drinking, and belief within the various Christian traditions might be hard put to it to find much to talk about, but while this collection is relatively slim, it represents something of a banquet. To be sure, the question of Lenten fasting receives thorough treatment in a number of historical contexts—from the period of the medieval sumptuary laws, to the present-day monastic cohort at Downside Abbey in Somerset, England, where an engagingly waspish attitude to Lenten austerity has gained the upper hand: "I hate that kind of thing," snaps one of the Benedictine brothers to the essayist Richard Irvine, referring to a letter from a devout correspondent asking to stay at the monastery during Lent and undergo the full self-denial package. "I wrote back and told him that if he was interested in fasting, he probably wouldn't find much of it here." After which, Irvine writes, "he defiantly munched on a biscuit."

Cleanliness and Godliness

The question of whether indigenous food and drink were clean enough to be used in the Eucharist mightily exercised Spanish colonists in the Americas once their own provisions gave out. Quite apart from the fact that the indigenous peoples remained stubbornly unconverted, the maize bread and "wine" they produced were fermented with their own spittle, the bread speckled with the head lice that fell into the dough while it was being mixed. Deciding to pass, they found the compliment returned when tribespeople fastidiously declined to cannibalize the corpses of their Spanish prisoners.

We might raise an eyebrow on discovering that white wines from the now-disdained Trebbiano grape enjoyed an elevated reputation among

monks on purchasing duty for the Santa Trinità monastery in 14th-century Florence, and raise the other one higher still to learn that members of the English Parliament in the 17th century regularly observed official fasts to purify themselves before the opening of each session. (So, that's what's gone wrong since!) At the same time, debates over appropriate regimes for Lenten fasting helped drive medical research into dietetics and the digestive process.

Ascetic current

More worryingly, the principle of Lenten restriction spawned a strong ascetic current in much Christianity. It spread outward from Catholic mortification practices to the cracker-barrel health fanaticism of the late 19th-century New Thought movement in American Evangelicalism. By the end of his life, the property developer turned freebooting mystic Charles Fillmore had persuaded himself that through abstaining from meat he might live forever but, failing that, was pinning his hopes on the extravagantly heretical possibility of reincarnation. Nowadays, there are Christian weight-loss programs, detailed here in a fascinating contribution from Samantha Kwan and Christine Sheikh. Who's for the Hallelujah Diet? God isn't fond of fatties.

If gluttony and drunkenness stand permanently condemned as abuses of the body (which doesn't, after all belong to you), not to mention acting as gateway sins to more calamitous tumbles from grace such as anger and lust, their neurotic avoidance as a regimen of living creates a particularly morbid kind of self-obsession that is the opposite of what Jesus urged on humanity. As so often, it's a tightrope—and one that these richly rewarding essays negotiate with impressive poise.

Right: *The Institution of the Eucharist*, c.1490, by Ercole de Roberto



The Bridgeman Art Library

(preview)

Such divine decanting! Manga and the art of wine communication

**Tadashi Agi and
Shu Okimoto**
*The Drops of God,
Volume One*

Vertical, \$14.95 / £11.99

REVIEWED BY DAVID WILLIAMS

The cultural hold that manga has over the Japanese collective imagination can come as a shock to the unsuspecting Westerner. Catch a rush-hour train in Tokyo, and no matter their age, class, or gender, those lucky enough to have the room to read will most likely be rifling through one of the phone directory-sized weekly or monthly compilations of serialized comic-strip stories rather than the novels and newspapers that you'd find in the same situation in New York or London. Even in the digital age, where mobile devices are eclipsing the printed page, sales of comic books in Japan—covering every conceivable subject from golf, to business, to flower arranging and sadomasochistic sex—still pull in around US\$5 billion a year, and the modern Japanese commuter is, in any case, as likely to be scrolling through a manga on their smartphone as they are playing a computer game or watching a movie.

In the West there is a tendency to make pat sociological judgments about the Japanese fixation on comic books: that it is evidence, along with the self-conscious *kawaii* (“cute”) culture among late teenage and early 20-something Japanese women, with their love of Hello Kitty and baby-talk-style slang, of a sinister infantilism at the heart of Japanese culture. In Anglophone countries, we tend to view comic books as something to be put away, like my own stockpile of the British soccer comic *Roy of the Rovers*,

in the attic once we've come through puberty. Respected novelists such as Michael Chabon and Jonathan Lethem might write at length about their love of the form, but there always seems to be a note of defensiveness in what they say, a nagging suspicion that an adult engagement with DC or Marvel Comics owes more to nostalgia or irony than a genuine belief in their value as works of art or literature. Outside the small, cultish world of the comic collector, and with a very few exceptions—such as the work of Joe Sacco, Chris Ware, Marjane Satrapi, Harvey Pekar, or Robert Crumb, which anyway all tend to be sold under the more respectably adult moniker of “graphic novel”—anything featuring pictures and text bubbles is regarded as inherently less worthy than blocks of prose.

That attitude might seem to present an insurmountable barrier for the potential readership of the English translation of bestselling wine manga *The Drops of God*. Indeed, the whole enterprise seems a little odd—transgressive, even—for Anglophone tastes. A genre associated with children or young adults dealing with the distinctly adult subject matter of the joys of drink with a smattering of sex? If the idea had been developed by a British or American artist, it would never have got past the slush pile.

That this English translation is being published at all, therefore, is testament to the extraordinary success and impact *The Drops of God* has had in Japan and other East Asian countries since the first weekly instalment appeared in *The Weekly Morning* magazine in Japan in 2004. The series, which has been collected into 30 volumes and was made into a TV series in 2009, has since sold more than 3.5 million copies, with a weekly readership in the hundreds of thousands in Japan, and its impact on wine sales has been far more compelling than the words of

any wine critic in the region. According to the publishers, sales of wine in Japan rose by 130 percent the year *Drops of God* first appeared, and Asian sales of the specific wines featured in the series have been known to double or even triple after publication. The series has also been a hit in France; the French, with their own tradition of serious *bande dessinée* being much less snooty about comics than the Americans or British, got a translation in 2009. Given how slight the sales are, let alone the influence, of most wine books, *Decanter* magazine could not be accused of exaggeration when it included Tadashi Agi and Shu Okimoto, the brother and sister behind *The Drops of God*, in its wine world “Power List” in 2009, calling the series “arguably the most influential wine publication of the past 20 years.”

Genre conventions

Influential maybe, but is it worth reading? Well, it takes a bit of getting used to, even if you're in the habit of reading comics. The book is published as it was in Japan, which means you have to start at the back and work backward, with the drawings and text passing from right to left—I had to reread the first few pages before I'd retrained my brain, which felt a bit like trying to rub my belly and tap my head at the same time. You also need to swallow what might charitably be called the genre conventions—the female characters, for example, are all doe-eyed with perfect figures and of somewhat incidental importance to the plot (although, on the evidence of this first volume, they're not quite the submissive vessels for sexual violence that populate much manga). As with all manga, the pace of the story is lightning quick and episodic, with recaps of the plot every 20 pages or so (you are always aware of the book's origins as a series), and the tone is hysterically melodramatic.

Images courtesy of Vertical



(preview)

The story itself, which has echoes of the 12 labors of Hercules or, more relevantly perhaps, the 12 *Tasks of Asterix*, deals with the after-effects of the death of “renowned wine critic” Yutaka Kanzaki, a kind of Japanese Robert Parker. Kanzaki has left behind a peerless wine cellar that will be inherited by the man who can identify 12 great wines, “the 12 Apostles,” plus a 13th, “the ‘Drops of God’ that stands above them all,” from Kanzaki’s own descriptions. Two characters compete for the prize: Kanzaki’s son, Shizuku, a humble young salaryman at a beer company, and his protégé and adopted son Toomine Issei, a young rising-star wine critic. Issei, a gifted taster with years of experience who has learned at the feet of Kanzaki, at first seems the likely winner. But while Shizuku has no formal knowledge about winemaking or producers, having rejected wine after what seems to have been a troubled childhood (his father “train[ed] me till I was sick of it”), he is soon shown to have a preternatural talent as a taster (“Shizuku, your sense of smell is genius!”). And with the help

of, among others, a young female sommelier, a kindly bar manager, and a mysterious enophile tramp, the first volume follows Shizuku’s attempts to add knowledge to his natural talent and beat Issei to the inheritance.

This allows the authors plenty of scope to impart information on wine, much as another successful manga, *Oshinbo* (also available in translation), has done with Japanese food. This can be a little clunky, with overtly expositional dialogue placed in the mouths of characters (“Well, the quality of wine depends on the year the grapes were grown”) in much the same way as you find in airport thrillers. Occasionally, it’s also a little misleading: The authors seem to feel that decanting, in the right, highly skilled hands, can have an almost alchemical power to iron out the kinks in young wines, and the tasting abilities of wine connoisseurs take on a kind of mystical aura.

For the most part, however, and particularly when the characters are describing the (almost exclusively French) wines, the approach is

refreshingly unstuffy and imaginative, generally managing to stay just the right side of preposterous. Château Mouton Rothschild 1982, for example, is compared to Millet’s *The Angelus*, while Château Mont-Pélat 2001 is likened to the music of British rock band Queen (“It’s powerful, but I also felt a melting sweetness and a sharp rush of sourness. Just as the soft, husky vocals of Queen are wrapped in deep guitar sounds and heavy drums”).

There’s also a section based on Shizuku’s hunt for a bottle of Henri Mayer’s Cros Parantoux, which, to me at least, explains why this book, and the form in general, has been so successful. In just a few lines of dialogue and a handful of frames, the section explains the magical interplay of man, land, variety, and vintage in Burgundy more deftly, economically, and engagingly than many more conventional wine books manage in several chapters.

The Drops of God doesn’t pretend to be high art. But—to borrow from another comic creation, Robin from *Batman*, as a pedagogical tool—“holy olfactory,” is it fun!

Two great reference works renewed

Tom Stevenson

The Sotheby’s Wine Encyclopedia

Dorling Kindersley, \$50 / £35

Daniel Rogov

The Ultimate Rogov’s Guide to Israeli Wines

Vertical, \$24.95 / £18.99

The *Sotheby’s Wine Encyclopedia* is one of the acknowledged classics of wine publishing and is perhaps the most accessible of a trio of great British wine-reference works, alongside Hugh Johnson’s *Wine Atlas* and Jancis Robinson MW’s *Oxford Companion to Wine*. Highly personal

and opinionated in tone, it is clearly and logically presented and exceptionally easy to read. There is no question that any wine lover who does not own one of the earlier editions (it was first published in 1988) would be well advised to get their hands on this fifth “updated and expanded” edition. But what about the rest of us, who already have the most recent previous revision (2007)? Is there enough to make a repeat purchase worthwhile?

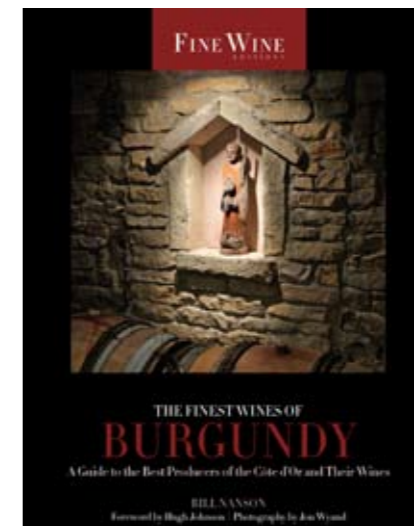
I would have to say yes. While a quick comparison with the previous edition reveals that much of the text is familiar, with the wording rather superficially changed here and there, there is plenty new of interest as well. The front section is much improved, with a greatly expanded section on grape varieties, the addition of a “timeline” devoted to wine’s history, and an excellent section on barrel-

makers, among other features. Elsewhere, there are new and redrawn maps and expanded sections on the world’s up-and-coming regions, and everywhere the information feels as up to date as possible in a work of this scope and scale. In short, Stevenson’s magnum opus remains indispensable.

Operating in a narrower range but in no less thorough a manner, *The Ultimate Rogov’s Guide to Israeli Wines* is also a model of its kind. Updated just before Rogov passed away in September last year, it is a fine epitaph for a man who has done more than anyone to progress the cause of Israeli wine. In lucid prose, Rogov describes more than 2,500 wines and 150 wineries. It would have been useful—for this Israeli wine novice, at least—to have more than 33 introductory pages, but that’s a minor quibble about an authoritative and engaging book. **DW**

THE WORLD OF
**FINE
WINE**

The Finest Wines of Burgundy



Written by a highly respected independent commentator on the region—Bill Nanson—*The Finest Wines of Burgundy* is the latest in an award-winning series of lavishly illustrated guides to some of the world’s finest wine regions from the publishers of the acclaimed quarterly magazine *The World of Fine Wine*.

The Burgundy of today has woken from the lethargy of the 1980s and, over the past 20 years, has seen a massive increase in the volume of wine that qualifies as Grand Vin de Bourgogne. *The Finest Wines of Burgundy* discusses the themes of greatest current interest and profiles 90 of the most exciting Côte d’Or producers and their wines, including some relatively undiscovered producers alongside the recognized stars. At all levels, it highlights the exceptional and the individual, showing that, as long as you know where to look, Burgundy remains a place where value, as well as wonder, can still be found.

Burgundy’s vineyards are ranked by long historical consensus. You might think that this would make its evaluation routine. But you have reckoned without a system of landholding apparently inspired by the Tower of Babel.

When hierarchies interweave like this, commentary has no straightforward route. Candid inquiry and careful tasting are essential—but so is a sensibility that only long experience can achieve. Bill Nanson is a qualified and careful guide. In *The Finest Wines of Burgundy*, his love of the region is clear, but it never swamps his practical fair-mindedness—an achievement in itself, when ravishing scents and unforgettable flavors call out like sirens from cellar after cellar.

Hugh Johnson
OBE



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