

Mead On Wine

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By Jerry D. Mead

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DON'T JUDGE BOOK BY COVER—

There's a revised edition of a really excellent book, by one of the world's most knowledgeable and entertaining wine writers, containing fully 50 percent new text, scheduled for publication in late February 1998.

It places this reviewer in a most unusual position. I want to recommend it, praise it and suggest you add it to your library, even if you possess an earlier edition.

In the next breath, though, I have to warn you that the book's title is itself misleading, and if you're unfortunate enough to see a review based more on the dust jacket description or on publisher Simon & Schuster's public relations hype sheet, than what's actually in the book, you are going to be greatly disappointed.

Modern Encyclopedia of Wine (4th Edition) (\$40) by Hugh Johnson. If what you want is a true Encyclopedia of Wine, you'd better buy something like the Oxford Companion to Wine (\$60) edited by Jancis Robinson, which is truly encyclopedic and just the best there is, or the New Sotheby's Encyclopedia (\$50) by Tom Stevenson, which also fits the common conception of an encyclopedia.

Don't try to look up "phylloxera" (the devastating root louse) or an obscure grape like "Valdiguie" (we used to call it Napa Gamay or Gamay Noir in California) in Johnson's book, because not only is the information not there, this book isn't organized alphabetically.

A better title might be, "An Encyclopedic Look at the World's Wines and Wine Producers," because that's more what it is.

The contents page will show you that the greatest portion of the book is devoted to a nation by nation, region by region, examination of the world's great (and not-so-great) winegrowing regions.

There's a brief introductory section on classic wine varieties of the world and how grapes are grown and wine made. The book ends with a short section on how to buy, serve, taste and enjoy wine, topics which Johnson has covered so entertainingly in other books and numerous television appearances.

The hype sheet also claims 7000 tasting notes. Not by my definition, there aren't! A tasting note is when a writer/critic describes the taste experience of a specific wine. While Johnson is quite capable of writing tasting notes (and has done so in

other titles), all he does here is brief winery profiles (which are certainly helpful and informative) telling us that wineries like Frick are located in Sonoma County or that David Bruce is situated in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and then may list some of the wines produced, approximate quantity of total cases produced, or with larger producers maybe an observation as to general style, but nothing most folks would consider a tasting note.

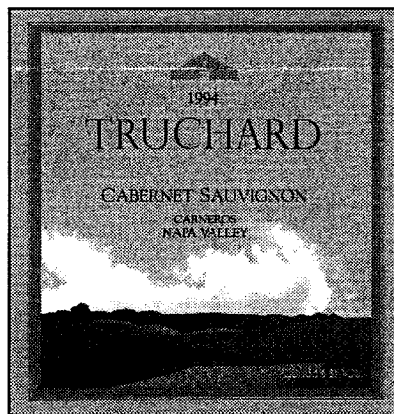
Let me repeat. You can't judge a book by its cover (or its title), but I still recommend you buy this one for what it is, even if it ain't what it claims.

Should be available through book stores everywhere, including the Internet, since it's from a major publisher. Or it can be ordered via the mails for \$42.50 at (800) 845-9463.

NO MEDICAL CLAIMS—Former Reno physician Dr. Tony Truchard has successfully (very successfully) turned a hobby into a second profession. The wines of Truchard Vineyards come from some 160 acres of Carneros region plantings. Truchard also sells grapes to other famous producers throughout the North Coast.

Though Truchard long ago moved to California to be close to his vines, I happened to catch up with him back in Reno doing one of those vintner dinners that have become so popular nationwide.

WINE OF THE WEEK



Truchard 1994 "Carneros" Cabernet Sauvignon (\$24) Very Bordeaux like nose. Smoky...barrel character bouquet and a hint of eucalyptus. Cassis and blackberry. Very rich and intense. A very great Cabernet. Very limited production. Very difficult to find. Worth the search. Rating: 98/90

This particular experience was at the elegant White Orchid restaurant at The Peppermill Hotel. And a quick note for those who think all Reno hotel restaurants are of the \$4.95 Prime Rib variety...think again! There are world class dining spots (with great wine lists) at The Eldorado, Silver Legacy, Harrah's and The Peppermill, to mention only a few. Reno has grown in both size and sophistication in recent years.

Back to Truchard Vineyards, the wines have limited national availability and can be tracked down through the winery: 3234 Old Sonoma Road, Napa, CA 94559 (707) 253-7153. Visits by appointment only.

Truchard 1996 "Carneros" Chardonnay (\$24) Rich, ripe, but with a still lean, taut structure. Barrel-fermented in what appears to be heavy toast barrels, due to the very forward and aggressive, spicy, smoky, oak vanillin. Delicious. Imagine it with Smoked Sturgeon. Rating: 96/86

Truchard 1995 "Carneros" Pinot Noir (\$23) One of the best Carneros Pinots I've ever tasted. Very smoky with lots of earthy complexity. Dry but with an implication of sweetness. Tea leaf, plum and cherry; intensely fruited. Very long and complex. Foie Gras, anyone? Rating: 96/86

Truchard 1994 "Carneros" Merlot (\$22) Huge red wine. Not what most folks expect from Merlot. Reminiscent of the Robert Keenan Merlots of a decade ago made from Winery Lake fruit. Very ripe black fruit flavors of cherry and cassis. A Merlot with tannin. Rating: 92/84

Truchard 1995 Syrah (\$24) For those who like really big, extracted reds...so big you have to chew before you swallow. Big boysenberry fruit with lots of wood...you don't want to pay this man's barrel bill. Rating: 96/84

Wines are scored using a unique 100 point system. First number rates quality; second number rates value. Feel free to call Mead's office at (800) 845-9463 for help in tracking down wines or products reviewed in any column.

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