

**Around the Wine World in 40 Pages:
An Exploration Guide for the
Beginning Wine Enthusiast**

Andrew Cullen

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"In Europe we thought of wine as something as healthy and normal as food and also a great giver of happiness and well being and delight. Drinking wine was not a snobbism nor a sign of sophistication nor a cult; it was as natural as eating and to me as necessary." -- Ernest Hemingway

INTRODUCTION

When you walk into a major wine warehouse, it can be pretty intimidating. There are wines from all over the world with labels in foreign languages (literally and figuratively), and your only guide to finding what you want are the section names (Cabernet, Merlot, France) and perhaps a guy that wants to sell you wines that he thinks are great because the girl he had on a date last night thought he was awesome because he sounded confident ordering a Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape.

I imagine this happens all the time, and most likely one of two things will happen. You will either gravitate toward that Merlot you had last week that you thought was ok with your grilled pork chop, or you will follow the advice of the in-store guy and buy whatever he recommends.

For some people, this might be ok. This book is written for the others, the ones who want to dive a little deeper, understand what they are buying and why; those who want to explore some new areas and be turned on to wines they might have overlooked.

I was the guy that used to walk into the store and take one of the two aforementioned actions. But the more I did it, and the more I explored, the more knowledge I acquired of the top wine growing regions and what to expect from each one. I was able to pair wines far beyond the Merlot – Pork chop because I had a wider base of wines to choose from. It sparked the beginning of a life long journey into the world of wine, and one that I want to share with you in the pages that follow.

Since I've been on this journey I've taken every opportunity to try new wines from different areas. With every trip to the store, a new bottle would find its way into my cart, one that I didn't know anything

about. And it took years, but it was a lot of fun. And this journey still continues today as I explore wines from up and coming areas like Croatia, Hungary, South Africa and Canada.

I don't want to attempt to dump every piece of knowledge on every single area. Instead, I want to go freestyle, a little off the cuff, with very little research and just throw out some suggestions for wine exploration that I think can build the foundation for a larger wine study over many years.

I toiled at great lengths on how to lay this book out. My first draft was organized by wine region, but then I quickly learned that it might prove too overwhelming and you really have to dig into each area deeper before you grasp what makes it stand out. Then I thought about varietal organization but I thought some people might get turned away or skip parts on grapes with weird names, even if they are grapes that person might enjoy.

So I settled on a hybrid of the two, which seems to be the way many wine shops also go. They have a Cabernet Sauvignon section and a French section that includes many Cabernet based wines. It's inevitable that there will be a little overlap but whenever I begin to feel I am approaching repetition, I will try to dig into that subject even deeper to highlight key differentiating points. I also wanted to accomplish this in as few pages as possible, just hitting the highlights, the base knowledge that can help you get started.

There are a ton of books on wine out there that list every single region and grape across the entire globe. They are encyclopedic in the size and style. This isn't one of those books. This is a quick hit. Intentionally a short burst of information to spark a larger exploration.

Andrew Cullen

Ultimately, your growth in wine knowledge is going to be up to you and your success dependent on your commitment. This guide should help. I hope you enjoy.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Cabernet Sauvignon is the mother of big red grapes. It's generally full bodied with flavors of blackberry, cherry and black currant with some undertones of plum and black licorice, depending on the region the grapes are from and what types of oak were used in aging.

Cabernet Sauvignon is ideally paired with red meat like steak, roast beef, short ribs or beef stew where the wine can really stand up to the abundance and depth of flavor from the food.

Some of the most popular areas where Cabernet Sauvignon is grown is in the Napa and Sonoma valleys, where Napa really reigns (in my opinion) as the dominant force. There are multiple areas inside Napa that are worthy of exploration including Rutherford, Oakville and Stag's Leap as well as all of the hilly areas surrounding the valley that produce excellent Cabernet (Howell Mountain, Diamond Mountain, Atlas Peak). In Sonoma make sure to explore Dry Creek Valley and Alexander Valley for great Cabernet.

Many of the big names in Napa and Sonoma produce special blends frequently led by Cabernet that include other grapes such as Merlot, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc and you are now seeing a rise in Malbec. Some of these wines, such as the Joseph Phelps Insignia, can run upwards of \$200 and are really spectacular.

A good tip is to find vineyards such as Joseph Phelps, Franciscan, Chimney Rock or Heitz who are known for their higher end red blends but offer straight Cabernet wines for much less. The grapes that are grown for the high end blends are likely grown within eyeshot of the lesser priced Cabernet bottles, so they can be excellent values.

Great Cabernet can also be found in the US from Washington State has positioned itself favorably in recent years. You'd be remiss not to try Cabernet as well as other reds from here.

Cabernet Sauvignon is prevalent in Bordeaux, France and is frequently blended with other Bordeaux varietals including Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. The left bank area of Bordeaux is world renowned for producing some of the finest Cabernet dominated wines in the world, and while prices can run high you can find areas tucked in the middle of the big boys that produce great Cabernet blends for under \$25 such as the Medoc (pronounced May-Dock) region. I would recommend trying wines from almost any Chateau in the Medoc or Haut-Medoc regions. Bordeaux Superior too is an additional value area to explore. Cabernet is also grown, albeit in smaller quantities, on the right bank of Bordeaux (the two “banks” are separated by the Garonne River) where the blends are more Merlot based with smaller parts Cabernet Sauvignon, and they are excellent wines as well.

I'm also a big fan of Cabernet Sauvignon grown in Argentina and Chile. The Mendoza area of Argentina, which is known for its Malbecs (we will cover those soon) produces world class Cabernet Sauvignon with lots of character. Two other areas of Argentina to keep an eye out for are Salta and Patagonia which you are seeing pop up in more stores around the US. Great wines. Maipo Valley in Chile is a monster Cab area and the wines are big in the mouth and on flavor. They are fantastic with hearty red meat meals and you can find several for under \$10, but they really get good in the \$20-50 range.

The Coonawarra region of South Australia is another world famous Cabernet Sauvignon growing region. Some major names from here are Penfolds, Mildara and Parker and prices are going to start at \$15 and go into the several hundreds. You will also find Australian Cabernet blended with Shiraz, which also grows well in Australia and the combination is perfect.

If you were interested in the blends I mentioned from Napa Valley, you may also want to explore what's become known as Italian “Super

Tuscans.” These are hearty red blends from Italy that include a good chunk of Cabernet Sauvignon, along with Merlot and Sangiovese. These are lovely wines and can run the gamut from \$8 to \$500 or more. I find many in the \$10-20 range to be excellent bargains. One of my favorite wines of all time is a Super Tuscan, the 2007 Antinori Solaia. Granted it’s not inexpensive but it’s worth every dollar.

South Africa is another area to keep an eye on. They are producing some fantastic Cabernet there, and because it is still a bit off the radar, the wines are typically very good values.

Your Cabernet Sauvignon Check List:

- Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon
- Napa Valley Red Blend
- Sonoma Cabernet Sauvignon
- Washington State Cabernet Sauvignon
- Left bank Bordeaux (St Julien, St Estephe, Margaux, Medoc)
- Right bank Bordeaux (St Emillion)
- Cabernet Sauvignon from Mendoza, Argentina
- Cabernet Sauvignon from Maipo Valley in Chile
- Cabernet from Coonawarra (South Australia)
- Italian Super Tuscan
- South African Cabernet Sauvignon

Fast Fact: The lead singer of rock bands Tool and A Perfect Circle, Maynard James Keenan, founded Caduceus Cellars in Arizona, defying many who believed that good grapes couldn't be grown in the desert. But after a string of successful releases, including Cabernet Sauvignon and some red blends, Keenan has firmly planted Arizona on the wine growing map (and the wines are excellent, try them).

CABERNET FRANC

Cabernet Franc is a fun one to experiment with. It's a grape that is typically associated with Bordeaux blends, where it really shines, but in recent years you are seeing more and more straight Cabernet Franc bottles. And I'm fan. Cabernet Franc is kind of a little brother to Cabernet Sauvignon. They share some similar characteristics (red/black berry fruit) but Cabernet Franc is generally a little softer, not as dominant, and exudes more pepper, spice and earthy tones.

On a recent trip to Napa, I found more and more of the winemakers offering straight 100% Cabernet Franc bottles. One that stands out that I enjoyed was The Fury from Revolver Wine Company (and they have a great little tasting room in Yountville). Cabernet Franc is typically priced less than Cabernet Sauvignon since it hasn't yet achieved the same level of fame (and arguably, finesse). You will find a few Cabernet Franc bottles starting around \$10 with many hovering around that \$40-60 mark.

I'd recommend trying to find a straight 100% Cabernet Franc bottle to start with so you get a good idea what the grape tastes like. California, Washington State and France's Loire Valley (prominent area is Chinon) are good places to start. From there, you can begin to enjoy the nice red wines that are blended with Cabernet Franc, especially many of the Bordeaux wines. It will be easier to pick out the Cabernet Franc characteristics and you will begin to determine if you like blends with more or less Cabernet Franc.

Your Cabernet Franc Check List:

- California Cabernet Franc (you should be able to find a few that are 100% Cabernet Franc)
- Bordeaux blend that includes Cabernet Franc

- See if you can find a Cabernet Franc from the Loire Valley in France. Chinon is a popular region for Cabernet Franc and one of the more widely available in the US
- Cabernet Franc from Washington State (see Walla Walla)
- Up and coming Cabernet Franc region: Canada

MERLOT

Merlot was enjoying a nice run until a single line in a little movie called *SIDEWAYS* quickly changed people's opinion of this great varietal. But if you're willing to pass up one of the wine world's biggest and most important grapes because Miles prefers Pinot Noir then you might want to skip this section.

Merlot is often the dominant grape in some of the most prized wines in the world. The right bank of Bordeaux is loaded with Merlot and produces world class Merlot heavy wines. The Pomerol and Saint-Emilion areas of Bordeaux offer excellent wines consisting mostly of Merlot. In fact, Chateau Petrus, which is one of the most expensive wines in the world, is almost all Merlot based.

I think the Merlot grown in France tastes great, a little more rustic and old world than the fruit forward Merlot we enjoy in the US. In all its incarnations across the wine growing world, Merlot brings a softness to wines starting with its floral nose. In the mouth, Merlot is not quite as heavy as Cabernet Sauvignon, being more medium in body to Cabernet's full body. Flavors to expect are blueberry, blackberry and plum. These characteristics are why it's such a perfect blending grape although good Merlot can stand just fine on its own.

In addition to France, you can find great Merlot blends from Italy, such as the Super Tuscans we covered in the Cabernet Sauvignon chapter. Again, these start at \$10 for decent, highly drinkable bottles.

In the US, Merlot is a really good bargain in my opinion right now, perhaps a slight result of the "Sideways effect." You just don't hear about people getting excited about Merlot as much as you used to. And the wine selection at restaurants for Merlot tends to number significantly smaller than for Cabernet Sauvignon. But the US

produces some excellent Merlot that's as good on its own as it is with a blend.

The two primary areas to note are California and Washington State and both have some sub-regions that you will want to explore. In Napa, be sure to try Merlots from Rutherford and Oakville. Spend a little time browsing your Merlot aisle and you will quickly realize that big Cab names like Freemark Abbey, Duckhorn and Stags Leap Winery offer bottles of Merlot priced less than half of their Cabernet Sauvignon. And while these places may be best known for their Cabs, their Merlots aren't bad at all for the money, and their Merlot is used in their higher end blends of "Meritage" wines (rhymes with Heritage). On the Sonoma side, you will want to try Merlot from Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley (Longboard Vineyards is a good one/good price) and Dry Creek. In the central coast area of California, you can find quite a few good value producers of Merlot.

In Washington State, Merlot grows plentiful in the Columbia Valley, Horse Heaven Hills and Red Mountain areas. Chateau Ste. Michelle is a recognized name and it should be easy to find their Horse Heaven Hills Merlot which is typically under \$20. From Columbia Valley, check out Columbia Winery and Seven Hills. I know Hedges (great producer) makes some awesome red blends from Red Mountain that are worth checking out.

Your Merlot Check List:

- Bordeaux from Saint-Emilion
- Bordeaux from Pomerol
- Italian Super Tuscan (blend from Tuscany that includes Merlot)
- Napa Merlot from Rutherford and/or Oakville

- Sonoma Merlot from Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley and/or Dry Creek
- Washington State Merlot from Columbia Valley and/or Horse Heaven Hills

Fast Fact: Merlot is the most widely planted grape from the Bordeaux region of France.

SYRAH-SHIRAZ

Syrah or Shiraz, as it's known in Australia, is the same grape but some of the differences in taste between regions are so great that it might lead you to believe otherwise.

Syrah is a big red, typically full bodied with pepper, chocolate and dark fruit flavor; Syrah is noted for its spicy character, particularly Australian Shiraz. These wines are often blended with different grapes (red and white as we'll cover) although they can stand nicely on their own. I find them to be very food friendly as well, perfect with grilled meats, barbeque, sausage or roast pork.

There are four regions where Syrah is best known: the Rhone region in France, all over Australia including the famed Barossa Valley, Argentina and in the US.

Rhone Valley in France

The Rhone Valley in France offers high quality wines for the money and you should be able to find quite a few different bottles at most stores in the US. I will get into more detail on the Rhone Valley in the France section that follows, but this is prime growing territory for Syrah. In Northern Rhone you find more straight Syrah wines while in the Southern part you will find blends that utilize Syrah as well as Grenache and smaller parts Mourvedre, Cinsault and Carignan.

An interesting practice that you see in Northern Rhone is the blending of small parts of white wine (mostly Viognier) with Syrah which brings new layers of complexity and style. This is also popular in Australia.

Australian Shiraz

Shiraz has become the powerhouse grape for Australia and some world famous wines have been produced as a result. Shiraz is grown

all over Australia but I'm going to focus on three big areas that will help you get acquainted with these wines: Barossa Valley, McLaren Vale and Clare Valley.

Barossa Valley is probably the most popular region for Shiraz in Australia and bottles should be plentiful at your wine shop. These wines are also amazing bargains, with some bottles priced at \$20 tasting like they cost \$50. It's a fun world to explore too because the Australian winemakers use a lot of creativity with their bottle labels. Some Barossa Valley wines to note would be: Earthworks, Yalumba, Penfolds and Wolf Blass.

McLaren Vale is an Australian region on the rise with more and more bottles seemingly on the shelf every trip I make to the store. d'Arenberg Stump Jump is an awesome bottle from here that costs under \$15. Clare Valley is solid too. One of my favorites from here is the Jim Barry, The Lodge Shiraz.

In Australia, you will also find many Shiraz blended wines. As noted, we're seeing more and more Shiraz Viognier bottles, and since Cabernet Sauvignon grows so well, the Shiraz/Cab blends are really excellent too.

Argentina

Syrah from Argentina is huge on flavor. It doesn't hold anything back and with the right meal to complement their boldness, these wines are awesome. You'll find blends from Argentina as you do with many of the other regions. Make sure you experiment with these wines. The South American style Syrah might be right up your alley (I love to throw them in the mix occasionally). Montes makes a nice one for under \$20.

Syrah in the United States

This is one that you're going to have to explore. In the US, Syrah takes on many different characteristics in the areas of the country where it is grown.

California is an important region, namely Napa and the Carneros area. You will find these wines priced all over the place, starting around \$10 on the low end. Over in Paso Robles, there is a group known as the Rhone Rangers, who are popularizing the grapes made famous in the Rhone region of France. Syrah would certainly fall into this camp, and you will find excellent Syrah blends from this part of California. Some top names to look for are Justin, Terry Hoage (you might know him) and Tablas Creek (personal favorite).

Syrah also does great in Washington State particularly in the Walla Walla, Horse Heaven Hills and Yakima areas. Many of these bottles will run between \$30-50 but the climate in Washington State is really perfect for this varietal and the wines are highly enjoyable as a result.

Your Syrah/Shiraz Check List:

- Syrah from Northern Rhone Valley in France (Cote Rotie, Hermitage)
- Syrah from Southern Rhone (Cotes du Rhone, Chateauneuf-du-Pape)
- Australian Shiraz from Barossa Valley
- Australian Shiraz from McLaren Vale
- Australian Shiraz from Clare Valley
- Syrah from Argentina
- California Syrah from Carneros
- California Syrah from Paso Robles

- Washington State Syrah

Fast Fact: Petit Sirah is a different grape than Syrah (not a smaller version of Syrah). It is a cross of Syrah with another grape, Peloursin, and it is most popular in California and Australia.

PINOT NOIR

Pinot Noir is a finicky grape that is difficult to grow (it does best in cooler climates) but when it is done right it produces some of the most prized wines in the world. And we are fortunate to be drinking excellent Pinot Noir here in the US as well as having access to the great Pinot Noir wines from Burgundy, France and elsewhere. It is an exciting time to be drinking Pinot, and here's what you need to know to get started.

Pinot Noir is grown all over the world and there are different nuances to its flavor profile that vary from place to place. Generally speaking, Pinot Noir is much lighter in body than the other big reds we have discussed so far. While it's light to medium in body, the grape packs a big flavor punch with lots of black and red berry fruit, and Pinot Noir can really be enjoyed with a variety of different meals. It's a versatile wine that has enough power to hang with bold foods and enough finesse to bring out the best in lighter dishes. It is one of my favorite food wines, hands down.

The best place to start with Pinot Noir is its home in Burgundy France, where some of the most expensive and most sought after Pinot Noir originates. In France, wine is listed by region not grape, so you will want to look for language on the label that a bottle is from Burgundy or Vin de Bourgogne. Once you've determined that a bottle is from Burgundy, you will want to dive into the specific appellation inside of Burgundy and it will read something like "Appellation Cotes du Beane Controlee."

There are dozens of appellations and you don't need to get into them all. To get started just know this. Cote D'Or is the number one area of Burgundy and it is divided into two main regions, the Cote de Nuits and the Cote de Beaune. I suggest trying a Pinot Noir from each of these areas and explore from there. In Cote de Nuits my favorite

wines are from Nuits-Saint- Georges, which you should be able to find. Burgundian bottles can get quite expensive, and while they are worth the money in most cases, I'd recommend starting in the \$20 range and working your way up slowly from there. Louis Latour is a big Cote D'Or name that you can find under \$20 and may serve as a good starting point. If this is an area you enjoy you will want to explore wines across all the different classifications – Village, Premier Cru and Grand Cru. As you can image the price will correlate to how high up the ladder you climb.

Pinot Noir thrives in the US as well, and in recent years has gotten more and more enjoyable. Areas like California's central coast and Carneros are emerging as Pinot Noir superstars. And the Pinot Noir from Oregon and Washington State is finally being recognized on the global stage as being truly world class.

California's central coast stretches from Santa Barbara up toward San Francisco, and while most red and many white grapes are grown here, Pinot Noir is a constant favorite. Notable areas on the coast to check out are Santa Lucia Highlands, Mt Harlan and Santa Cruz Mountains. Many wines from these areas will approach the \$30-50 mark so you might want to start with some of the more inexpensive wines, typically labeled as "Central Coast" such as those from MacMurray Ranch, Chalone, Beaulieu or Lockwood which I bet you can find for \$15 and under.

Carneros is a California appellation with a nice cool climate ideal for Pinot Noir. On a recent trip to Napa, I encountered many of the top Napa names offering a Pinot Noir from land they farm in Carneros. And the wines were amazing. Prices are going to start in the low teens with many higher end bottles approaching \$100. A good starting point for Carneros Pinot Noir can be found in names such as Castle Rock (under \$15), Saintsbury (\$20), or even Costco's Kirkland Signature Carneros Pinot Noir (under \$10).

The Northwest is a newer Pinot Noir hot spot and I am consistently blown away by the wines I buy from both Oregon and Washington State. Oregon's Willamette Valley offers the perfect cool, wet climate for Pinot Noir. My two favorite sub-regions are Dundee Hills and McMinnville. In Washington State, it's a similar situation with a nice cool, wet mountain climate bordered by rain forests. You almost can't go wrong with Pinot Noir from the Northwest, but the trick is finding a good value. A few names that come to mind are Willamette Valley Vineyards (\$20), Erath (\$18) and King Estate (\$18).

Another country that seems to be producing better and better Pinot Noir is New Zealand. Its famed Marlborough region, known for its excellent Sauvignon Blanc which we will cover shortly, is also dishing up some nice value priced Pinot Noir. I've had several bottles in the \$10-15 range lately that surprised me from such names as Oyster Bay and Clifford Bay.

Your Pinot Noir Check List:

- Burgundian Pinot Noir from Nuits-Saint- Georges (or Cote de Nuits)
- Burgundian Pinot Noir from Cote de Beaune
- California Central Coast Pinot Noir
- California Carneros Pinot Noir
- Oregon Pinot Noir
- Washington State Pinot Noir
- New Zealand Pinot Noir from Marlborough

Fast Fact: Pinot Noir is one of the most difficult wine grapes to grow, requiring constant care and a perfect climate of warm days and cool nights. These stringent conditions are the reason why fewer bottles are produced and also why they can be more expensive.

MALBEC

Malbec is one of my go-to bottles when I need a big, round red wine at a great price. Malbec's taste is going to vary between regions (and elevations) but it is generally a little earthy on the nose, full bodied and big in the mouth with dark berry and plum flavors; and then a little peppery and spicy on the finish. Malbec goes perfect with everything from red meat or red sauce dishes to hamburgers and pizza. Malbec is popular around grilling season at our house.

The first place to go for Malbec is Mendoza, Argentina where the price-to-quality ratio is almost hard to believe. Starting around \$8 and going over \$60, you can almost be assured you will get a good wine for the dollar when you go the Mendoza route. The good news for Malbec fans is that you are not alone, and most wine shops now have a whole section dedicated to Malbec wines.

Some names to seek out from Mendoza are Ben Marco (\$15), Catena (starting at \$15 but going up toward \$100), Alamos (a favorite for \$8), and Bodega Norton (\$18+). The higher elevation Malbecs from Mendoza are where things really start to get interesting, and they taste different than those grown at lower elevations (kind of like your Atlas Peak and Howell Mountain Cabs in Napa). Next time you plan to splurge on a \$50-60 wine, try a high elevation Mendoza Malbec, and it will taste like you spent twice as much.

Malbec is also popular in the Bordeaux region of France and it is frequently blended into wines along with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. The Cahors region is particularly well known for more Malbec dominated blends and they are quite good.

On the subject of Bordeaux blending, I have seen a larger number of California winemakers dedicate more of their land to Malbec for their

Bordeaux style blends. While Malbec has been planted around Napa for some time, many of the big names are producing higher percentage Malbec components in their premium blends. Combined with other varietals that thrive in Napa, these red blends are a lot of fun to explore. And they vary year to year in their composition depending on that year's growth conditions so the experience never gets old.

This is a quick overview to begin exploring Malbecs from all over the world. We are seeing more pop up from Washington State, Chile, other areas of California and Australia, which all should be fun to try.

Your Malbec Check List:

- Malbec from Mendoza, Argentina (I would try 3-4 different ones; this is the center of good Malbec, and at great prices)
- Malbec from Cahors (France)
- A red blend from Napa containing Malbec

Fast Fact: Argentinean Malbec is able to thrive on pure French roots (since Argentinean soil is resistant to the nasty vine killing pest phylloxera), making it some of the truest Malbec in the world.

ZINFANDEL

Zinfandel is a misunderstood grape, largely because of its many incarnations including the “wine-snob” frowned upon (but super high volume) White Zinfandel. Many beginning wine drinkers may pass it up simply because they don’t know how good it can be (I was one of those a long time ago). But Zinfandel in its best form creates rich, heavy, distinctive red wines that are fun to throw in the mix for a change of pace now and then.

Zinfandel typically has notes of super ripe fruit, lots of red fruit and berries; full bodied and big in the mouth with a distinctive finish that you will begin to instantly recognize as you dive in. You see a lot of wine critics refer to Zinfandel as “jammy.” Zinfandel goes great with everything from hamburgers to Thanksgiving dinner.

California has emerged as the leading producer of Zinfandel and it grows in many different areas of the state, and it grows well. You will see references to “old vine” Zinfandel and Gnarly vines, because they grow so radically.

Amador County is located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and is widely regarded for its Zinfandel. The climate is hot during the day and cool at night, which helps the grapes to ripen up nicely. A couple names to note from Amador: Four Vines “The Maverick” (\$20 and I love this wine), Sobon Estate (\$14) and Montevina (\$7-20).

Another big area in northern Sonoma is Dry Creek Valley, which I also mentioned for its Merlot and Cabernet. Dry Creek Valley is recognized for having some of the most popular Zinfandel in the state, and benefits from its cool, foggy climate not far from the Coast. Ridge (\$25-50) is one of my favorite Zinfandels from Dry Creek

Valley. Coppola Wines offers a nice Dry Creek Zin for around \$20. And keep an eye out for Seghesio Zins, another worthwhile taste, starting at around \$20 and going up from there.

Lodi is a little further inland, but produces excellent Zins and this is where you see a lot of the “old vine Zinfandel.” Lodi is a great place to go for value since you can score nice Zins from here under \$20. Look for 7 Deadly Zins (\$12) and Ravenswood Old Vine (\$12). And as you go further up market, you can find fantastic Lodi Zins in the \$25 range that taste like they cost \$50.

Zinfandel is also grown in Italy where it is known as Primitivo. Next time you run across one of these bottles in the store you’ll know what grape it is, and you may see Italian blends that include Primitivo. Most Primitivo is grown in the Puglia area of Italy.

Your Zinfandel Check List:

- Amador County Zinfandel
- Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel
- Lodi Zinfandel
- Italian Primitivo

Fast Fact: Zinfandel is genetically the same as the Croatian grape Crljenak Kaštelanski (pronounced sirl-yen-ack kastelanski). Order one of those at a restaurant if you really want to sound fancy.

FRANCE

The French wine section at my local wine shops is always a favorite. So much so that I wrote a short book on the subject (*Decoding French Wine: A Beginner's Guide to Enjoying the Fruits of the French Terroir*). What follows is a quick summary of many of the French wine regions that I covered in my previous book in more depth.

French wine is categorized by its region and each region (or appellation) is allowed to produce wines containing certain grapes specific to the French wine growing standards. For this reason you typically won't find French wines labeled as Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot but instead by where the grapes were produced. In addition, French wines are often blends of these different varietals. This is why many wine shops will have a whole section simply called France.

If you had to boil it down, the big areas to try are Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne and Rhone. Let's look at what you can expect from each one.

Bordeaux

Bordeaux, perhaps more than any other wine region on the planet, is known for its world class wines that fetch into the thousands of dollars per bottle depending on the vintage. The reason for this is the perfect climate, the gravel and limestone soil and generations of wine experience. The good news is that you can find excellent Bordeaux wines at fair prices and the last decade has seen a string of excellent vintages that you should be snatching up.

When you visit your local wine shop or look at French Bordeaux on a menu, you will want to note three things: the year, the Chateau and the appellation within Bordeaux. Bordeaux is divided into two main regions: left bank, meaning west of the Garonne River, and right bank, which is east of the river. You will get more Cabernet Sauvignon

heavy wines on the left bank side and more Merlot based wines on the right bank side.

Bordeaux wines are reds and whites. While the red wines usually consist of a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec, the white wines will consist of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc.

Here are some of the top areas of the left bank to familiarize yourself with:

- Margaux
- St Julien
- St Estephe
- Pauillac
- Medoc
- Graves (Pessac-Leognan and Sauternes)

And from the right bank:

- Pomerol
- Saint-Emilion
- Fronsac
- Bourg
- Blaye

Also, as I briefly mentioned above, we've had some great years recently for Bordeaux wines. Try to find some from 2005 (if you can), 2009 and 2010. Good Bordeaux also ages well, so don't be afraid to dip into an oldie if you have the chance. I still have a couple from 2000 that are drinking really nice right now.

Burgundy

We covered Burgundy briefly in the Pinot Noir section, but Burgundy also produces some excellent Chardonnay, which leads to the designations Red Burgundy and White Burgundy. Easy enough, except that Burgundy also includes wines from Beaujolais made from the Gamay grape. Let's break down each of these briefly.

Red Burgundy: as mentioned previously, start by looking for wines from Cote D'Or. The best way to explore this area is to always try something new. If you do, you will start to develop a taste for what you like and an understanding of how the areas within Cote D'Or differ from one another.

Beaujolais: an area of Burgundy that you might be familiar with given the incredible retail marketing effort for the release of these wines around Thanksgiving every year. Beaujolais is made from the Gamay grape, and in most incarnations is meant to be consumed young (often times in the year it's released). But if you venture out a bit and try some of the Cru Beaujolais, they get quite good.

Chablis: a very important region of Burgundy and a great white wine with a variety of meals. Chablis is made from Chardonnay, and has a little more of a new world taste to it compared to the other white burgundies. Chablis remains an excellent white wine choice for almost any occasion and like many of the other great French wines, we are starting to see more and more bottles carried in the stores here in the US.

Champagne

People often associate champagne with any sparkling wine, but Champagne is an area of France and the only “true Champagne” originates from here. Wines from Champagne are typically made with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and they carry with them designations such as Prestige Cuvée (the best from the winemaker), Blanc de noirs (made from black or red grapes, but still white, no skins), Blanc de blanc (made from Chardonnay), and Rose (some Pinot Noir used). You’ll see these designations on the label and they provide a guide for what to expect on the inside. Champagne is really gaining in popularity in the US in the last few years since it complements just about any meal (not just a special occasion).

Rhone

The Rhone Valley in Southern France produces stellar wines using many different grapes than are found in other parts of France. In fact, in the popular and renowned Chateauneuf-du-Pape region, blends can utilize 13 different grapes. Rhone wines stand out to me because they exude the beauty of the French land, with old vine heritage, and they are consistently exceptional values from the low end (\$10) all the way to the high end (\$300+). They are incredibly food friendly too.

Northern Rhone is noted for its Syrah which is the primary red grape that is grown in the area. Interestingly enough to many US wine consumers, the winemakers in Northern Rhone will occasionally blend their Syrah with small parts of white grapes, including Viognier, Marsanne and Roussanne. Some of the appellations of Northern Rhone to keep an eye out for are Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage, Cote Rotie and Saint Joseph.

Southern Rhone has a bit warmer climate and in addition to Syrah, you will also see blends with Grenache (dominantly), Mourvedre,

Cinsault and Carignan. One of the key appellations in Southern Rhone that you will want to commit to memory is Cotes du Rhone, a staple of the area, lots of Grenache dominated blends and typically a safe bet at almost any price point. Other notable areas include Cotes du Rhone Villages, Gigondas (great values), Cotes du Ventoux, Vacqueyras, Chateauneuf-du-Pape (a personal favorite), Rasteau and Costieres de Nimes.

Rhone offers some great white wines too blended from grapes such as Viognier, Roussanne, Marsanne and Grenache Blanc with some lesser known grapes such as Ugni Blanc, Bourboulenc, Picpoul, and Clairette.

Note: For wines from the European countries, I am going to focus on covering the appellations that you should explore and not specific bottles as I did for some of the other sections. Distribution is just such a moving target, I would hate to send you searching for certain winemakers when your store might carry an even better bottle from the same region. Focus on the areas, explore the differences between them, and then get into the specific winemakers from the areas you like best.

Your French Wine Check List:

- Left bank red Bordeaux from Margaux, St Julien, St Estephe, Pauillac, Medoc and Pessac-Leognan (try each one)
- Right bank red Bordeaux from Pomerol, Saint-Emilion and Fronsac
- White Bordeaux (Bordeaux Blanc blend of Semillion and Sauvignon Blanc)
- Dessert wine (sweet) from Sauternes

- Red Burgundy from Cote D'Or
- White Burgundy from Chablis
- Beaujolais (various options here, but try to find a Cru Beaujolais too)
- French champagne
- Red wine from Cotes du Rhone
- Red wine from Chateauneuf-du-Pape
- White Rhone wine

Fast Fact: The French wine-making tradition traces its roots back to the sixth century B.C., when the area that is today southern France was settled by Greek colonists.

ITALY

Italy is another wine powerhouse and a region that demands proper exploration. Like France, it can be quite confusing at first, but it doesn't really have to be. This is why my latest book dives deeper into helping consumers understand Italian wines (*Decoding Italian Wine: A Beginner's Guide to Enjoying the Grapes, Regions, Practices and Culture of the "Land of Wine"*). I co-authored the book with an Italian film reviewer who brought a great deal of cultural references and tidbits to the story that makes this book even easier to digest.

Italian wines are usually labeled according to the region where they are produced versus the grape, so you will want to familiarize yourself with what's produced where. And there are a lot of different regions, including some super small ones that produce great wine, but I'm going to stick to the more well known ones that you need for an introductory wine education, and they are the ones that you should be able to find in your local wine shop.

We'll begin with the 3 Big B's: Barolo, Barbaresco and Brunello.

Barolo and Barbaresco: two of Italy's greatest treasures. Both wines are produced from the Nebbiolo grape in the famed Piedmont region (your wine shop may have a dedicated Piedmont section). Barolo and Barbaresco wines are big, rich red wines that are full bodied with red berry flavor along with more rustic undertones of chocolate and licorice. Pair these with something that can match their flavor, like lasagna or thick tomato based pasta sauces. Barolo wines are known for their high tannic structure (a bit tighter than Barbarescos) and they are meant to be aged to allow time for the tannins to soften up a bit.

Brunello: made from 100% Sangiovese (San-joe-vay-zee), and probably the highest end region for this grape in Italy. Wines from

Brunello tend to have dark berry flavor, highlighted by a dry finish, perfect for many Italian style dishes.

Wines from the 3 B's of Italy are not inexpensive, but they are unique and really enjoyable when the time calls for them. On the low end, you're looking at \$30-40 (be careful going much lower than that) but to truly grasp the beauty of these wines, you will need to spend closer to \$70-80.

Your wine store may have an entire section dedicated to Piedmont since it is one of the premier wine regions in the world with perfect soil and weather to grow many of the famous Italian grapes. In addition to the Nebbiolo mentioned above, you will want to explore some of the other grapes famously grown in Piedmont including Dolcetto and Barbera. These are usually found at much lower price points, starting in the teens.

Another powerhouse wine from the Veneto area in Italy is Amarone (pronounced Am-a-row-knee), which commands a premium price due to its complexity, structure and ability to age. Amarone is made from the Corvina grape that has dark cherry flavors with great tannic structure. While most Amarone bottles start in the \$30 range, keep an eye out for Valpolicella wines which is a little sister to Amarone. Many Valpolicella wines are priced around \$15-20 and they offer a lot of what Amarone does, for a lot less.

Italian Sangiovese extends far beyond Brunello though, and it gets (arguably) equally as good and even less expensive in other areas, including Chianti. Chianti is produced in Tuscany so your wine shop may include these wines in a special section or bundle them up under "Italy." Some even break Tuscany down by region which is really helpful.

Chianti is made predominantly from the Sangiovese grape, although a few other ones might be blended in depending on the winemaker. When you see a bottle labeled as “Chianti Classico” this is not a classic version of Chianti. Rather it encompasses the next few towns over, and it has its own wine sanctioning body. I find Chianti Classico wines to exude a little more character than their counterparts down the street. Chianti and Chianti Classico wines can be found starting around \$10 and they climb up from there. One of my favorite producers is Frescobaldi and they are a good one to keep an eye out for because they offer different bottles at various price points.

The more I have explored Italian wines, the more value areas I discover so I'd like to cover a few of those now. These wines, in my opinion of course, cost less than \$15 on average and offer better quality than almost anything else in its price range.

The first one is Montepulciano d'Abruzzo and it is made from the Montepulciano grape. Bottles of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo are starting to appear more and more in US stores, with price points starting around \$8. The wines are dry like many Italian wines, with pepper and spice; blackberry in flavor. They are really meant to be paired with classic Italian dishes.

Another favorite Italian value wine is Nero D'Avola, which is produced in Sicily. These are dark wines with peppery undertones and a dry finish. Nero D'Avola wines can typically be found for \$10-15.

Italian white wines are also quite good, including the Pinot Grigio that many people think beats out Pinot Grigio from other regions. I'd also keep an eye out for bottles of Soave, a crisp dry white wine that can be scored ridiculously cheap in many cases. A few other Italian whites that I really enjoy are Gavi, Verdicchio and Vermentino – each are reasonably priced (often under \$20) and are excellent alternatives to the standard white wines you may encounter.

I'll wrap up this section on Italy with another mention of Italian Super Tuscans. These are wines blended with Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot (as we covered briefly in the Cabernet Sauvignon section). Starting at only \$8 they are excellent bargain drinkers, and the high end ones that stretch into the hundreds of dollars can hang with fine Bordeaux that costs even more. When you go to the store remember, you won't see the words "Super Tuscan" on the label. Rather look for red blends from Tuscany, sometimes simply called Rosso.

Your Italian Wine Check List

- One red wine from either Barolo or Barbaresco. Not cheap I know, but a fun way to experience the Nebbiolo grape
- Red wine from Brunello
- Red Amarone wine
- Red Valpolicella wine
- Red wine from Chianti and/or Chianti Classico
- Red wine from Montepulciano d'Abruzzo
- Nero D'Avola from Sicily
- Italian Pinot Grigio
- Italian Soave
- Italian Super Tuscan, red blend

Fast Fact: Italy is currently the largest wine producing country by volume, followed (closely) by France and Spain.

SPAIN

Of all the wines and regions we've covered thus far, Spain might be the one where I am buying most of my wines from right now. The price to value on many Spanish wines right now is just too good to pass up. Let's look at some of the key areas that you need to know about, beginning with areas known for their red wines made from the Tempranillo grape (known there as Tinto Fino).

Rioja and Ribera Del Duero

These are the two quintessential areas of Spain for big, hearty red wines that are food friendly and on the whole, very reasonably priced. Rioja (pronounced Ree-OH-hah) and Ribera del Duero produce Tempranillo based wines that are medium to full bodied, with some noted earthy undertones; expect flavors of red berry fruit. The flavor profile really varies with the time the wine spends aging.

Both areas use the Spanish aging labels. A wine labeled as "Crianza" must age two years before release; a wine labeled "Reserva" must age three years, and a wine labeled "Grand Reserva" must age 5 years before release.

Rioja and Ribera del Duero wines can start in the \$8-10 range and climb up significantly from there. The quality across the board, even on the low end, is quite remarkable. These wines are really versatile. You can serve them on their own, with almost any meal, share with friends at a party or bring over to someone's house as a gift. You can't go wrong.

Priorat and Garnacha

The next big thing to know about Spanish wines is the Garnacha grape grown prevalently in Spain's famed Priorat region. "Garnacha" is the same as the "Grenache" found in France and elsewhere. Like

many grapes, it is just known by its local name in Spain. Fairly good Priorat bottles can be found for close to \$15 but they get incrementally better as you spend more.

Garnacha is an important grape in Spain and it is also beginning to be blended into Rioja wines. Its juicy, fruit forward character and softness makes it a great blending partner but also a wine that is fantastic on its own. We're seeing more Grenache being grown here in the US as well.

You will also want to explore wines from Navarra. Your wine shop will likely carry a few of these, and they start right around \$12.

Spain's white wines

I think Spain offers some of the best white wine values in all of Europe. The more I try the more I tend to build on that position. Simply put Albarino from Rías Baixas and Verdejo from Rueda can be found for \$10-15 and they actually put a lot of fun back into drinking inexpensive white wines. With more character than Pinot Grigio, less oak and butter than most Chardonnays, and more complexity than many Sauvignon Blancs, these wines serve up crisp apricot and peach flavors, perfect if chilled in the summertime. And I love to pair these whites with lighter summer fare such as salads, white fish and chicken.

Wherever you explore in Spanish wine country you will find good wines for a good value. There are many more regions than I listed here, but this should get you going in the right direction, and you can further explore based on what grapes and areas you find favor with.

Your Spanish Wine Check List:

- Tempranillo wine from Rioja
- Tempranillo wine from Ribera del Duero

- Grenache based wine from Priorat
- Grenache from Navarra. Toro is an area not to be missed too
- Albarino white wine from Rías Baixas
- Verdejo white wine from Rueda

Fast Fact: Even though Spain is recognized more for its reds, nearly two thirds of Spain's vineyards are white grapes due to high volumes of brandy and sherry production.

GERMANY-AUSTRIA

Most people just starting out on their wine journey don't associate Germany or Austria with wine country. And I didn't either at first. But Germany produces some of the best Riesling in the world, and Austria has made a big push into stores recently with their Gruner Veltliner (pronounced GROO-ner Felt-Lean-er) whites and amazing red wines.

Let's first look into German Rieslings. Riesling thrives in Germany because of its cool climate surrounded by mountains and rivers. Riesling from Germany tends to be sweet like Riesling from other areas, but they taste really pure, with fragrant noses and the rich flavor of peaches, apricots and apples. They are spectacular (and that's coming from someone who doesn't normally prefer Riesling).

There are many drier Rieslings available too and we're seeing more and more of these reaching US stores. The German wine authority has a super complicated system for outlining the ripeness and sugar content of the wines, but I, like many American wine consumers, have yet to figure it out.

The labels on German Rieslings are confusing too but you can start your journey by finding some Riesling from Mosel, which seems to be a popular option in many restaurants and wine shops.

In Austria, Gruner Veltliner is thriving as more wine enthusiasts pick up on what is a great white wine bargain, and one that floats a little off most people's radar (although I am seeing an influx of new Gruner bottles at my wine shop). Here's the scoop. Gruner Veltliner is not at all like Riesling. I only included them in the same section because of their geographic relationship (and because my local wine warehouse keeps them side by side).

Gruner Veltliner is light to medium in body, and is dry and crisp; not too sweet. It shares some of the same fruit flavors as Riesling, but is more like a robust, floral Sauvignon Blanc. Gruner Veltliner is really food friendly as well, going with just about anything – seafood, white meat, vegetables or stir fry.

And you can find Gruner Veltliner in stores for around \$15-\$20. When you are looking for a change of pace, try a bottle of Gruner. It won't be your last.

Your Wine Check List for Germany and Austria:

- Riesling from Germany (start with Mosel)
- Gruner Veltliner from Austria

Fast fact: German immigrants brought Riesling vines with them in the late nineteenth century and the earliest US plantings occurred in New York's Finger Lakes region.

CHARDONNAY

Chardonnay is one of the most popular white wines in the world and it is grown extensively in most major wine regions, where it particularly thrives in France (Burgundy) and in the US (California). California Chardonnay was put on the world map when it beat out its French counterparts at the 1976 “Judgment in Paris” with French judges blindly choosing the Chardonnay from California’s Chateau Montelena over their own White Burgundies.

And Chardonnay continues to thrive today, offered in many different styles from different regions of the wine world.

White Burgundy

We covered Chardonnay in France pretty extensively. At your wine shop you will want to look for the Burgundy section and then begin to segment out the white burgundies. I would aim to try at least two bottles of white burgundy, one from Chablis and one from Pouilly-Fuisse. This should be easy to find as these are two of the primary areas you will see represented in US wine stores.

French Chardonnay is going to be stylistically different from what you will find elsewhere. It won’t be over oaked and buttery, instead more pure, citrusy and clean. Its fruit flavors will really come to the forefront. In Chablis, winemakers may use stainless steel fermenting to keep the wines even more pure and fresh.

Using stainless steel for fermenting is growing in popularity in other places too, particularly in the US which is a relief from what I’ve found to be severely over oaked Chardonnays. For a time, the US consumer preferred the oaky style, but having recently returned from a Napa trip, I can say there’s been a marked shift, not necessarily to all stainless, but they’ve definitely turned down the dial on oak influence on the wines.

California

Many of the areas of Sonoma we've covered also produce excellent Chardonnay including Alexander Valley, Carneros and Russian River Valley. California's central coast is also a hot spot, particularly Santa Barbara County, with its cool ocean side climate. And big name Napa producers will offer good Chardonnay as well. Expect to start in the \$10-15 to get going, with some of the really tasty bottles priced in the \$25-30 range.

Outside of California, you should seek out Chardonnay (and Riesling) from upstate New York's Finger Lakes region. Given the cooler climate, these grapes fare very well.

Based on the popularity of Chardonnay it's no surprise that it is grown all over the world. Australia and New Zealand produce good Chardonnay, as does Italy, Chile and Argentina. I would keep an eye on South Africa and Canada, since both are up and coming Chardonnay regions.

Your Chardonnay Check List:

- French White Burgundy (Chablis, Pouilly-Fuisse)
- Blanc de blancs champagne made from Chardonnay
- California Chardonnay from Alexander Valley, Carneros or Russian River Valley (Sonoma)
- California Chardonnay from Napa Valley
- California Chardonnay from the central coast, Monterey, Santa Barbara
- New York Chardonnay

Fast Fact: Chardonnay is the top selling varietal in the United States.

SAUVIGNON BLANC

Like Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc is a grape that is expressed in many different styles from all over the world. In general, Sauvignon Blanc is a citrusy, grassy white wine with a good dose of acidity (making it often times tart) and fresh tropical flavors. Each of these components is emphasized more or less in the various styles throughout the world, and some regions, particularly in France and New Zealand have become known for their unmistakable characteristics in their Sauvignon Blanc.

We'll start with French Sauvignon Blanc, which is the birth place of the grape. In France, Sauvignon Blanc is (primarily) grown in Bordeaux and the Loire Valley including Sancerre where the grape really thrives. As I mentioned in the France section, Sauvignon Blanc in Bordeaux is frequently blended with Semillon, a practice you are seeing become more popular in other regions of the world including Napa Valley (Duckhorn's Sauvignon Blanc is one of my favorite of these blends, \$24).

Most of the Sauvignon Blanc in France falls into the more elegant of executions, floral and earthy with mineral undertones and a clean crispness to the flavor. This runs a little differently than we will see from California and New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs. You'll want to make sure to try a few white Bordeaux, which are relatively inexpensive (starting around \$12) and move into some of the Loire Valley wines which start closer to \$15. And keep in mind that Sauvignon Blanc is also an important component to French sweet dessert wines including those from Sauternes.

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc

Now let's jump down to New Zealand where Sauvignon Blanc takes on entirely different characteristics, particularly in its famed

Marlborough region. Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc is vibrant and instantly recognizable for its high acidity and powerful citrus flavor. These Marlborough wines also start around \$10 in the majority of wine shops with most bottles I see hovering around \$15-20.

Some names to note are Kim Crawford (perhaps the most well known in the US), Cloudy Bay, Brancott and Nobilo (a great one for under \$10, and also my wife's summertime go-to wine). Marlborough is one of those regions where you really can't go wrong, and we're even seeing other New Zealand areas represented in wine shops including the excellent Hawke's Bay and Martinborough. Jump in, explore New Zealand wines and see where it takes you.

Great Sauvignon Blanc can also be found in the US, primarily in California, but also in Washington State (Chateau Ste. Michelle offers a good Horse Heaven Hills Sauvignon Blanc for around \$12). I gravitate toward many of the Napa producers which are good places to start, such as the aforementioned Duckhorn (around \$22), Markham (\$13) or Honig (\$15).

On the higher end, one of my favorite Sauvignon Blancs comes from Cliff Lede in Stag's Leap (around \$40; their reds are also a personal favorite). Russian River Valley in Sonoma also kicks out some good wines such as the Frei Brothers which is around \$13. Note also, that certain places in California will refer to Sauvignon Blanc as Fume Blanc, even though they are the same grape.

California Sauvignon Blanc is a little tamer on the acidity and toned down a tad in its flavor. It still remains very citrusy (lemon, lime, grapefruit), but a touch of oak keeps the wines a little more mild mannered, and in my opinion a tad more food friendly.

And finally, if you see Chilean Sauvignon Blanc, pick some up. It's more representative of the European style of Sauvignon Blanc, and perhaps a bit more rustic, but for \$8-10 a bottle, it's a good buy.

Your Sauvignon Blanc Check List:

- Sauvignon Blanc from France's Loire Valley
- White Bordeaux with Sauvignon Blanc
- Sauvignon Blanc from Sancerre (France)
- Sauternes dessert wine (sometimes you can find these in the smaller 375ml bottles)
- New Zealand Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc
- New Zealand Hawke's Bay Sauvignon Blanc
- Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc
- Sonoma Valley Sauvignon Blanc

Fast Fact: Screw caps seal 75 percent of Australian wines and 93 percent of New Zealand wines.

IN CONCLUSION

So that's a good primer on many of the things I've learned about wine in the last eight to ten years, all summed up in under 40 pages. I realize I didn't cover every region or even every important wine, but my intent was to lay out a quick "shotgun blast" approach to getting going in the wine world, and you will have to see where it takes you from there.

Many of the wines I recommend are personal favorites, and that doesn't guarantee of course that you will agree with my tastes, but it should help you in your exploration. All prices I listed were rough estimates too and will vary across different parts of the country, and by vintage.

So I hope this gets you started down the right path. If you made it this far, I think you'll do just fine. And if you work your way through the checklists I posted at the end of each section, you will be fast on your way to building a solid foundation of wine knowledge. What you build on that foundation is entirely up to you.

I love hearing from readers about what they think of my books. If you have the time, and feel so compelled, please post a review on the Amazon.com page for this book, and/or email me at acullen@gmail.com.

I also encourage you to check out my other books covering French and Italian wines, available on Amazon Kindle as well as paperback. You can also follow my regular wine musings on my website: www.CostcoWineBlog.com.

Thanks again for reading.

Andrew

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Cullen has authored and co-authored four non-fiction books including *"Decoding Italian Wine: A Beginner's Guide to Enjoying the Grapes, Regions, Practices and Culture of the "Land of Wine," "Decoding French Wine: A Beginner's Guide to Enjoying the Fruits of the French Terroir," "Around the Wine World in 40 Pages: An Exploration Guide for the Beginning Wine Enthusiast"* and *"New Customers Now: Using the Web's Best Free Tools to Market Your Small Business."* He is a digital marketer for a global 100 brand and the founder of several websites including CostcoWineBlog.com and ToysBulletin.com.