



Secrets of the Sommeliers: How to Think and Drink Like the World's Top Wine Professionals by Parr, Rajat, Mackay, Jordan (2010) Hardcover

Rajat, Mackay, Jordan Parr

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Up front, we are introduced to Parr through an episode one evening at restaurant Michael Mina, when a couple came in with a special bottle in a paper bag and asked Parr to identify it. He tried to beg off because of a lingering cold. The customers insisted, and so with only a sniff, he correctly called it as a Volnay Premier Cru Burgundy, and after one sip, as a 1998. As it turned out, he also had the producer in his head, though the bottle was revealed before he spoke. As the book suggests, just imagine what Parr might be like with his full game on. Credentials established, the book moves through the world of the sommelier from almost every angle: the development of the role historically, capsules on modern-day pioneer sommeliers who redefined the profession and fine wine lists, service essentials, storage and serving temperatures, buying strategies and tasting notes. Some sections, like the short, pithy section on wine and food pairing, are fresh and insightful. Parr draws some nifty distinctions between different preparations of the same chunk of protein, and offers a promising solution to the age-old riddle of what goes with soup and with fried foods: Champagne. A central focus is on how to taste, and how to get better at tasting. As you might expect, rigorous practice is the key, and the more years of it the better. In case you thought this would be easy, Parr suggests drinking only one kind of wine for a month or two, in all price ranges, from every region, until that grape's character is burned into your head; and then pick another one. His suggestions of iconic and benchmark wines that define certain grapes and regions sound right on the money to me, with an emphasis on the money part: many of the listed bottles -- great Burgundies and Bordeaux, for example -- carry a bottle cost higher than most people's idea of a good case price...

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