

The remainder of the book is divided by geographical regions, with each of the 13 *Anbaugebiete* meriting its own chapter. Herein lies the bulk of the book. Krebiehl introduces each region with a description of its history, key figures, and relevant data (e.g., varietal plantings). Following each regional introduction, Krebiehl offers descriptions of selected estates, including ownership information, details about plantings, recent changes, and recommendations. While Krebiehl acknowledges that the roster of estates in the book is not exhaustive, it is certainly the most comprehensive list between two covers of which I am aware. Even the most widely traveled of readers will surely find something new, whether about a hitherto unknown estate or even a long-time favorite.

For readers outside of Central Europe, one of the book's key strengths is its serious look at regions that are less familiar, including Württemberg, Saale-Unstrut, and Hessische Bergstrasse. The section on Württemberg alone covers 24 producers, only a few less than the number covered in the section on the more familiar Mosel. In addition, each chapter features interludes about something peculiar to or particularly important in the region. For example, in the chapter about Württemberg (p. 271), the reader will learn about *Schichtstufenlandschaften*, or the "tiered layer landscape" that dominates the region. Another of the more interesting interludes describes the *Landwein* movement in Baden, which Krebiehl cleverly connects to the region's historical/political tradition of going against the grain. A short glossary helps navigate Germany's notoriously complex wine vocabulary.

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Jane Lopes: *Vignette: Stories of Life & Wine in 100 Bottles*

Hardie Grant, London, UK, 2019, 304 pp., ISBN: 978-1743795323, \$25.70.

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Vignette begins with directions for reading. The first chapter, titled "How to Read this Book," instructs the reader that the book can be read in three distinct ways. The first is as a guide to great wine. As the subtitle suggests, the author provides a list of 100 bottles intended to cover the range of experiences available from the world's wines. The second is as a memoir, the author's story of discovering wine, working for years as a sommelier, and eventually passing the Master Sommelier exam. Lastly, this is also a coffee table book for the casual reader. It contains sidebars on a diverse set of topics, presented in colorful formats, including charts, maps, and illustrations.

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Does *Vignette* succeed in meeting one or more of these three purposes?

In providing a list of wines (and some spirits and beer), the author aims to give the reader “a nearly complete education on the flavors, weights, textures, and emotions that exist in a bottle of wine.” At the start of each chapter is the name of one or more bottles that are featured in the vignette. For example, the bottle that goes with the chapter on California Chardonnay is a Kistler Vineyard Chardonnay. Another chapter on Chablis lists Vincent Dauvissat Les Clos Chablis Grand Cru.

I am not convinced that this information has much value. If a reader is an avid wine drinker, they are likely to already know that Kistler has a reputation for great chardonnay. If not, are they going to spend \$200 on a Kistler Vineyard bottle or \$600 for the Vincent Dauvissat Les Clos? Also on the list of 100 bottles are Petrus and Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Romanee-Conti Grand Cru, two of the most expensive wines in the world. How many readers, after learning about these wines in this book, are going to take out second mortgages on their homes to buy them? To be fair, the book includes an appendix with more affordable alternatives, and some of the wines listed in the main text were new to me, particularly those from less established regions, such as Austria and Greece. Am I likely to follow up on any of the author’s suggestions? Possibly, although I would need to find additional information on vintages, which—very surprisingly—is not provided.

The book has 55 chapters, each a vignette from the author’s life. It begins with her earliest awareness of wine—cheap, oaky California Chardonnay drunk by her parents—and proceeds chronologically to her passing the last of the Master Sommelier exams in 2018, becoming one of only 34 women in the world to do so (the tasting exam was later invalidated when it was discovered that the identity of some of the wines had been accidentally revealed; hence Ms. Lopes does not presently hold the Master Sommelier title). Along the way, the author describes her first taste of great wine (a Brunello di Montalcino), working in upscale restaurants in Chicago, Nashville, and New York, and winning wine-tasting competitions.

Ms. Lopes is not reluctant to share details about her personal life. Her love life is a recurring topic, especially her pursuit of a commitment-phobic boyfriend, in addition to her challenging struggles with health problems. She describes many instances of taking exams, including service exams in which she handled trays of delicate glassware, with little sleep, overwhelming anxiety, and uncontrollable shaking. Admirably, she almost always pulls it off.

Overall, I found the quality of the vignettes highly variable. There is a delightful one on white Burgundy. Early in her wine career, she was left in “utter disbelief” at the flavors found in a 30-year-old Chevalier-Montrachet Grand Cru. She describes the spectrum of Burgundy whites as ranging from “taut and laser-like to opulent and exotic; but it’s the difference between Audrey Hepburn and Sofia Loren, not the difference between Audrey Hepburn and Janis Joplin.” Another I enjoyed is the opening of The Catbird Seat restaurant in Nashville, which featured an ambitious ten-course tasting menu that changed weekly. Ms. Lopes was responsible for pairing wines and other beverages, and she became known for her creative cocktails (e.g., a combination of Alsatian Pinot Gris and Falernum).

There is also an interesting chapter on Malbec, which the author always struggled to identify in blind tastings, often confusing it with Northern Rhone Syrah, California

Cabernet, or Zinfandel. Only after she thought about the fierce conditions under which Malbec is produced—high altitude, windy, and rapidly changing—did the wine make sense to her. She realized that compared to Napa Cabernet, the “fruit character was bluer and more purple than it was black, more berry than it was currant.” She was able to pick out the wine after that.

But I was disappointed by the chapters on wine exams and competitions. I found myself wishing there was more context and detail. It would have been interesting to know which wines were in the tasting flight, which ones the author got right, and why she missed others. What questions were on the theory exam? Although more is said about the service portion of the exams, we mostly learn about the author’s anxiety and health conditions leading up to the events. Competitions, like the *Chaine des Rotisseurs Jeune Sommelier*, are casually mentioned without explanation of the format or specifics about the exams themselves.

Some of the vignettes seem to be filling up space. There is one about her cat, and another that offers banal advice about travel (“do something you wouldn’t normally do”). Some vignettes have the slimmest of connections with wine. One is about her visit to the Mayo Clinic for diagnosis and treatment of health problems. The only link to wine is that during her stay, the author drinks a few inexpensive glasses at a nearby Greek restaurant. There are also chapters devoted to spirits—gin, scotch, rum, tequila, and more—which I found to be a distraction. With so much to be said about wine, why not make that the exclusive focus of the book?

The last purpose of *Vignette* is as a coffee table book. Each chapter contains “illustrative content,” including maps, charts, surveys, puzzles, cartoons, and more. One, titled “Wine Whims That Became History,” explains how some important developments in the history of wine were the apparent result of historical accidents. For example, the decision by Pope Clement V to move the papacy to Avignon in the 14th century set the stage for wine production in the Southern Rhone region (Clement V’s successor built the castle referred to as Chateaufort-du-Pape). “Chenin Blanc’s Spirit Humans” associates Loire Valley appellations known for Chenin Blanc with different actresses—Vouvray is matched with Emma Watson because both are “classic, restrained, intellectual.” Another shows the reader how to decode a German wine label. Some of these sidebars miss the mark (“Resources for Alcoholism” in a wine book?), but many are creative, informative, or just plain fun.

So, *Vignette* tries to be a beverage guide, memoir, and coffee table book, all in one. I wish the author had decided which of these books she wanted to write. She is a terrific writer and has fascinating things to say about wine, but rather than committing to a single idea, the book feels like it is employing a diversification strategy. Don’t want to read about wine? Here’s a chapter on spirits. Tired of text? Here are some colorful illustrations. And just in case none of that works, here’s a list of wines to buy. Ideally, the three components of this book would have complemented and strengthened each other, but unfortunately, I found the book to be a case where the whole is less than the sum of its parts.