

BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

Aldo Sohm and Christine Muhlke: *Wine Simple: A Totally Approachable Guide from a World-Class Sommelier*

Clarkson Potter, New York, 2019, 272 p., ISBN: 978-1-9848-2426-7, \$18.98

Chris Ernest Hall

The Writing of Chris Ernest Hall, Berkeley, CA, USA

Email: fozboot@gmail.com

The world of wine can be intimidating: dozens of grape varieties, hundreds of regions, thousands of wineries. How to taste properly, how long to wait to drink a bottle, how to pair with food. Mistakes can be expensive, and worse, lead to embarrassment or loss of face. As sommelier of Le Bernadin, one of New York's most prestigious restaurants, Aldo Sohm has seen this anxiety and lack of confidence play out. So he has written a book to help people make sense of the world of wine and learn how to not only gain expertise and generate social capital but, most importantly, have fun doing it while not breaking the bank.

The book is divided into six sections: an introduction which includes a description of his background; an epilogue that describes his own wine-making experience; and the meat of the book—four parts about what is wine, how to drink it, how to evolve one's palate, and pairing wine and food. The book is consciously organized not as a textbook, but as a guide, to be read through sequentially, and later consulted as a reference.

Wine Simple is one of the most attractive books I've ever read. From the cover to the text, to the abundant maps and explainers, and even humorous cartoons, almost every page has some visual interest.

The voice of the book is casual and conversational, and full of amusing tidbits from Sohm's career, like when his pairing of chocolate and Trappist ale for Beyonce and Jay-Z was so successful that the latter wanted to take more ale to go. I also appreciated Aldo Sohm's nuanced take on natural wines—he doesn't reject them outright as several of my wine loving friends do.

Although Sohm works at a restaurant where one could easily break four figures for a meal, he takes pains to emphasize that one can become a more experienced and accomplished wine lover without spending a king's ransom. He has considerable good advice about how find bargains and styles/regions that are reliably high quality, but not too pricey.

By trying to cover the entire world of wine, some of the geographical coverage can feel cursory. As an Austrian who was originally trained in France and is now a sommelier at a French restaurant, the coverage is, understandably, more extensive for European wines, especially the big three of France, Germany, and Italy. For example, some important emerging regions of California, such as Lodi, are neglected. New Zealand only merits two pages, and only Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir are mentioned, although many other grapes are grown there.

For the neophyte who wants to become more informed about wine, the best way to use the book would be to read it all the way through to learn about Aldo Sohm's own wine journey and get the lay the land. After that, do a tasting with friends using the protocol described in Chapter 2. From there, start building your collection, and do more advanced tastings such as vertical, for soil, or blind.

Summing up, this book is a lively and informative introduction to the world of wine that would be useful for both the neophyte and someone interested to learn more about what a sommelier's working life is like. It would also be useful for an experienced wine lover who wants to broaden their horizons or possibly learn that some of the rules of thumb they have used for years have kept them from exploring new combinations and styles.