



Cork Dork: A Wine-Fueled Adventure Among the Obsessive Sommeliers, Big Bottle Hunters, and Rogue Scientists Who Taught Me to Live for Taste

Bianca Bosker

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The *Kitchen Confidential* of wine: Read this book, and you'll never be intimidated by wine or wine snobs again. Madeline Puckette, Wine Folly

For readers of Anthony Bourdain, Susan Orlean, and Mary Roach, a surprising, entertaining and hilarious journey through the world of wine

Like many of us, tech reporter Bianca Bosker saw wine as a way to unwind at the end of a long day, or a nice thing to have with dinner and that was about it. Until she stumbled on an alternate universe where taste reigned supreme, a world in which people could, after a single sip of wine, identify the grape it was made from, in what year, and where it was produced down to the exact location, within acres. Where she tasted wine, these people detected not only complex flavor profiles, but entire histories and geographies. Astounded by their fanatical dedication and seemingly superhuman sensory powers, Bosker abandoned her screen-centric life and set out to discover what drove their obsession, and whether she, too, could become a cork dork. Thus begins a year and a half long adventure that takes the reader inside elite tasting groups, exclusive New York City restaurants, a California winery that manipulates the flavor of its bottles with ingredients like Mega Purple, and even a neuroscientist's fMRI machine as Bosker attempts to answer the most nagging question of all: what's the big deal about wine? Funny, counterintuitive, and compulsively readable, *Cork Dork* illuminates not only the complex web of wine production and consumption, but how tasting better can change our brains and help us live better.

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Reading Bianca Bosker is like sitting down with a brilliant, curious friend for an after-work drink, and suddenly finding it's midnight and the table is littered with empty bottles. Between her hilarious exploits and thoughtful meditations on wine and life, you'll want to stay for just one more.

Lauren Collins, author of *When In French*

"In this delightfully written and keenly observed book, Bianca Bosker takes readers on a year-long romp through the realm of wine lovers, experts, cultists, sommeliers, and poseurs. Along the way, she helps us become connoisseurs not only of wine but also of people whose passions would more aptly be described as obsessions."

Walter Isaacson, author of *The Innovators*"

Cork Dork: A Wine-Fueled Adventure Among the Obsessive Sommeliers, Big Bottle Hunters, and Rogue Scientists Who Taught Me to Live for Taste Details

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From Reader Review Cork Dork: A Wine-Fueled Adventure Among the Obsessive Sommeliers, Big Bottle Hunters, and Rogue Scientists Who Taught Me to Live for Taste for online ebook

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

In "Cork Dork," author Bianca dives into the world of sommeliers. Now, I like wine. I know what color I prefer (red). I also know what kinds I prefer (malbecs or pinot noirs are clutch in my book). I know that I enjoy wine but that is about it. This book opened my eyes to a brand new world. Much of this book looks at the world of sommeliers. A little bit of obsessiveness, a little bit of science. A lot of one of my favorite subjects!

In this book the author explores the intriguing world of sommeliers who are on the hunt to fine-tune their palette in order to become the best that they can be. I had no idea how rigorous sommelier training is! Some of their methods are unorthodox. I had to laugh about some of the people in the book deciding to like things lick rocks in order to fine-tune their taste a little bit.

The author also goes into the science of wine-making and what makes different wines unique. She looks at why some wines are so much more expensive than others and whether or not the prices really worth it, something I have always wondered about myself. I really appreciated the way that the author did a deep dive into the subject.

In some ways this book reminded me of some books like Mary Roach is where the author takes a deep dive into something that you've never really thought about all that much before. This book was thoroughly entertaining and I recommend it to my fellow winos!

Jennifer says

What a good book! Bianca is a great writer. I am far from being a "cork dork" so this could have been a way over my head and boring book, but I was really engaged and learned quite a bit about wine. I might even splurge on a more expensive bottle some time just to see what all the fuss is about!

Randal White says

Cork Dork manages to completely peel back the layers surrounding the wine world and it's mystique. I have to admit, I love wine. And have spent a copious amount of time trying to educate myself about it. Despite studying all the written material that I could find, and tasting many, many wines, I still could not detect the smells and tastes that sommeliers said were present. I suspect many of you find yourselves in a similar situation.

Bosker, with no real experience, endeavors to become a sommelier, in only 18 months. Through her experiences, I absorbed more information than I have in any other wine book. Right in the beginning, she states, "if you've ever wondered what all the fuss is about a wine, whether there's really a discernible difference between a \$20 and \$200 bottle, or what would happen if you pushed your senses to their limits,

well then, I have some people I'd like you to meet". And, if you read the book, she will introduce to you a crazy cast of characters. Sommeliers who completely give up any semblance of a normal life to just taste wine, scientists who study smells and tastes, and many other just plain odd folks.

If you have ever listened to someone describing the smells, or tastes of a wine, and thought to yourself, they have to be pulling my leg, than this is the book for you. The descriptors get wackier and wackier, not just things like green apples or blackberries, but "wet asphalt", "surgical glove", asparagus pee", "dried cardboard", and "salami farts". Think that it's a scam? You have a point, and Bosker reveals the entire story (although I won't, so not to spoil the surprises).

Ever wondered what people were talking about when discussing the "legs" of a wine, the acidity, the tannins, or the alcohol content? Bosker explains not only what they are, but what they mean. In very simple to understand language.

I've watched television programs about people attempting to become sommeliers (Uncorked, for example), and found them fascinating. Bosker graphically describes what they are like. From the knowledge tests, to the blind tastings, to the service portion. And goes through them herself.

Ever wonder about how the so-called "experts" rate the top wines? The author covers this in depth, and the controversies resulting (not to spill the beans, but some of the ratings are dubious, at best).

Throughout the book, Bosker is not only drinking wine and having a good time, but veers off into exploring many wine-related areas. The science of smell, and of taste. The type of people who are avid wine collectors. The new controversial practice of creating whatever type of wine you want in a factory, including being able to replicate some very expensive wines. The terminology of sommeliers and wine merchants (necrophiliacs, hand sells, trigger wines, and cougar juice, for a few). And what to watch for when dealing with a sommelier.

I won't divulge the ending, suffice it to say that it was very satisfying.

This is one of the most informative books that I have read this year, as well as one of the best written. I plan on keeping it handy to refer to for a long time. I highly, highly recommend it!

Rebecca Foster says

Tasting notes: gleeful, ebullient, learned, self-deprecating

Suggested pairings: *Sweetbitter* by Stephanie Danler; *Top Chef*, *The Great British Bake Off*

Bianca Bosker, previously a technology journalist, gave herself a year and a half to learn everything she could about wine in hopes of passing the Court of Master Sommeliers exam. Along the way she worked in a variety of New York City restaurants, joined blind tasting clubs, attended an olfactory conference, and blagged a TopSomm guest judge spot. The challenge was not just about educating her palate, but also absorbing tons of trivia about wine growers and production methods and learning the accepted standards for sommelier service.

The resulting book is a delightful blend of science, memoir and encounters with people who are deadly serious about wine. Taste and especially smell are underdeveloped human senses, but it is possible to train them: at the end of the book Bosker gets in an fMRI machine and proves that – like a London taxi driver with route-finding – there's evidence of her brain having formed advanced connections in the areas involved in taste. Everyday wine drinkers may be particularly interested in the discussion of price versus quality, and the book made me think about how the passing pleasures of the flesh are still worth celebrating.

Some favorite lines:

On how to open a bottle of sparkling wine: "The cork should be twisted and released into a

napkin with a pfft sound no louder than—and these are the technical terms I was given—a ‘nun’s fart,’ or ‘Queen Elizabeth passing gas.’”

“Smell, curator and keeper of memory, allowed me to be a time traveler, and more than ever before I had control over my destination: I could pick a scent or a wine, then whisk myself to a time, feeling, or place.”

From her guru, Morgan Harris: “Wine for me is just a touch point to a wider world view. That I am not important. That I am a sack of water and organs that’s going to be here on the Earth for eighty years if I’m lucky. And so I should figure out some way to make that count.”

The unassuming criteria of another of her mentors, Terroir wine bar chain co-creator Paul Grieco: “The wine must be yummy. One sip leads to a second sip. One glass leads to a second glass. One bottle leads to a second bottle.”

Deb says

Probably 4.5 stars for me total.

I really enjoyed this entertaining, informative and enjoyable book about Bosker's somewhat crazy foray into the world of wine, tasting and sommeliers and her pursuit to become a "cork dork." It's important to note that you don't have to know a lot about wine or be a wine fanatic to enjoy this book (I'm not--I enjoy wine, appreciate it, and know what I like and don't like and that's about it), but being a foodie or food lover helps. The information and science "stuff" that Bosker explains so accessibly, has applications on tasting and enjoying any food or beverage. Having spent many years in the coffee industry and training to be a company "coffee master"--although not nearly as in-depth or rigid as trying to become a certified sommelier, made me relate and some of her tasting experiences brought me back. ;-)

I'm glad that Bosker undertook her journey because no way I would sign up for that kind of dedication, but she had both laughing and taking notes that will add to my wine confidence and some that I'll use in any tasting and further learning about food and drink. I like and firmly agree with the quote: "Every person has the capacity to find and savor the soul that lives in wine--and in other sensory experiences, if you know how to look for it." Cork Dork gives plenty of ways to look for it.

I read this as a library e-book, but it is a book I'll be buying and adding to my food and wine books.

Jasmine from How Useful It Is says

About: Cork Dork: A Wine-Fueled Adventure Among the Obsessive Sommeliers, Big Bottle Hunters, and Rogue Scientists Who Taught Me to Live for Taste is a memoir written by Bianca Bosker. It was recently published on 3/28/17 by Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, paperback, 352 pages. The genres are non-fiction, food, memoir, wine, and science. This book is intended for readers ages 18 and up, grades 13 and up.

My Experience: I started reading Cork Dork on 3/31/17 and finished it on 4/18/17. Wine amazes me even more after reading this book. This book offers me more than I bargained for. There are abundant of info on wine and those wine experts known as Sommeliers and they must be geniuses in order to know it all. The blind tasting is beyond words! They must have some amazing taste buds! At a blind tasting, your expected answer goes something like "This is a Merlot-dominant blend from the right bank of Bordeaux from the village of Saint-Emilion in the 2010 vintage of Grand Cru Classe quality." p.75 Who can do this if not geniuses? There are competitions too where the competitors will compete in this blind tasting on 6 different wines and it's timed!

In this book, readers will follow Bianca Bosker, a journalist taking a year and a half journey to learn and live the life of wine. She starts at the bottom of the ladder as a Cellar Rat to learn the basics on wine and to get free tastings on variety of wines producers makes or restaurants purchases. From there on, she went on to meet other wine enthusiasts to learn in-depth about wine, such as taking an exam to become a Master Sommelier and joining a competition as a judge instead of a competitor to observe how it all unfold. Through her adventures, she unravels and demands entrance to secret meetings that obsessive sommeliers, big bottle hunters, and rogue scientists meet to obsess over wine. Studying for the exam is ridiculously difficult, 2200 flash cards and 116 crib sheet, but yours may be more.

This book has it all. Bianca taught me how to perform blind tasting and the right way to enjoying a glass of wine. She taught me on the history of wine, the steps to become a Master Sommelier, locations of vineyards, and much more. This book deserves multiple readings because it's rich with information and experiences that reading once just becomes too overwhelming. The Don'ts on serving wine is enough to make me dizzy, let alone the history on the sense of smells. I like knowing the secrets on ordering by the glass at the restaurant to how amazing the Sommeliers are. They don't just serve wine, they have the expertise, charm, calm, and overall knowledge of not just wine but what goes with wine. I highly recommend this book to everyone who is interested to learn more about wine. It doesn't hurt to gain extra knowledge.

Pro: history of wines and sense of smells, steps to become a sommelier, types of wines, blind tasting, secret meetings, informative, humor, cover, step-by-step instructions, very well written,

Con: not easy to read through the history bits

I rate it 5 stars!

***Disclaimer: Many thanks to Penguin Random House for the opportunity to read and review. Please assured that my opinions are honest.

xoxo,

Jasmine at www.howusefulitis.wordpress.com

Olive (abookolive) says

See my review on booktube: <https://youtu.be/C2I8BevGXII>

JanB says

A big thank you to my friend Mary - I won this book on a giveaway on her blog, bookfanmary.

My husband and I are hardly wine connoisseurs. We drink wine, enjoy wine, and attend wine tastings when we get the chance, but liking and enjoying wine is far different than knowing wine. Several years ago we watched the documentary, Somm, which documented the rigors of becoming a master sommelier (a "cork dork"). Which, by the way, is tough, very tough. So I was thrilled to receive a copy of this book and get an inside look into the world of wine.

The author documents the 1 1/2 years she spent studying and learning to become a sommelier. She tells of the experiences she had honing her tasting skills while also dishing out some juicy bits about swanky NYC restaurants and the service industry. She also uncovers, often humorously, secrets to the elusive descriptions of the flavors in wine.

I enjoyed this book but be aware it can get a little technical at times. However, if the reader isn't interested in delving that deeply into the science of it all, those parts can be easily skimmed to get to the juicy bits. I will happily remain a casual drinker of wine, but I have great respect for sommeliers, and the knowledge and passion that drives them. This book may not be the end all, be all of the world of wine, but for a rookie like myself, it offered a peek into their world, and I will never approach a glass of wine in quite the same way.

Book Pairings (Laci Long) says

Rating: 5

Pairings: 2015 Pedernales Texas Albarino & 2014 Silverado Vineyards Petit Verdot. I selected both of these wines because they are unlikely gems in the wine world, just like Bianca Bosker's Cork Dork.

Long ago I was romanced by the wonderful world of wine and I even toyed with the idea of becoming a sommelier a few years ago. Okay fine it wasn't that long ago....I'm only 27 but around 22 I became obsessed with learning about wine. Not to the extent of the cork dorks and sommeliers within the pages of this book, but nonetheless I love learning about wine so this book was the perfect pairing for me. ;)

Cork Dork follows the adventures of Bianca Bosker from tech journalist to cellar rat in the elite world of wine. Bosker takes us on a journey that reveals what it really takes to become a super-taster like the elite sommeliers around the world. I loved the combination of anecdotal evidence, idiosyncratic methodologies, and scientific research to better understand how you can hone your senses like the professionals. It really is fascinating.

We also get glimpses into the world of upscale dining in New York City restaurants (be prepared to be shocked by the amount of money NYC elite will drop on wine), a California mass market wine producer, and a neuroscientist's research using fMRI machines. There is no shortage of informative detail in this book, but Bosker's writing style makes it a compulsive read. I highly recommend this to novice wine drinkers and cork dorks alike. Bosker is a breathe of fresh air in an industry that can feel stuffy and pretentious. Also check out her account and the hashtag #pairdevil for some amazing pairings of wine and takeout food.

More About the #BookPairings:

I had a hard time selecting just one wine to pair with Cork Dork, so I chose two. One red and one white, both of which are from vineyards that I have had the pleasure of visiting and learning from the experts that run them.

The white wine is a little gem from the heart of Texas Hill Country. I selected the 2015 Pedernales Texas Albarino, which highlights a Spanish grape varietal that thrives in Texas weather. This wine has a creamy mouth feel but also packs wonderful acidity with green apple and citrus flavors. It is the perfect wine to sip in the dead of summer heat.

The red wine I chose is from a beautiful vineyard in Napa called Silverado. The 2014 Silverado Vineyards Petit Verdot Mount George Vineyard uses one of five common Bordeaux varietals. This wine packs a punch with dark fruit flavors, such as blackberry and cherry, and floral/herbal notes, such as violet and lilac.

Andrew says

I enjoyed this book at the start, and then slowly started to despise it until I was about 60% done with it. At that point there were fantastic sections that dig into what truly defines “good wine” and how variable the definition can be.

I literally judged this book by the cover, which displays a blurb comparing this book to *Kitchen Confidential*. I didn’t need to read much of this book to see that comparing Bosker to Bourdain is a little ridiculous. Bourdain spent his life working his way through the bowels of the restaurant industry and learned to define good food and good chefs along the way. Bosker is a journalist who wanted to write about the wine world and spent a year studying wine and the people working their way through the bowels of the wine industry. This isn’t necessarily a problem, but the comparison bothered me a bit while reading. Bourdain talks like a grizzled vet who has been in the trenches, while Bosker seemed perennially gobsmacked by how crazy the wine world can be.

That seems a little harsh. In reality, this is an interesting book. Bosker certainly brings a fresh perspective to wine, and shakes up some of the conventions that have gone stale. By the end, she arrives at a definition of “good wine” that sticks with you long after you finish reading.

Part of my problem is Bosker’s seemingly disingenuous interest in the wine world. I just don’t believe that she started on this path for anything more than to write a book. She doesn’t have a lot of skin in the game because this isn’t a career path for her. There are big moments that should have a lot of emotional payoff, but they didn’t land because I wasn’t able to become emotionally invested in Bosker’s plight. What bothers me is that I felt like the author was dipping her toe in, to see what it’s like, not truly interested in spending the rest of her life living and breathing wine.

Katie/Doing Dewey says

Summary: Light, funny, and engaging mix of personal experience, history and science in the style of Mary Roach.

When tech reporter Bianca Bosker stumbled across a wine tasting competition, she was blown away by the

ability of sommeliers to "after a single sip of wine, identify the grape it was made from, in what year, and where it was produced down to the exact location, within acres." She was also intrigued by their passion for wine, as well as the passion of the many creators and collectors of wine. To determine what made wine so special to these people, she gave up her job and decided to try to become a sommelier herself. Starting as a 'cellar rat', storing and retrieving bottles of wine, she slowly works her way into the wine world. She eventually attends exclusive tasting groups and visits expensive restaurants and dinners for dedicated wine collectors. She also learns about the science of wine tasting and wine creation. This is the story of her experiences and what she learned.

I was excited when I picked this up and saw that it was blurbed by Mary Roach. The blurb turned out to be a good fit, because the style did remind me of Mary Roach. Slightly less science focused and not quite as hilarious, but definitely funny, engaging, and conversational. This book also reminded me of Mary Roach because Bosker kept the story entertaining by mixing science and history with anecdotes describing her own experiences in the wine world. It felt a little lighter than Roach's books to me, but I still thought it was a great read. I learned a lot and it made me want to learn even more. It wasn't pretentious, included lots of practical advice, and made wine feel more accessible. If you like Mary Roach or have any interest in wine, I'd definitely suggest giving this a try. This review was originally posted on Doing Dewey

Samantha March says

As a casual wine drinker, I took on Cork Dork in hopes to learn a little about wine, be entertained and gain some knowledge. I think all of that happened, but it ended up being a tough read for me. I think this book is for very enthusiastic wine drinkers, sommeliers, or readers who really want extremely in depth knowledge about wine. For a more casual wine drinker or general reader, it's hard to get in to. It can seem drawn out at times and it was hard to keep focus on. There were definitely parts of the story that caught my attention or I was able to repeat a fact to friends, but overall it was a bit of a struggle to get invested in Cork Dork.

I received a review copy

Lisa Montanaro says

Fascinating nonfiction book about one woman's journey to becoming a Cork Dork. Bianca Bosker is a journalist who decided to learn the secrets of sommeliers, and she takes her readers along with her on this crazy, obsessed, interesting and insightful experience. From NY to Napa Valley to Virginia Beach to South Korea and beyond, she studies what it takes to be one of the world's experts on wine.

As a wine lover, I really enjoyed this book. It is funny, chock full of detail, revealing and yes, teaches you a lot about wine. But it's more about the process of becoming a sommelier than it is a treatise on wine itself. So keep that in mind. Think Cork Dork = Absolute Wine Nerd!

An enjoyable, dense, rollicking ride into the world of wine expertise.

Book Riot Community says

I'm a fan of both food writing and immersive journalism, and this book rang both of those bells for me. In

Cork Dork, Bosker leaves her journalism job behind (well, mostly) in order to learn the ways of the sommelier. Along the way, she also meets up with smell scientists, participates in competitions, and delves into the many nuances of flavor. I had a feeling I'd enjoy this one, but I didn't realize how much. Bosker's personality shines here, plus the book is filled with facts and speculation that made me go: "...huh."

— Steph Auteri

from The Best Books We Read In June 2017: [https://bookriot.com/2017/07/03/riot-...](https://bookriot.com/2017/07/03/riot-best-books-june-2017/)

Gina *loves sunshine* says

3.5 stars to a very good audiobook - the author was an incredibly enthusiastic writer and reader and I think that made the book exciting. So much of the info was way out of my league and probably even over my head. But I kinda pretended like I knew what she was talking about and just let the info roll and I learned a few things!! I found the whole thing to be super super interesting even though it was a crazy detailed road to a job.

This is an in depth look at the author's journey to becoming a sommelier - which seems very intense and hard core. To actually taste a wine on the spot and be able to tell exactly what bottle it is - crazy!! I really don't know that much about wine - I spent my early years hating it. I realized I just hated what other people were drinking and picking. Once I found the grape varieties I liked, I have really enjoyed picking, trying and enjoying red wine. So these new tidbits of info were fun to learn!!
