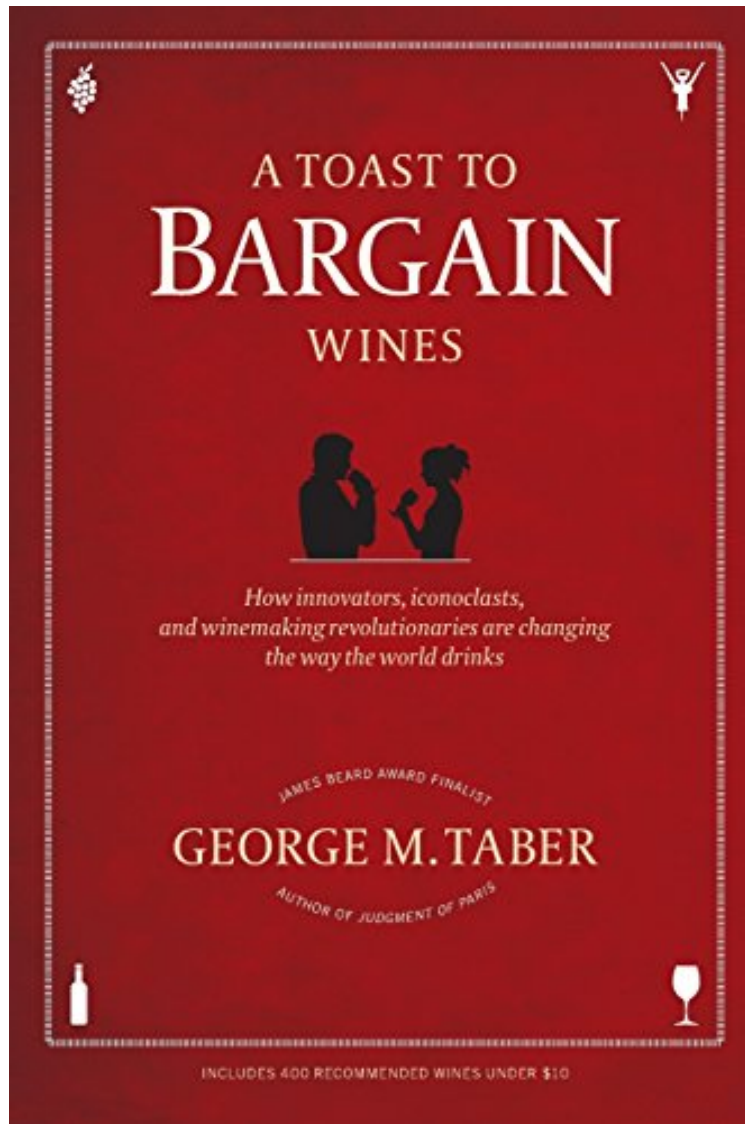


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A Toast to Bargain Wines: How Innovators, Iconoclasts, and Winemaking Revolutionaries Are Changing the Way the World Drinks

George M. Taber

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George M. Taber : A Toast to Bargain Wines: How Innovators, Iconoclasts, and Winemaking Revolutionaries Are Changing the Way the World Drinks before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Toast to Bargain Wines: How Innovators, Iconoclasts, and Winemaking Revolutionaries Are

Changing the Way the World Drinks:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Easy read into the world of affordable wineBy GoddessJen"A Toast to Bargain Wines" is a great book for those with interest in the world of wine. I'm not a part of the industry, just like various wines. I learned a lot about the behind the scenes of mass-production and it answered a few curiosity Qs I've had at times about bottles I've picked up here and there. It gave a great big-picture of the progression of the industry - an enjoyable, easy read.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Entertaining and informative, but . . .By Kenneth UmbachMy goodness, to have tried all those wines Mr. Taber must have a liver the size of a large watermelon. That aside, though, the book is entertaining, even if sometimes self-contradictory (here dismissing awards as meaningless, and there citing them as evidence for this or that wine). My own experience with a couple of the many wines he recommends did not square with his (I found them pretty much undrinkable, though both are very widely available: an Oak Leaf Cab Sauv and a Barefoot Cellars Chardonnay), but perhaps it is unfair to judge from one sample of each of the bargain-bin wines. Still, I'd take his recommendations with a grain of salt, even while wanting to keep an eye open for some of the names he discusses.For a wildly contrasting point of view, let me recommend Grape-A-Hol: <http://www..com/Grape-Hol-Business-Subverting-Winemaking/dp/1457510308> . And for a wide and fun perspective on the industry, Wine Wars (by a wine economist!): <http://www..com/Wine-Wars-Miracle-Revenge-Terrorists/dp/0742568202> . Anyway, I read A Toast to Bargain Wines all the way through until near the end, where I skimmed or skipped over wine-producing regions I'm less interested in. For whatever it is worth, I'm finding that twenty- or thirty-dollar-a-bottle artisan wines from local wineries (the greater Sacramento, California, area is blessed with an abundance of them, from the Valley to the Sierra Foothills) offer a very different (more interesting, rewarding) experience even from relatively good widely distributed bargain wines. I am coming around to the view that life is too short for cheap wine (or at least, for an exclusive preference for cheap wine).0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Out of Date RipoffBy WilliamThe first part of the book is okay. However, I take exception to his love of Two Buck Chuck at Trader Joe's. The second half of the book lists Bargain Wines from 2008 - 2010. This is not at all helpful as many of the wineries have been acquired and most of the wines have probably changed over the last decade. At \$3.00, it would have been an interesting read. At \$9.99, I fell like I was taken advantage of compared to his other books.

The Acclaimed Author Of Judgment Of Paris Explores The Thriving Business Of Bargain Wines And Offers His Recommendations For The Best Values. Is inexpensive wine any good? Award-winning author George M. Taber shows that it is, examining the paths to success of the worlds best-selling bargain brands. Taber helps readers learn to trust their taste and make informed decisions when confronting wine lists, and reveals how innovators are turning the old vin ordinaire into something extraordinaire. A Toast to Bargain Wines is an accessible mix of history, business, and reference, and includes a two-part guide to the worlds best buys: Georges ten favorite bargains of every varietal (plus two splurges in each category), then ten value brands from twelve regions around the world. Casual wine drinkers and connoisseurs alike will benefit from this insiders guide to finding and enjoying good wineat a great price.

"One of today's finest wine journalists, GeorgeTaber once again gets the scoop before it hits the headlines. First it was the JUDGMENT OF PARIS. Now it's the news that, amid all the woes ofthe Great Recession, there's one thing worth celebrating: more great wine onthe market at bargain prices than anyone ever thought imaginable. A TOAST TO BARGAIN WINES tells you why--andwhere to find them." --Tilar Mazzeo, author of The Widow ClicquotA timely, interesting, educational approach to todays wine picture. Wine still makes a feast out of a meal, but in times of not so plenty we will enjoy a bottle that is more reasonable. This tome is a must-read for wine lovers as well as the trade. --Margrit Mondavi, Vice President of Cultural Affairs at Robert Mondavi WineryThere's been a mutiny in the wine world, and for years, George Taber has been camped out in the trenches with the contrarians who have been drinking snobbery under the table: the rogue masters of wine, the behavioral neuroscientists, the bargain-wine tycoons, the guerrilla consumer advocates. With the intimate precision of a world-class journalist, Taber has woven their stories together into a larger narrative about the demise of conventional wisdom in an industry that has been dominated by dusty elitism for centuries. This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand wine's newly changed landscapeor who simply wants to drink better for less. --Robin Goldstein, author of The Wine Trials and director of the Center for Sensory Economics at the Culinary Institute of America"A must-read for wine enthusiasts, especially those on a budget." --KirkusAbout the AuthorGeorge M. Taber is the author of Judgment of Paris, the 2006 wine book of the year for Britain's Decanter magazine. His second book, To Cork or Not to Cork, won the Jane Grigson Award from the International Association of Culinary Professionals and was a finalist for the James Beard Foundation Award for best book on wine and spirits and the Andre Simon Award for best wine book. Before turning to writing wine books, Taber was a reporter and editor for Time.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. CHAPTER ONEEmbarrassing Moments in Wine History In 1863, Englishman Thomas George Shaw published a delightful book entitled Wine, the Vine, and the Cellar that painted an insiders picture of the British wine trade in the early and mid-

nineteenth century. He recounts how, in the 1820s, as a young clerk and salesman for a London port and sherry house, he used to play a trick on the venerated wine tasters who worked alongside him at the docks, where wine arrived from the continent. He would pour two glasses from exactly the same wooden barrel, give them to two tasters, and ask which they thought was better. The men would sample each wine, then try it again and again until they invariably declared that although the two were similar, one glass had rather more of this or that than the other and was therefore definitely superior. Shaw wrote, I kept my own counsel, but was convinced forty years ago, and the conviction remains to this day, that in wine-tasting and wine-talk there is an enormous amount of humbug. As the French say, plus a change, plus cest la mme chose (the more things change, the more they remain the same). So-called wine experts still pour out their views on paper, on the Internet, and anywhere people will listen, and those opinions can determine whether a wine consumer will spend hundreds of dollars on a prized bottle for some special evening. And much of the tasting and talk, then and now, remains humbug. Blind wine tastings, when people cannot see the brand of the wine they are drinking, are unfailingly honest. They can also be very humbling. When the identity of a wine is unknown, nothing stands between the persons taste buds and whats in the glass. The taster is forced to decide whether he or she likes the wine only on the basis of his or her senses. Does the wine taste like some wondrously exotic fruit or does it resemble nondescript sugar water? Seeing a wine label dangerously prejudices anyones opinion. As Jancis Robinson has written, It is absolutely staggering how important a part the label plays in the business of tasting. If we know that a favorite region, producer, or vintage is coming up, we automatically start relishing itgiving it every benefit of the tasting doubt. Judges are only human and have their predilections, whether they will admit them or not. Thats why there is no substitute for a blind tasting, where the taster knows little more than the color of the wine and perhaps the grape variety. Michael Broadbent, a famous British taster, admitted, A sight of the label is worth fifty years experience. A cynical truism, for what an impressionable lot we are! Even the most disciplined taster is biased by the mere glimpse of a label, even the shape of the bottle. Thomas George Shaws tastings at the London docks were not the last instances of people mistaking a wine when they didnt know its origin. In an oft-repeated anecdote, Britains Harry Waugh, a leading wine expert from the 1940s to the 1960s, who traveled the world drinking great wines and writing books about them, was once asked if he had ever mistaken a red Bordeaux, which is made usually with Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, for a red Burgundy, which has only Pinot Noir. His quip answer: Not since lunch. I was lucky enough to be the only journalist present at one of the most famous cases of wine confusion, which took place in Paris in May 1976. It was an event that Anthony Dias Blue, the American food and wine critic, has called the most important wine tasting of the [twentieth] century. The wines being sampled that day were some of the best Chardonnays from Burgundy, such as Btard-Montrachet Ramonet-Prudhon and Puligny-Montrachet Les Pucelles Domaine Leflaive, and leading Bordeaux reds, including Chteau Haut-Brion and Chteau Mouton Rothschild. The French wines were tasted blind alongside unknown California Chardonnays, including Chalone and David Bruce, as well as Cabernet Sauvignons, such as Mayacamas and Ridge Monte Bello. The judges included some of the worlds most eminent wine experts: sommeliers at prestigious French restaurants, the editor of Frances leading wine magazine, and famous winery owners. But during the tasting, those prestigious judges became totally confused and couldnt even accurately distinguish which wines were French and which were from California. At the end of the day, they selected a California Chardonnay (Chateau Montelena) and a California Cabernet Sauvignon (Stags Leap Wine Cellars) as best in the white and red categories. The Californians were delighted, while the French judges were shocked and suffered the wrath of their compatriots, who condemned them for rendering such an outrageous decision. Hardy Rodenstock, a German collector of old bottles of wine, was well known in the 1980s for uncovering wine treasures, although some of those finds later turned out to be fakes that left experts with red faces to match the red wines. Thomas Jefferson had supposedly purchased the most famous of the Rodenstock bottles in the 1780s, when he was the American minister to Paris. Rodenstock wouldnt reveal how he had uncovered the bottles, saying only that they had been recently discovered in a Paris building that was being demolished. The bottles even had Jeffersons initials on them. What more proof of authenticity did anyone need? In December 1985, the billionaire media mogul Malcolm Forbes bought at auction one of the bottles, a 1787 Lafite, for \$156,000, which remains the highest price ever paid for a single bottle of wine. Although there were some doubts about the authenticity of the Rodenstock bottles, some of the most famous names in the wine world, such as Robert M. Parker Jr. and Hugh Johnson, were enthusiastic about the wonderful wines. Broadbent, the worlds foremost authority on historic wines, gave them his unofficial stamp of approval by running the auction of Rodenstocks bottles, implicitly vouching for them. The fight over the authenticity of the wines is still going on in court, but it is now generally believed that they were all fakes. Rodenstock insists the wines are authentic, but skeptics say he most likely put wine of unknown origin and quality into old bottles and passed them off as historic masterpieces. Benjamin Wallace recounted the story of this great wine hoax in *The Billionaires Vinegar: The Mystery of the Worlds Most Expensive Bottle of Wine*. On June 3, 1986, Rodenstock and several top wine experts were at Chteau Mouton to taste a 1787 bottle of Branne-Mouton, the prior name of the winery. Broadbent sampled it and described it as having a rich, warm, whole meal, gingery smell. Going over the top, he said it smelled like dunked ginger nuts. Rodenstock said it resembled lovely coffee. Jancis Robinson was smitten, calling the wine the most exciting liquid I ever expect to drink. No one in the room voiced any doubts about the authenticity of the 1787

wine, and Broadbent provided the final judgment: I thought it would be a bit acidic, a bit decayed, but there wasn't a trace. . . . The wine is genuine. No doubt about it. It is now generally believed that Rodenstock had taken in all those experts, and the 1787 Branne-Mouton was a fake. E. J. Gallo is the largest wine company in the world. Its labs in Modesto, California, have been called the best private enology research center. Gallo wines might not rank among the world's finest, but no one says anything against the expertise and professionalism of the winery's staff. In the aftermath of the 2005 hit movie *Sideways*, Pinot Noir, which the film celebrated, became the hot wine for American consumers. They couldn't get enough of it, and wineries scrambled to keep up with demand. Gallo's Red Bicyclette Pinot Noir, which proudly noted on its label that the wine was made with French grapes, cost about \$7 and flew off shelves. Between January 2006 and March 2008, Gallo bought 135,334 hectoliters of Pinot Noir from Languedoc-Roussillon, enough for 18 million bottles of wine. Cost: 4 million (\$5.2 million). French wine inspectors, however, began suspecting that something was amiss. The whole region traditionally produced only about 50,000 hectoliters a year, but Gallo was buying nearly three times as much. Moreover, a wine merchant who played a key role in the Gallo purchases was paying just 58 (\$87) per hectoliter for Pinot, while the official price was 97 (\$145). The cost of other grape varieties at the time, though, was 45 (\$68). Experts suspected that Gallo was getting a mix of Merlot or Syrah, although the three types of grape are entirely different. Pinot Noir is delicate and known for its elegance, while Merlot has a medium body and Syrah is big and powerful. In February 2010, a French court convicted a dozen people of selling fake Pinot Noir wine. The companies received fines ranging from 3,000 (\$4,000) to 180,000 (\$250,000), and jail terms of between one month and six, which were all suspended. The court said those convicted had illegally pocketed 7 million (\$9 million). Gallo was never accused of being part of the scam, unless you consider it a crime to be unable to taste the difference between Pinot Noir and Merlot or Syrah. Gina Gallo, winemaker and granddaughter of the family, later said, I haven't tasted the offending wine that often, and were committed to the Languedoc, especially Limoux, as a source of Pinot. But I admit it was something of a disaster. Why didn't the Gallo empire pick up on something in the eighteen million bottles of supposed Pinot Noir? How could all those experts not recognize the difference between Pinot Noir and Merlot or Syrah? In addition, why didn't one of the millions of Americans who drank the Red Bicyclette Pinot Noir lodge a complaint? A lawyer for one of the condemned French firms attempted to explain the scandal away by saying, Not a single American consumer complained. There have been many other occasions when people misjudged wines because they didn't have the comfort of knowing what had been poured into their glass. If the world's best experts sometimes mix up a rarefied Bordeaux First Growth with pedestrian plonk, how are average consumers supposed to tell them apart? That is not to say that any \$5 bottle is just as good as a 2005 Domaine de la Romane-Conti Montrachet that costs \$4,000 a bottle. It isn't. Yet these incidents raise questions about the professional tasters and other experts who tell average consumers what wines they should drink. Clearly, wine consumers should not be buying a bottle simply because it is expensive or because some famous person says it's good. People should decide for themselves which wines to drink no matter the price or the pedigree. They may be pleasantly surprised by what they discover. 2011 George M. Taber