

the silk-backed sandpaper of young Barolo to the succulent fluidity of Sonoma Pinot. They are all just solutions in an alcohol-water base, and yet capable of evoking an immense range of textural impressions. For me, it's a major part of the magic.'

One of the best pieces of tasting note advice I was given, many years ago, came from wine writer and critic Oz Clarke: 'Sometimes there is no tasting note.' So true. Move on.

Gauging drinking windows

This is an area in which experience, intellect and memory are key. Lee says: 'The drinking window will depend on the style, grape variety, producer and vintage. Some wines will surprise you with how long they can age, so the end of the drinking window is harder to estimate; this comes mainly from experience with that particular wine and producer. For example, with experience you know that a Château Giscours Margaux will have a longer drinking window than d'Issan in the same vintage. Gauging accurate drinking windows is challenging even for professionals, and I think around half of the time we get it wrong. We improve with experience and time.'

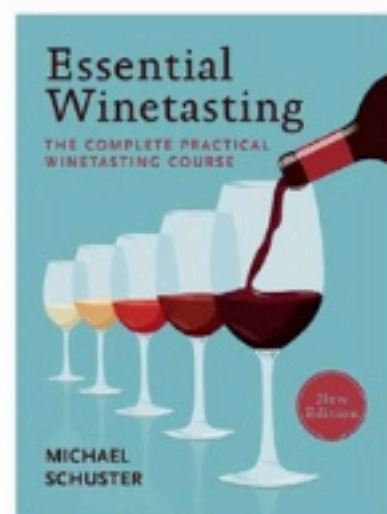
And finally...

Says Faulkner: 'My biggest tip to anyone who enjoys wine and wants to learn more, apart from practice: come to your own conclusion.'



Above: Kevin Zraly says many of his pupils want to taste the wine before smelling it (see p25)

Moore recommends: five brilliant resources for wine tasting tips



Essential Winetasting

by Michael Schuster (Mitchell Beazley)

Originally published in 2000, this award-winning book remains a good, practical and logical guide to the nuts and bolts of tasting wine.



Blind tasting with Ronan Sayburn MS – Old World vs New World (for 67 Pall Mall)

Wine geeks watch blind-tasting videos on YouTube. This recording of an online class for 67 Pall Mall is a good example of the evidence-gathering exercise practised by blind tasters. The first half hour is a general guide. Via www.67pallmall.com/virtual-events.

Red & White: An Unquenchable Thirst for Wine

by Oz Clarke (Little Brown)

Clarke's wine memoir is a must-read for any wine enthusiast. It contains a chapter, 'Some thoughts on wine tasting: everyone can do it', that outlines Clarke's own approach to tasting. Feels like having him stand beside you, pouring a glass.

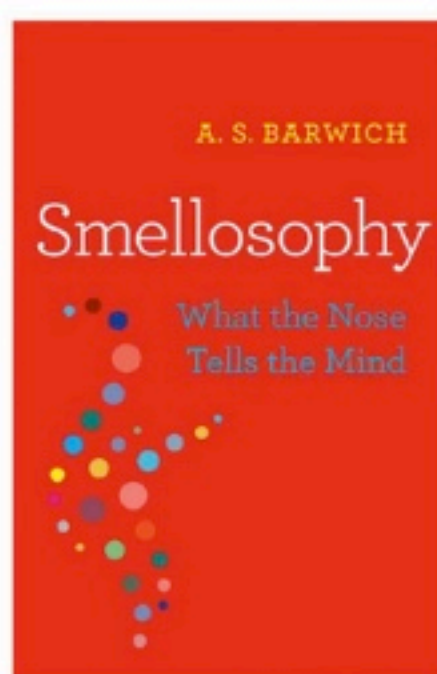
Smellosophy: What the Nose Tells the Mind

by AS Barwich (Harvard University Press)

A detailed and academic guide to our sense of smell, which is, of course, what tasting is all about.

Virtual wine tasting with Kevin Zraly

The American wine educator has been running wine classes for five decades, and now they are available online through www.kevinzraly.com



Discovering Comte de Thun

The once famed and greatly respected region of Gaillac has been quietly sleeping since the late 17th century, but just over two decades ago a dream between two men, known affectionately as 'the pioneer' and 'the magician' sought to bring this region back into the spotlight.

It was among the gently rolling hills along the river Tarn, 80km north of Toulouse in south-west France, that Ferdinand Graf von Thun und Hohenstein decided to begin his dream, buying Château de Frausseilles and its 29 hectares of vines.

Ferdinand, a businessman from Munich who had a passion for connoisseur adventures and fine wines, called upon the talents of the famous Italian oenologist Dr Riccardo 'Il Mago' Cotarella to help create wines of an international style but of rare intensity in the region.

World-leading wines

With a bold vision of turning Frausseilles into one of the leading vineyards in south-west France, the pair set about reviving the world-class wines of their predecessors which once graced the tables of kings and queens having been exported to the English royal courts of Henry III and Henry VIII.

Indeed Gaillac has been producing authentic and sought-after wines in a range of styles from dry to sweet and sparkling and an incredibly rich palette of colours for more than 2,000 years. From 1397, what is probably the wine world's first brand - Vins du Coq - was created for Gaillac and given official recognition in the early 16th Century.

The region's grapes, a mix of indigeneous varieties found nowhere else in the world and French staples, give personality and individuality to the wines and with the climate, provide fascinating and distinctive taste profiles with pronounced vintage effects.

A new era

The Comte de Thun vineyards are situated on the limestone-rich Plateau Cordais, one of six sub-regions of Gaillac and considered to have one of the best terroirs in the area.

The soils are barren and calcareous and together with a continental climate, giving hot sunny days, cool nights and a long vegetation period, grapes have ideal conditions from which to grow and mature. Rain falls in spring and late autumn help vine growth and a warm east wind during harvest time ensures a healthy crop.

Yields are strictly limited letting only

the healthiest grapes come to maturity and regular analytical tests are carried out to ensure grapes are well balanced with ripe tannins. Each plot of land and variety is picked individually in order to best reflect the different aspects of its origin, after which the wines are left to age in selected barriques from the best French coopers.

The estate produces a range of pure varietal crus labelled IGP Côtes du Tarn - each an ambassador for the wine landscape of south-west France.

Terroir expressions

The grapes give their own individual expressions of Comte de Thun and of the estate's unique terroir - unmistakably elegant and fruit-centred with a strong regional identity. Only after a long ageing period do the wines enter the market, fully ready to drink.

The focus is understandably on robust, and ageworthy red wines with plantings of Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir - varieties that articulate the Gaillac terroir in a strong and independent way.

The result is fine, storable wines that show their origins with finesse and independence. Powerful yet elegant and well-structured with cool fruit flavours and soft minerality.

A small production of white, sparkling and dessert wines is also made and shouldn't be overlooked.

Together, the Count and Cotarella wanted to reveal to wine enthusiasts the potential of this little-known terroir for the production of great red wines. It is now considered one of the pioneering wineries in the region and is once again producing wines worthy of world wine renown.

To discover these unique wines for yourself, Comte de Thun tasting kits are available at: www.shop-comtedethun.com

