

the United States comes in third (29). Even so, the book's 32 far-flung contributors have made an admirable effort to keep track of what is happening nearly everywhere fine wine is grown. If you are ever dining in Malta and find yourself confronted by a cellar list of local producers, the *Pocket Wine Book* would be your friend. Rand ends the volume with a bracing essay on "the ten best things about wine right now," and her upbeat assessment may encourage you to reach for your corkscrew and pour a glass in celebration.

For some readers, the most useful section of the book will be its recommendations for matching wine with a wide range of foods. Based on a lifetime of sipping and tasting, Johnson's opinions are firm but not dogmatic (apart from a stern warning that "watercress makes every wine on earth taste revolting" (p. 34). Even if my own tastes occasionally diverge from his, I have found his advice to be sound across a wide range of main ingredients, cuisines, herbs, spices, and cheeses. Above all, Johnson wants the marriage of food and wine to be free from anxiety. As Johnson wrote in the 2021 edition: "Matching wine and food matters, but don't get hung up on it."

That pragmatic, hedonic philosophy neatly captures the book's enduring appeal. Some writers make appreciating wine seem like hard work; Johnson and now Rand remind us that it is fundamentally about pleasure. Knowing more about the wines we drink, when to pull the cork, and how to pair them with food enhances our enjoyment, and being able to allocate one's wine budget intelligently is a useful skill. The *Pocket Wine Guide* can help you do all of these things, which is why I have ordered a copy for my two millennial children. I cannot think of a better endorsement than that.

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doi:10.1017/jwe.2022.25

Steven Spurrier: *A Life in Wine*

Académie du Vin Library, Ascot, Berkshire, United Kingdom, 2020, 288 pp., ISBN 978-1913141073, \$45.00.

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A second viewing of *Mondovino* (Lima and Schroder, 2009) and an obituary in the *New York Times* (Asimov, 2021) piqued our interest in the man behind the

Judgement of Paris. That famous 1976 Paris wine tasting (which has been analyzed and reviewed in this *Journal*¹) brought sudden, surprising attention to Californian wines, and for the first time demystified the French grandes maisons and their alleged superiority. Understandably, this single event is thoroughly unpacked in the longest and most absorbing chapter of the book. From its genesis and the difficulty of finding worthy American wines in 1970s Paris for an Independence Day tasting with some pomp, through to its aftermath, Spurrier insists that Patricia Gallagher take equal credit for the event.

This historic moment has been poured over many times, so what of the life that surrounds it? Three ingredients make this character an outlier: the inheritance early in his 20s of a large fortune, a love of wine developed by tasting la crème de la crème, and a generous curiosity towards any wine worthy of the name.

Spurrier does not trouble us much with his pre-wine life. One stroke is enough to brush in the necessary family circumstances, upbringing, and expectations. There's just a hint of charmed existence and the suggestion of gleeful discontent in his progression to fine wine's doorstep. One part money, two parts eagerness and open-mindedness, and three parts charming self-belief.

Private school connections bring Spurrier to his first gig in London's wine merchant arena, at Christopher's. Entertaining snippets of work and his London social life convey at a brisk pace what it meant to be an importer and bottler in 1960s England, to enjoy an inheritance, start a wine collection, and acquire antiques. He was sent abroad for eight months in 1965 to work as the company's principal in four European countries. He puts his fortune to good use, working for free—an astute move that leads him to be used in ways his fellow interns simply cannot match. Chapter 2 is rich in details about how the trade operated in the 60s, how merchants “ruled the roost” and chateaux “meekly accepted” their offers via the En Primeur system.

Spurrier then launches on a Tour de France with stops at a number of prestigious stations. His tribulations inside the bordelais commercants (Cruse) are entertaining and delectable to readers with an avid interest in period details. Tax departments in France have always been interested in scrutinizing lucrative sectors and big employers, such as the wine trade in Bordeaux and elsewhere. Spurrier takes us through the tricks being carried out to maximize volumes of certain appellations, while in the background, a significant share of that volume turned out to come from another (cheaper one)! The pace is breezy and enjoyable: Cognac, Jarnac, the Loire Valley, Burgundy (Chablis then Beaunes), finishing in fine fashion with the northern Cotes du Rhone.

There are only big names on this trail, no Jura, no vin de pays, no Bandol, nothing not meant for the English market and its upper class. For many current humble wine lovers, it all appears conventional and beyond means. It may well have been that only these limited wines were available for export and of sufficient quality. Many appellations, obscure at the time, have improved immensely in recent decades.

¹See, for example, Cicchetti (2006), Ashton (2012), and Gergaud, Ginsburgh, and Moreno-Ternero (2021).

A few pages of further escapades in southern Europe follow, which serve to accentuate the sumptuous style in which Monsieur Spurrier traveled. A beguiling combination of time and money makes for a unique aesthetic. However, the return to London is difficult. The wine trade is going through a transition that will lead to the Oddbins, Bottoms Up, and the Majestic Wines, which are now up and down the United Kingdom. But the opening of Christie's wine auctions in 1966 was a significant event. From there, Spurrier becomes a regular (and successful) bidder and gets to know Michael Broadbent from whom he learns that tasting should be a structured activity. It is a seminal moment that helps Spurrier in setting up his Wine School in Paris years later.

The ballet of tastings whirls on. His new job at Murray and Banbury offers more forays into France. Manifestations of Madame X, Monsieur Y, and Owner Z are met here and there in mesmeric milieux, which Spurrier brings to life with crisp anecdotes involving prestigious wines. Back in London, "life is marvellous" Spurrier buys more antiques and a four-story house in SW10. Renovations ensue and result in space for large wine racks. Despite a few poor investments, Spurrier buys a property in France. He marries Bella and they move to Provence, intending to enter the antique trade. The building work proves too much and too costly. He is forced to sell. The car is packed and they are headed north to Paris.

La ville Lumière appears at first to offer little in the wine trade for an Englishman with passable French. Only Spurrier would surmise from this that setting up on his own is the only option. With a generous dose of good luck, he finds the Cave de la Madelaine. Chapter 5 recounts the transformation of the shop away from vins ordinaires to much better offerings. As Spurrier writes: at that time a petrol pump attendant and a cavist had similar social status. Inspired by Constant Bourquin's book, *Connaissance du Vin* (1970), Spurrier refreshes his stock in two innovative ways: (1) selling non-dosé champagnes (dosage consists of adding a liqueur after dégorgement to mask acidity); and (2) avoiding wines (specifically Beaujolais), which have gone through chaptalization (adding sugar to the fermenting to bolster alcohol content). Spurrier now runs a small wine shop and has settled on a barge on the Seine. His father is unimpressed—calling him a hippy.

There is virtually nothing about the mundanity of running a wine shop to distract from Spurrier's focus on creating a shimmering litany of acquaintances, ventures, and wines. When space becomes available next to de la Madelaine, he opens the Académie du Vin. As he writes, "It seems embarrassing to say it, but in terms of wine appreciation, promotion and communication it was the only game in town." Spurrier would later say that he took more pride in l'Académie than in all his other commercial ventures in France.

The first decade of his adventures in Paris had been a success. Following the "Judgement" in 1976, Spurrier began to travel more extensively and surf his newfound American wave of fame. The Académie and the Cave were both doing well, but hardly making a profit. His second decade in Paris started badly. Poor investments caught up with him, dragging him away from his core activities. Mitterrand's nationalization of the finance industry meant that many of his customers left for Frankfurt or London. The shop's peak had passed and would not return. Following a few years of increasing frustration, Spurrier returns to London after a

hiatus of 14 years. Cue a letter from Michael Broadbent with an irresistible offer to set up and run an academy of wine in conjunction with the Christie's Fine Arts Course. He would remain involved for decades. Spurrier became a writer in the early 1980s with significant success. The Spurrier brand soon spanned the globe. Notably, the wine worlds of Australia and New Zealand leave a favorable impression.

In the late 1980s, Spurrier moves to the countryside in Dorset and maintains his London pied-à-terre. Meanwhile, in Paris, it is time to sell his local interests. The subsequent chapters, of less interest, describe a retinue of engagements, consultancies, and writing, globe-trotting either as a wine judge or speaker. In Chapter 15, the 2008–2009 ambitious planting of a little over two hectares of vines from a pépinière in Burgundy on his own Dorset estate completes the circle. In 2014, at Liberty Wines' annual trade tasting, he finds himself on the selling side of the table for the first time.

In the latter part of his life, Spurrier had become a celebrity in the English-speaking world of wine. Feature films, such as *Bottle Shock* in 2008 (Valletta, 2008), and documentaries exploring the Judgement of Paris, such as *Somm 3* in 2018 (Stavins, 2020), brought an additional aura to his prescience in promoting lesser-known wines. "Meet Steven Spurrier: The Man who changed Wine Forever" and other YouTube clips have drawn significant audiences, perhaps surprising given how unknown the Judgement of Paris is to many of today's wine drinkers. For others, such as Robert Mondavi, Spurrier put California on the map. But his appeal to French-speaking audiences appears thin: YouTube has only the odd, old interview with him elaborating in French, and *Le Monde* did not offer an obituary.

To your reviewers—both British university faculty of relatively comfortable means—Spurrier's grandiose vertical tastings of illustrious Champagnes or Clarets seem affected, somewhat vacuous, and the preserve of the few. But Spurrier was also a champion of lesser-known appellations and vin de pays, as his *Guide des Vins Régionaux de France* (Spurrier, 1985) attests.

Wine leaves its mark and lays down its challenges early on in Monsieur Spurrier's life with a simple, bold appearance that evokes a first love. From that moment on, we are bounced along in his wine-glass elevator, skipping through a dizzying array of events, touching down on endless, highly prized invitations to dinners, engagements, tastings, or competitions. Regrettably, for a reader not part of the trade, at times it feels like a tiresome exhibition of name-dropping, and thereby loses some of its vitality.

This was clearly a heavily documented life, and the details are lifted with meticulous care: "We were to have Dom Perignon as an aperitif, probably the 1955, then Chassagne-Montrachet Marquis de Laguiche 1962 bottled by Brouhin, and compare Domaine Rousseau's Gevrey-Chambertin and Chambertin Clos de Beze from 1952. The order was left to me and I suggested that the Lafite should be the first of the reds and that it should not be decanted, but poured directly into the glasses after opening" (p. 96). Despite these otherworldly nuggets of haute gastronomie, Spurrier retains a sense of his huge good fortune through recurrent touches of self-deprecation.

With products, places, and especially people front and center, recurring names weave a rich mise-en-scène that, in one way or another, is responsible for many of

the plays of his life. He is unstintingly generous in crediting others and self-effacing to the point that you could believe it all happened by itself.

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doi:10.1017/jwe.2022.38

Stephen Bittner: *Whites and Reds: A History of Wine in the Lands of Tsar and Commissar*

Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2021, 272 pp., ISBN 978-0198784821, \$97.00.

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At one time, the Soviet Union was the fourth-largest wine producer in the world, but by the 1990s, production in the successor republics had dwindled. In this trajectory, there are some parallels with Algeria. But the crucial difference was that while Algerian wines were always oriented to the French market, Russian/Soviet wines were largely based on French varietals but were geared almost entirely to an undiscerning domestic market. As Stephen Bittner demonstrates in this new book, this reality proved to be the Achilles heel for those who aspired to build an industry premised on quality and some conception of terroir.

There has long been a need for a book (or article) that would properly address the history of Russian/Soviet wine and describe it in an international context. This study more than delivers. In an understated way, Bittner deftly guides the reader through a