

Decant for Sediment

by Daniel Mallock (August 2017)



Cafe in Paris, Jonelle Summerfield, 2013



In a frantic-sounding [racks](#) is understandable. Wine is one of the few remaining things that brings people together in a common affection; it is at the center of an identity group of shared appreciation that has no borders or boundaries. The appreciation of wine is a celebration of humanity and the planet on which we all reside. An empty wine cellar can be remedied, broken associations cannot.

An examination of wines and wine people can easily be paired—the perfect bottle for it is your choice.

As with any commodity there are greats, middle-of-the-roads, and low ends. There's fakery and fraud, and cheaters and crooks, but these are all outliers. They have not been able to break the community of wine people nor deconstruct their love of wines which unites people across borders, cultures, and opinions.

Wine people can be very strong in their loves and hates, some even turning fanatical in their affection for Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Noir, Riesling, Syrah, Petit Syrah, Malbec, Pinotage, etc. Concomitantly, some wine lovers despise certain varietals—the most famous being the Sideways-inspired rejection of Merlot. The more aggressive forms of wine snobbery are universally challenged by most wine people's desire to learn, experiment, share, talk about, and find great bottles at great prices—that hidden gem on the shelf that few talk about but is worthy of discussion and enjoyment. The frustrations and delights of the treasure hunter were [Côtes de Provence Rosé](#) (from France), was available for £5.99 (approximately 7.64 US) at [snobs](#) are always fringe (though they are certainly annoying) and the average wine drinker is generally open to experimentation, but with a strong viewpoint. Having a strong bias isn't equivalent to snobbery; everybody has an opinion. These are sample opinions and not necessarily mine: Merlot? Sorry, not Pinot! Chardonnay? Tastes like grass! Bordeaux? Too dry! Chianti? Too sweet! Rose? For the ladies! [Screw top](#)? Cheap! Box wines? Never!

Opinions run strong on everything in the wine world from regions to bottles to closures and containers. That wine is a world of worlds within a world is undeniable though the constant battles over quality of terroir, appellations, varietals, methods, and blends can be dizzying. Perceptions play a role, too.

The release of the movie 'Sideways' had a significant [Sideways](#) was about a wine snob, the rejection of Merlot in favor of Pinot Noir coincided with a long decline in quality of the former and a general under-appreciation of the many qualities of the latter.

Most wine drinkers, aficionados, do not follow the wine press beyond looking for wine scores on little cards on retail shelves. Those who do follow the wine press find scores of pages with two sentence reviews. How many different ways can one discuss a Cabernet, or a Petit Syrah, Salice Salentino, Bordeaux, Beerenuslese, Chardonnay, Barollo, Burgundy, Barbaresco, Primitivo, Eiswein, Chianti classico, Brunello, Super Tuscan, or Zinfandel? Those wine marks on shelves have an impact on sales. Wine people want to know what "experts" think, but then make their own decisions.

At the higher end there are those [sommelier](#) who can smell a wine, sip it and list off country of origin, region, grape, vineyard, winery, and year of vintage. Even the most sophisticated collectors can be fooled by this [Mega Purple](#). It is a concentrated additive that many US wine producers add to their juice for enhanced color. It is made from a concentrate of the ruby red grape variety. No winery has yet admitted that it uses this additive though it is understood by those who study this matter that Mega Purple is ubiquitous in American

wines under 15 dollars/bottle. Wine makers know that color is a key decision/purchase point for consumers. If your teeth go purple after drinking, if the legs are purplish (rather than clear), if you have a great nose and smell something a bit "off" (in conjunction with the other markers) then your under-15-bucks American wine may have Mega Purple in it. Because no producer will admit to its use there is no way for wine people to know with certainty. This is why labeling on wines will be so beneficial.

Some apologists have made the case that, since Mega Purple is a concentrate of grape juice, its use is therefore not really "cheating." The fact that nobody will discuss it, that nobody will own up to using it, makes its use seem closer to cheating. Though wine makers are allowed to put all sorts of additives into their fermentation vats and thus into their bottles, most wine drinkers appear to believe that the wines they buy are only fermented grape juice (with some sulfites for protection against oxidation and for sustaining freshness) that's been sitting in a cask or stainless steel tank, then bottled-and nothing else.

When wine makers add ingredients specifically for the purpose of changing the appearance and inadvertently (or not) the taste that, to me, [one seller](#), it is a public relations disaster waiting to happen. One of the many great selling points of wine is that it is seen as an honest, if not almost entirely natural, product. Disclosure of ingredients and processes and grape varieties through industry or government-mandated labeling would bring honesty to the forefront once again. What is the basis of the exception for wine makers from disclosing their ingredients as is required for almost all other food products?

While expensive wine fraud is a matter of concern for the relatively lucky few, Mega Purple's impact is far more widespread. Regardless of both issues wine sales continue to grow and more wineries open across the country every year. There is a wine renaissance in the United States just as there is a [renaissance in wines](#) and growing interest not only because wine is a pleasure to enjoy but because being a "wine person" is an "identity group" without borders or ideology; membership is limited only based upon the legal drinking age within any given polity and interest to join. Though generally unknown, Mega Purple is not the only controversy in the wine world.

Thomas Jefferson's 1787 travels through the wine areas of France, Germany, and Italy was a seminal trip for him, for the United States and for wine lovers across the world. His observations of women working back-breaking labor in the vineyards and fields of France confirmed his already visceral hatred of the monarchical system. In a letter to President Washington written in Paris several days after returning from [endless debt](#). Always living beyond his means, the troubled and conflicted man-of-the-people who lived the slave-holding-aristocrat's lifestyle on top of his mountain, never resolved his debt issues. Essentially broke when he died, Jefferson's surviving daughter eventually was forced to sell Monticello as a consequence. Much of this debt was related to construction projects at Monticello (and [viticulture](#)).

When Jefferson served fine wines, many visitors commented on his superb table, fine hosting skills, extraordinary conversation and, of course, the quality of the wines that he shared so freely and famously. But many guests also noted the

fact that wine and food were not served simultaneously. There was no discussion of which wines paired with which dishes. The entire issue was avoided in a singular manner. Daniel Webster, writing of a December 1824 visit to Jefferson, describes the scene.

He (Jefferson) has a strong preference for the wines of the continent, of which he has many sorts of excellent quality, having been more than commonly successful in his mode of importing and preserving them. Among others, we found the following, which are very rare in this country, and apparently not at all injured by transportation: L'Ednau, Muscat, Samian, and Blanchette de Limoux. Dinner is served in half Virginian, half French style, in good taste and abundance. No wine is put on the table till the cloth is removed.

That the father of American wines only served wines *after* the meal was cleared does not necessarily show that Jefferson did not believe in pairing wines with food. What it does show is that Jefferson believed that wine should be served and enjoyed by itself and not in association with foods; that is, that wine is special and ought to be enjoyed as a conjunct to socializing and conversation.

Wine pairing is nothing more than excellent wine industry marketing. Consider a fine steak dinner—how is it that the oaky, chocolate and berry notes found in a Cabernet Sauvignon are better for the steak experience than the oaky, berry, and flint notes that you might find in a Syrah or Malbec? Might the peppery bite of a Petit Syrah improve the steak flavor more than the plum notes of a [Kkanpunggi](#)) better than a lighter Pinot Noir, or a [macaroni and cheese](#). It's all [Terroir](#)

is the essential foundation of a wine; without great terroir a wine cannot be great.

But terroir is also about people, the winery and vineyards, the nearby town, appellation, the region, and country in which the wine is made. It is of course about grapes, too; how they're grown, harvested, fermented, processed, and finally bottled. Then the conversation turns to aging (oak or stainless steel), winery characteristics (modern, traditional, organic, etc.), cellaring, bottling, and marketing. Finally, all eyes are on the glass; with swirling, looking, sipping, slurping/aerating, and intense enjoyment mystifying those not in the fraternal order of "wine people."

Wine is one of the great unifiers of the world. Appreciation of wine unites people in an identity group that is beyond all borders and dividers; it is a group of like-minded humans. One cannot conceive this identity group devolving to such a state that Pinot Noir drinkers might say to Chardonnay aficionados—"You are not a proper wine person, be gone!" Imagine a Cabernet fan saying this to a Merlot person: "You drink Merlot! Everybody knows that it's bad, everybody knows that nobody likes it. Everybody knows that people who like Merlot have bad judgment and questionable morals! Merlot ought to be banned! But you drink it! You are outside the wine world" Impossible!

That such an identity group can exist—a group that eliminates national and cultural boundaries and unites people under a single banner in friendship, fellowship, and mutual interest is a cause for hope in a world of conflict and hyper-deconstruction of too many unifying concepts.

The United States in particular is now in a period of turmoil in which unifiers only seem to exist for groups of specific self-interests. It is a dark time of growing self-identification with subset groups at the expense of the central unifier—the idea that we are united as Americans under the Constitution. The great danger of identity politics is that the unifying idea of “American” is deconstructed to such a degree that this concept which survived centuries of struggle and threats, and is the essential unifier, is now at risk.

The enjoyment of wines unites millions of [Rhine](#) planned specifically for wine people, for example. The study and enjoyment of wine is the study of people, land, manufacturing, language, customs, nationalities, culture, history, perceptions, states, war, and peace. Zinfandel drinkers get along just fine with [Montepulciano](#) while retaining a greater appreciation for the entirety of wines. Uncorking a bad wine does not generally result in shouts of “I’m done! I’m switching to [macro](#), there seem few concepts and things remaining that unify people—wine is one of those.

We can take a page from the wine world and scribble some tasting notes the next time we pour a new bottle: “Nice notes of blackberry, barnyard, forest, flowers, . roses, plums, raspberry, some apricot, honey, and hints of leather. Excellent structure, slow legs/tears, grippy but not overpowering tannins. Definitely worth the price paid; a real gem. Next time, it’ll be a Agony and Eloquence: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and a World of Revolution.

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