

# In Pursuit of Wine Knowledge

AS I NOTED IN THE *Is Wine Art?* article (September/October 2009), there are several books that are helpful in building one's wine knowledge foundation. As noted also, there is no substitute for doing homework and actually drinking wide varieties of wines from all over the world. When you consider that everyone's palate is somewhat unique, it makes more sense to make your own decisions about your favorite wines than to permit even the savviest writer to overly influence you. I also encourage people to establish a personal relationship with a wine adviser (proprietor, employee, sommelier, wine writer, etc.) who has an extensive knowledge of wine and, in particular, knows wine and food pairing. In the September/October 2008 article *Wine Tasting Wisdom*, I gave guidelines for holding wine tasting parties. Throughout many of my previous articles, I've tried to show the increased pleasure of actually visiting viticultural regions and getting to know at least some of the local wines at the producing properties.

For those who wish to take this wine adventure to a new and higher level, there are numerous wine events, seminars, and festivals held throughout the world. Many are regional in focus, e.g., Sonoma, Calif., Oregon, Central Coast, or Tuscany. Those seeking a deeper understanding and knowledge of a particular region, e.g., Napa, Bordeaux, Burgundy, or Argentina, can attend more extensive, intensive courses of study regionally. For an extra diversion, I recommend volunteering to work part of a harvest to gain even more fundamental knowledge of the grape and wine making process, and an almost guaranteed better understanding of the best food to go with the wine. To become a wine professional, there are formal study curricula, e.g., Certified Wine Educator, Master Sommelier, and Master of Wine, which entail rigorous and lengthy periods of study. Most people seeking such certification do so while working in the industry in positions such as sommelier, director of wine, distributor, or retail employee, etc., and generally intend to stay in the industry.

From my perspective, one should attend the two most famous and largest wine events at least once. I attended Vinexpo in Bordeaux in 1989.

The highlight, in addition to many châteaux visits and tastings there and during the Vinexpo daily events, was a world class tasting and dinner at Château Palmer catered by Maxims-de-Paris. I had the opportunity to taste all great vintages from 1947 to 1983 of one of the greatest Sauternes (Chateaus Gillette Crème de Tete) with the owner, Christian Medville. The other guest and I were honored to say the least, even though he and I had sworn we would not drink wine before noon that day. We had no alternative as our offer came at 10 a.m.

Perhaps my greatest memory came when I had the chance to be one of the 130 judges in a tasting of all French wine. I spent a joyous day doing one of my favorite intellectual and hedonistic exercises. After the four-hour event, we were given an engraved magnum from the French government attesting to our event participation and then taken to an old church along the Gironde where we feasted and dined royally.

I was also fortunate to attend Vinitaly in Verona in 2003. This event, Vinexpo, is mainly for professionals and in the case of both, they are so large and such a bustling of activity, that one is worn out after several days. I was with friends

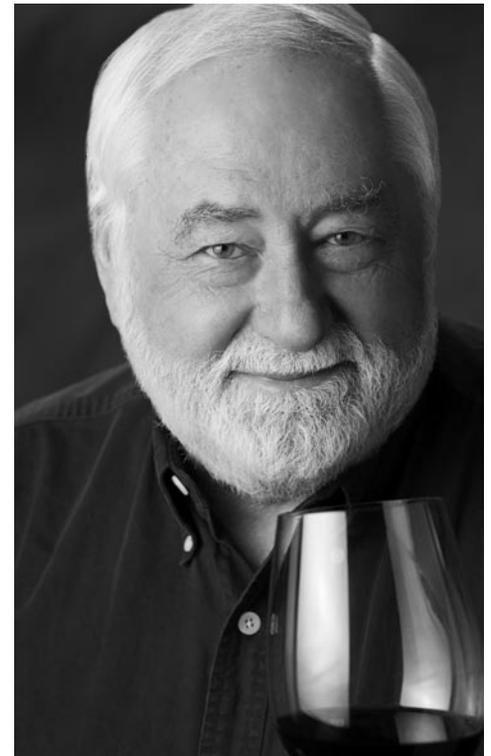


PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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from Italy as well as the United States, and had many evening dining and winery events. One should note that in France for winery visits in June of odd years or Italy in early April annually, it will be almost impossible to make successful trips due to the attendance at these two world's largest wine exhibitions.

After spending much of my life in pursuit of wine knowledge, I have decided that the best-organized event is the New York Wine

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Experience held on odd years in New York City and the New World Wine Experience (previously the California Experience) both sponsored by the Wine Spectator Wine Scholarship Foundation. I just returned from my 25th year at the New York Wine Experience. The daytime events for both venues are formatted the same, featuring seminars on the greatest wines of the world. Sometimes there are verticals of First Growth Bordeaux, Grange, Grand Cru Burgundies (both red and white), as well as country sponsored wine lunches with copious amounts of wine. Most speakers are very interesting and it takes your breath away to enter the ballroom at 9 a.m. facing 25,000 wine glasses (25 for each of the 1,000 attendees). It is the only place I know to extend one's knowledge of wine so quickly in just two days.

An annual culinary highlight worth the price of admission is a fierce competition between Mario Batali, Emeril Lagasse, Wolfgang Puck, and Charlie Trotter to outdo one another in preparing our pre-lunch. They each choose a wine and someone else chooses the alternative and we vote on the best food and wine pairing.

Lest I forget, Thursday and Friday evenings consist of the top 250 wineries in the world (Lafite, Margeaux, d'Yquem, Latour, Salaia, Mouton Rothschild, Catena Zapata, etc.) each with the owner and/or wine makers pouring all you wish of their top wine. I know of no such event where you can drink to your heart's content for the prepaid largely tax-deductible ticket. For those who are not interested in such an affair, both the Wine Spectator and the Wine Enthusiast sponsor annual three-city tours for one evening, each which gives one a glance into the genre at a small cost. Santé! 🍷

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