



The Battle for Wine and Love: or How I Saved the World from Parkerization

Alice Feiring

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"I want my wines to tell a good story. I want them natural and most of all, like my dear friends, I want them to speak the truth even if we argue," says Alice Feiring. Join her as she sets off on her one-woman crusade against the tyranny of homogenization, wine consultants, and, of course, the 100-point scoring system of a certain all-powerful wine writer. Traveling through the ancient vineyards of the Loire and Champagne, to Piedmont and Spain, she goes in search of authentic barolo, the last old-style rioja, and the tastiest new terroir-driven champagnes. She reveals just what goes into the average bottle—the reverse osmosis, the yeasts and enzymes, the sawdust and oak chips—and why she doesn't find much to drink in California. And she introduces rebel winemakers who are embracing old-fashioned techniques and making wines with individuality and soul.

No matter what your palate, travel the wine world with Feiring and you'll have to ask yourself: What do I really want in my glass?

The Battle for Wine and Love: or How I Saved the World from Parkerization Details

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Marty says

I love Feiring--her attitude, her blog, her taste, and her drive. Feiring and I agree on about 99% of things. (Except the fact that pork is heavenly.) Not everyone does, though, and I understand it, but I find that people who love wine as an honestly delicious product without pretension will enjoy her book and her passion. This book is not just a vinous journey or information, not is it a perfectly woven story of wine and love. It reminds me more of a slightly more focused Robert Altman film. We need more voices like Feiring--proponent of honest wine making. Many people think that writers like her favor wine that tastes like dirt and sticks, but that is far from the truth. She should be spoke with in the same vein we discuss people like Alice Waters, and those who are proponents of the family farm, sustainable agriculture, and home-cooked food. Bravo, Alice.

R says

Interesting account for support of Terroir when considering wine. I agree with her, especially when considering a high-alcohol content wine that is considered "big" by Parker. I rather enjoy the more "milder" wines that allows one to taste the various nuances. One of the problems is that it's much more difficult to locate these types of wines in today's American market rather than the manipulated and overblown ones.

Marsha says

“Pooh, Harry, you don’t even know what your religion was, and is and will be until the day of your expensive funeral. One’s religion is whatever he is most interested in, and yours is—Success.” – “The Twelve Pound Look” by J. M. Barrie

Following the adage of writing what you know, Ms. Feiring’s book is a passionate ode to good wine. By that, she means wine made by individuals not machines, lodged in dusty, dirty cellars not sterile, depressingly clean places that look like a scientist’s lab, allowed to ferment naturally according to the dictates of the soil, weather, the local florae and faunae, not fiddled with using yeasts and reverse osmosis to look and taste like every other wine out there.

At times the book has the tones of a true fanatic, one who clings madly to a subject, hobby, god or noted ideal. So strong is this desire that she simply can’t bring herself to love any man who doesn’t share her passion. Such an attitude, along with her incessant prattling about her subject, would be off putting to any reader who isn’t an oenophile like herself. At times I found myself vastly irritated by her obvious superiority, the way non-wine lovers will be irked by watching some person sniff at a cork just pulled from a bottle.

But her knowledge doesn’t prevent her from wanting to learn more. Her disdainful attitude is saved by an unwavering curiosity, a true devotion to wine and her fierceness to see that the remaining genuine vineries out there that aren’t spoiled by what she calls Parkerization, a 100-point system imposed by Robert Parker, Jr., a man who professes to know wine intimately but whom she feels is crippled by a clay palate.

She does her best to be fair to him and to wine itself. Ms. Feiring knows the true test of a wine isn't the recommendation from a so-called expert or the illustrious name attached to it or even the fancy label on the bottle. What matters are smell, color and taste and her book shows her relentless pursuit around the famous vineyards of the world and foreign restaurants in order to find wine that has remained unblemished by current practices that she thinks are unsavory and occasionally downright illegal.

Reluctantly, I was won over to her vision. She writes so well and so fervently about her topic that I couldn't help but be pulled in by it. I don't drink wine and at my late age I really can't cultivate a taste for it. But this memoir roused a faint echo of her craving, the mark of a really talented writer.

Paula says

While visiting an Italian winery, we were lectured on the adulteration of wines sold in the USA. Feiring is passionate on the same subject and explains how wines are manipulated in all stages of production by some very unnatural methods. More than my headaches are produced. The wine industry sees nothing amiss but people like the author are searching for wines produced by traditional "natural" methods.

Erin says

I was lucky enough to meet Alice at a book signing in San Francisco. I'd been reading about her on various wine blogs, and she has a reputation for being quite a hard-ass, but she definitely did not seem that way in person. Petite, cute, and fiery, she was incredibly sweet and really pleasant to chat with.

So I started reading the book almost immediately after the signing. I swear, I almost never (Adventures on the Wine Route being the exception) tire of these books about people who trounce through the world meeting interesting characters and enjoying fabulous wine-related experiences.

In addition for being really entertaining, this book inspired me to get out there and jump start my own palate. Being in the wine industry, I've recently gotten into a rut with drinking mainly only stuff that I work with, but this book really renewed my vigor to revisit some old favorites and familiarize myself with regions that I've kinda forgotten about.

This book is definitely a must-read for anyone in the wine industry, and I think that wine enthusiasts will really enjoy it too.

Clay says

I really struggled to rate this book, because even though Alice Feiring infuriated me at times, and I found myself completely at odds with many of her statements, I found myself utterly taken in by the book and plowed through it in a very short amount of time. It should also be stated that I agreed with many of her statements too. Like Alice, I find the ubiquitous use of practices that overly alter the "natural" state of wine distasteful, and I find the idea of tailoring wine to appease the palate of a few influential wine critics' palates abhorrent. However - at times I like big bold and in your face flavors, and at times I like rich oak, while at

other times I like the subtlety that Feiring appreciates. Furthermore, Feiring champions biodynamic growing, which in my mind, is bunk. I support growers really caring for their vineyards and bonding with them on a level that few of us can imagine, but howling at the moon and burying a horn full of manure will not make wine better. As a scientist, I do not appreciate her occasional anti-science commentary. Also - without mincing words, Alice Feiring, is at times a hypocrite. She berates Parker for not allowing for other points of view and wine preferences and for saying, "What I like is good and all the rest is junk," but she consistently says the exact same thing, belittling wines that do not conform to her philosophy of "what wine should be." However, I must say the even though she is occasionally a hypocrite, she is an endearing one, and I would love to learn from her and taste at any event she might host.

Any wine-lover would benefit from reading this book, even if they do not agree with the author, and the gems of mind-blowing wine experiences that pepper the book make it a rewarding read.

Bob Stern says

Some good wine stories and info here.

Melissa says

This started out to be interesting. I enjoyed getting her opinion and hearing about the wines she liked to drink, but about halfway through she started to get a bit self-righteous and hypocritical. It became more of "the wines I like are so delicious and wonderful" and "what Robert Parker prefers is disgusting and evil." I began to almost hate her because she wrote off those who also like wines that Parker would prefer as being mindless drones who drink what they are told is good and/or has a high rating.

Her message was that it's crazy for an entire industry to create a product to please the palate of one man, however, she muddies that up with her snooty value judgements. She should have stopped halfway. What an arrogant snob.

Magda says

Well written from a writing standpoint, tho its dogmatism is rather off putting, and this coming from someone who holds the same principles as the author about wine : that it should be connected to its place of growth, and a reflexion of the purity of the earth, and that there should be minimal intervention and that agricultural practices should respect the earth & environment. Bref.

Edward Bartone says

Well, I'll give the book 2 stars only because it was an "easy" read - problem was she, in my view, has completely missed mark on her premise that "no human intervention should be allowed in wine-making - I don't care if your life fortune depends on turning out sell-able liquid, you should cater to my whim of letting it ferment and hoping for the best". Then go on to casually talk about how many areas of Champain "douse"

wines with sugar to continue fermentation in bottle - and that's ok. What about terroir? I marked about 20 pages of silly comments for this review, but its really not worth it. Yes, I like big wines, nicely balanced oak and toast, ok up to 50 ppm of SO₂, and by the way, stop touting "micro-oxygenation" from barrels as "tampering with wine". Really? Barrels have been used for wine storage forever, and it's been shown in study after study that "micro-oxygenation" really isn't even a word, let alone scientifically plausible. I'd suggest she do some research before her next book.

BUT sometimes the stories were funny! Maybe humor is more her Genre....

A.C. Collins says

This is the wine companion to Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma."

Feiring goes into great detail the difference between technologically made wine and naturally made wine. While consumers become more aware of how their food is grown, processed, packaged, and shipped, most are still oblivious to the ways winemakers, especially New World winemakers, can manipulate to an excessive degree. I like the idea of listing all ingredients on a label. As Feiring states, "just be honest."

As a former wine industry member, this book took me down a short memory lane - wineries I've been to (with thick black mold growing on the cellar walls), wines I've loved, my first taste of La Tache, and various characters both disguised (not to me!) and obvious. I really enjoyed this.

Ali Amidi says

Although Alice knows a lot about wine, this book is written in an arrogant and tiresome style. The personal love stories that have been included give the book a kind of "sex and the city" feel to it, which is really not charming. Her wine taste, which basically is the same as all other hipster sommeliers in the wine world, opt for pure, lean, high acid wines. Maybe I read this book a couple of years too late because all her points and critiques of high alcohol wines are rather boring and predictive. If this book were a wine, it would be a California cab holding 14.5% without a trace of acidity. Flabby.

Nilay Gandhi says

I admire where Alice is coming from--I share her spirit about wine--but this book is maniacally arrogant. And the title is completely nonsensical. Her attempt at mimicking Eat, Pray, Love is half-hearted at best and completely inconsistent. Oh, and, spoiler alert... She doesn't save the world.

Charlie says

A very interesting book that highlights the difference of how wines are made today and in the past. The "Modernization" of the wine making process has given the crafters the ability to create a wines that has tastes that they want and in the process, removing, what the author says, the "terroir" (earth) from the wine.

Because wines can be made to taste, wine makers are creating wines to meet one man's taste, Robert Parker. He is the wine critic who made the 100 point wine scale that is used to sell wines.

This homogenisation of wines is what Alice Feiring is fighting. I must confess, I know next to nothing about wine and use the point system to buy wines. I would be interested in trying wines with "terroir".

David says

Fun and lots of fascinating info about the wine biz, and how the big vintners turn out billions of gallons of slop for tasteless consumers like me. Made me much more suspicious about Parker ratings and why I like the wines I do. Made me sad that wineries all over the world are changing their hundreds-of-year traditions to cater to tastes of a single group of tasters - much like Walmart changed the expectations of shoppers. And not for the better. Monocultures are always dangerous, in farms, in prairies, in stores, and in wineries.

I wish I could taste some of the wines Feiring did, just to see if I could tell the difference between the good ones, an ok bottle and the three-buck-Chuck. I looked up one and it was over \$200. Forget it. I'll stick with the \$10 price point.
