

# Pour Decisions

By Brett Chappell

## Have corkscrew, can travel

Learning about wine might best be summed up with the cliché, “It’s not the destination; it’s the journey.” The “best bottle,” the “greatest wine,” the “most popular style” might be wonderful to try, but if you arrive at your journey’s end with no understanding of where you are, have you grown, and can you appreciate where you have ended up? The pandemic scuttled many travel plans, but what have you done to replace them? I suggest traveling the world through wine. You can start now and tour at your own pace.

Like travel, learning about wine requires an open, adventurous mind. You will not like everything you taste, but the point is to taste as much as you can. Also, knowing why you don’t care for a particular wine is an exercise in self-awareness and knowledge. Would it be wrong to visit Paris and claim you don’t like Paris because you ate snails and you didn’t like snails? The same goes for tasting a wine from Rioja and proclaiming you don’t like Rioja or Spanish wine in general. When you go on a trip, you prepare for the land you are visiting. Don’t pack a bikini for Antarctica. For wine travel, prepare your palate, learn a little of the language, and get a travel guide.

To prepare for a trip to Provence, my wife and I purchased *Rick Steves’ Provence and the French Riviera*. Ten dollars had us traipsing around Nice like a local. The same goes for wine. There are many wine books from which to choose. Beware of diving in too deep or spending your money on a fluff piece. Wine Folly’s *The Master Guide* is a great start if you want an elementary guide. For the best learning, my favorite is Karen MacNeil’s *The Wine Bible* (2nd edition). At nearly 1,000 pages, the book seems daunting, but is well segmented for easy reading and study. The book has more information than can be retained in the first reading but is nice to refer to when a fact needs to be recalled. It deserves a place on your bookshelf.

Reading a guide is one thing, yet wine is about experiencing with smell and taste also. You cannot properly study wine without pulling some corks. Not breaking the bank, of course, is important. Finding the right wines at a reasonable price requires a bit of sleuthing. Following the lead of your chosen guidebook, you should be able to source almost every bottle you need in a small wine shop. The shopkeeper should be able to suggest representative wines that exemplify the subject you are studying.

Keeping track of where you have been (what you have drunk) and your impression is your travel journal. After a bit, you should see patterns emerging. You may prefer higher acid wines over fruity sorts. In their youth, tannic wines may not be your favorite, but as the wines age, you may like their more structured style. Eventually you will find that even if you do not care for a specific wine style, as a traveler/student you will still try wines outside your “like” zone and learn from them.

And this is when you know you have been bitten by the wine bug. You continue to try wines for more than just pleasure. You taste to learn. You travel to new lands through a bottle. You look back at what happened in a particular year/vintage. You remember where you were and who you were with when drinking a

specific wine. You taste for differences as well as similarities. You grow. As American actor Danny Kaye claimed, “To travel is to take a journey into yourself.”

At MF Chappell Wine Merchant, we are starting a guided wine class in February that will span 2022. Each month we will pair a six-pack of wines, an overview article, and a virtual meeting to a chapter or two of Karen MacNeil’s *The Wine Bible*.

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