

presses, yeasts, racking, fining, and storage. Ancient winemakers understood that while oxygen was often their friend, it could also lead to spoilage. Although they did not use bottles—though they did use glass for drinking vessels—the various earthenware vessels were effectively sealed. The ancients also distinguished between wine that was made for immediate consumption and that which could be cellared.

The concluding chapter of the book deals with how wine was marketed and consumed. Much of the discussion concerns the receptacles that were perfected to store, age, transport, and dispense the wine. Thurmond is alert to the range of practices that distinguished the wine-drinking experience of the masses from those of the elite. At the top end, he notes that close attention was paid to vintage and provenance. Many of the details were inscribed on the necks of the amphorae. He also indicates that something like a ranking of regions (and associated varieties) emerged, linked to some conception of varying quality. There is also evidence that both resinated and *appassimento* wines were highly prized. The adding of wine to hot water might strike the modern consumer as odd, but some of the methods used to chill wine do not strike the contemporary wine drinker as unusual. Ancient Rome no doubt has its fair share of wine snobs, but what we do not have is a clear sense of whether there was anything like arbiters of taste, whose opinion might have influenced the choices made by others—except, of course, through ostentation and emulation.

For anybody interested in wine today, this book provides an invaluable service. It reveals how modern viticulture has built on millennia of active experimentation and good old-fashioned trial and error. It also demonstrates that while tastes certainly change, and wine drinkers look out for different things when they raise a drinking vessel to their lips, there are some constants in terms of practices that have been considered conducive to quality. On Thurmond's reading, the ancients were much closer to us than much conventional wisdom would have us believe. At a more basic level, the book underlines how integral wine has been to the shaping of western European and Mediterranean culture and society. The only shame is that the cost of this book will set the reader back to the cost of a third-growth Bordeaux.

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FREDERICK J. RYAN, JR.: *Wine and the White House: A History*. White House Historical Association, Washington DC, 2020, 456 pp., ISBN 978-1950273072, \$55.00 (hardcover).

It starts with the good old days: In a cartoon from 1953, the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey are peacefully toasting each other. The next illustration

does not impress politically, but personally: a bottle of Mouton Rothschild 1955 with a handwritten dedication by Ronald Reagan. He gave it to the author for his birthday. Of course, the bottle is from the year of Frederick J. Ryan's birth—and the cartoon mentioned is from the *Washington Post*, of which he is now publisher and CEO. Before going into media, Ryan served in the immediate entourage of the 40th U.S. President for 13 years—first in various capacities in the White House and from 1989 to 1995 as Chief of Staff to former President Ronald Reagan. On the one hand, this guarantees a wealth of first-hand insights. On the other hand, such proximity can be problematic if it comes at the expense of critical distance—especially since Ryan has held leading positions at the White House Historical Association for almost two decades. The organization is also the publisher of this visually impressive book. Imposing in its format (24×29×4 cm), weight (2.6 kg), and page count (456).

The book opens with an 80-page chapter on “The Presidents and their Wines,” preferences as well as abstinences ranging from George Washington (sub headline: “A Madeira Man”) to Diet Coke drinker Donald Trump. Most presidencies are covered in two pages, with many pertinent pictures and rather scant text devoted primarily to the tastes of the officeholder. The cultural imprint of some of these heads of state on the oenophile inclinations of their compatriots is little discussed. Under champagne lover James Madison, for example, Champagne began to rise to become the drink of the American upper class—even before French red wine. As a result, the United States became the sparkling wine's most important export market after Great Britain. Champagne could become a problem—Martin van Buren, the eighth president, was criticized by his opponents for his allegedly lavish lifestyle. A caricature of him was titled: “A beautiful goblet of White House Champagne.”

A few decades later, the temperance movement cast its shadow. In 1881, a newspaper article discussed whether wine should be banned from the White House. After all, the United States at the time was an “Alcoholic Republic” (Rorabaugh, 1981), with an annual per capita consumption of nearly 30 liters of pure alcohol, three times that of the present. The drinking habits of the three presidents during Prohibition are covered on only a single page. Here the reader would have liked to learn more about the relationship between the head of state and everyday culture. Also interesting would have been a deeper dive into Woodrow Wilson's unique perspective as the last pre-Prohibition president. His veto of the Volstead Act was rejected by Congress, which did not have much of an impact on him personally. When Wilson moved out of the White House, he was able to move “a substantial wine collection” (p. 59) into his post-presidential residence. Since transporting alcohol was a crime, he needed a special permit from the Prohibition commissioner. This opening chapter mainly reports anecdotes, many of which may already be known to the interested reader: That Richard Nixon (sub-headline: “High taste for fine wine”) sometimes secretly had his favorite top-class Bordeaux poured for him, while regular attendees were served simpler wines—this practice became

known as “Pulling a Nixon” (p. 77). On the other hand, he still officially offered high-class German Rieslings, premier crus from Bordeaux, and vintage champagnes.

Exclusively domestic wines have only been offered in the White House since the tenure of Nixon’s successor, Gerald Ford. This appears in the 100-page sixth chapter, which contains pictures of presidential menus from 1877 to the present day. The few exceptions can be interpreted as a respectful gesture to the guest; the Obamas, for example, had a Shaoxing Wine served to Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2015 as an accompaniment to the soup. Stocks of older French wines were otherwise occasionally served for smaller private dinners, as evidenced by some Reagan-era menu cards.

Despite his preference for these wines, Nixon (“his own counsel in many ways,” p. 103) did much to promote American state wine culture. Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs owes its worldwide fame to Nixon’s “toast to peace” with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1972, and it has been served at the White House to the present day, as can be easily determined from the extensive statistical appendix. Speaking of toasts, there is a richly illustrated fifth chapter with “Presidential Toasts.” In the photos with European state guests, a transatlantic difference in etiquette becomes visible, the cultural-historical explanation of which is missing: In Europe, the wine glass is (mostly) touched by the stem, in the United States by the bowl.

A short chapter in which the influence of other wine-producing countries is explained is informative. Three officeholders stand out: the still legendary wine collector and winery owner Thomas Jefferson, who as ambassador to France had made extensive trips through European wine regions; John F. Kennedy, who had been accustomed to the life of the upper class since his childhood; and Richard Nixon. All three shared a preference for prestigious French wines. Together with Ronald Reagan, who recognizably had the same taste, they rightly occupy a large space in the book.

The statements of various top vintners whose wines were served in the White House come across more as thinly veiled advertisements. Far more insightful is the introduction of a number of the staff responsible for the wine there. A true gem in the book is the four pages contributed by longtime “First Food and Beverage Usher” Daniel Shanks. Here the reader learns about the motivations behind the selection of the wines and details, for example, that the White House always pays for its wines. Another highlight is the very beautiful 60 pages of the fourth chapter, on which chronologically “The White House Collection” of wine glasses and decanters are illustrated.

The fact that wine can be a means of state representation becomes clear on almost every page. In wine-loving France, the philosopher Roland Barthes even counted it as a “raison d’état” (Barthes, 1957). When state guests in Washington are served bottles from wineries founded by immigrants from their country of origin, this is more than just courtesy. Rather, it is an oenophile proof of identity.

During the 45th presidency, only state banquets seemed to involve traditional diplomacy. To the first of his few official state visitors—French President Emmanuel

Macron—Trump had Chardonnay and Pinot Noir served following the concept “French soul - Oregon soil.” The wines were chosen “to embody the historic friendship between the United States and France,” according to a White House statement. However, a picture of the two presidents shows them toasting each other with different glasses and different contents—one of the details where some diplomatic background would have been desirable. In general, how does protocol deal with presidents who do not drink alcohol? How to deal with abstemious guests, such as observant Muslims?

The concrete influence of the respective incumbents is largely omitted. An exception is a document from 1961: With a stroke of a pen, JFK ignores the written advice of White House Social Secretary Letitia Baldrige to have under all circumstances a red wine served with the cheese. The president insisted on a single wine, a California Pinot Blanc—if not culinarily, this wine was at least patriotically correct.

Many books already exist on various aspects of state representation around the White House, its architecture and garden, interior design, art. There have also been some on gastrosophical issues, on menus and recipes, but not specifically on wine. This void is now filled, though Ryan’s book extends beyond wine; the drinks serve more as the common thread. However, the reader is in danger of getting lost in the multitude of chronologically presented individual cases. Because of this abundance of detail, which remains mostly on the surface, the book misses a broader view. A large historical arc is spanned but remains without the political depth of focus. Still, the many pictures offer further access, which is not so much a criticism of the work as a complement to photo editing. Ryan has delivered a great coffee table book—or rather: a wine cellar book—that makes you want to consume more than a single bottle with it.

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