

if I do not like the wine? Should I buy and lay down wine? Or buy later at auction? What should I know about cost-effective home wine storage?

An advantage of this book's being revised annually is that you can buy recent editions on the used book market (e.g., at www.abebooks.com) for about half the cost of the latest edition. You will still get most of the good stuff the 35th edition offers. On the other hand, if you want a solid, inexpensive reference book, I recommend early editions of Jancis Robinson's (2006) *Oxford Companion to Wine*.

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MICHAEL DWECK and GREGORY KERSHAW (Directors). *The Truffle Hunters*. Written by Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw. Produced by Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw. Distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, 2021, 1 h 24 min.

Nominally, *The Truffle Hunters* is a film about the search for an elusive, bulbous fungus for which foodie connoisseurs are prepared to pay astronomical prices. The highly prized white truffle, or Alba truffle, is found in the forests of Piedmont. (The black, or Périgord, truffle is found, and increasingly cultivated, in southwestern France and is less highly prized, but not exactly chopped liver.)¹ The truffle, itself,

the cork arose, we do not know, but page xiii of the book features a photo of a young Kevin Zraly pretending to smell a cork. The photo appears to be posed, so we can hope he knew better.

¹ According to Danilo Alfara, in a highly informative article, the truffle botanically is a species of mushroom. See <https://www.thespruceeats.com/what-are-truffles-5179896>.

might qualify as a best-supporting actor nominee, but the real stars of this beautiful film are the wiry old men (some well into their 80s) and their faithful dogs who trudge through dark forests at night in search of these heavenly delights. In fact, this film is really a love story between the men and their dogs.

The narrative focuses on four men, ranging in age from 60s to mid-80s, their well-trained dogs, and their closely guarded territories in the forest outside their Piedmont village.

The men. They are old but enviably vigorous. (This reviewer is old but not so vigorous!) They care for their dogs, treating them as family members. One of the men, seriously contemplating his mortality at age 87, worries about who will care for his dog once he is gone. He has nightly conversations with his dog on the subject.

The dogs. Amazing! Historically, pigs were used for hunting truffles. The problem was that they ate most of the product. So, truffle hunters turned to specially trained dogs who were more easily encouraged to locate, but not eat, the truffles.

The territory. The forests of Piedmont are commonly held; there are no enclosures or property rights to tracts of forest land. Given the high value of harvested wild truffles,² and the inability of truffle hunters to claim territorial property rights, truffle hunting is a very secretive affair. The old men and their dogs head for their favorite hunting grounds at night, alone and unwilling to reveal their locations. This has a labor market implication as well. The men are so secretive that they are loath to take on younger apprentices. While it is unclear how the old men originally learned their vocation, their unwillingness to pass along their skills to younger men threatens to force younger men to reinvent the wheel.

The film itself is cinematographically absorbing—picturesque Piedmont landscapes lusciously portrayed; interior shots of modest homes of wood stoves, rough plastered walls decorated with religious icons, windows open to village and forest; and the dogs tramping through the dampness with their owners. The music by Ed Cortes reminds us that these are not ordinary villages and forests, but *Italian* ones. There is a certain sadness conveyed in the fact that old men, not long for this world, will take their secrets to the grave. Indeed, in one scene, a priest reassures one of the men that there is truffle hunting in heaven.

There is another sense of sorrow in this film. As in so many other industries, traditional ways of doing things are vanishing. The skills associated with hunting itself are not being learned by a younger generation. The old ways of marketing the truffles—individual hunters taking their product direct to local consumers in village farmers' markets—are giving way to deals with middlemen who market the product worldwide. The high price of the product is inducing cutthroat

²They commanded roughly \$1,600/pound in 2021; the price of unusually large, fist-sized bulbs can rise to more than \$4,000/pound.

competition—the poisoning of dogs by outsiders is not uncommon. Thus, the beauty of the cinematography and music is touched by melancholy.

I recommend this film, therefore, not only for its splendor but also because it constitutes a historical record of how life once was in Piedmont villages. It is something to contemplate as you enjoy a glass of Barolo along with pasta with shaved truffles.

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