

WINDOWS
ON THE WORLD



COMPLETE
WINE
COURSE

A Lively Guide

KEVIN ZRALY

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2002 Edition

A portion of
the proceeds from
the sale of this book
will be donated to aid
the families of the
victims of the
Windows on the
World staff

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I am indebted to the winemakers, grape growers, and wine friends throughout the world who contributed their expertise and enthusiasm for this project. The signatures on the endpapers represent some of the people whose help was invaluable to me.

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Dedication

First and foremost, to my parents, Charles and Kathleen, and to my sisters, Sharon and Kathy, who have been a constant source of encouragement and understanding throughout my life.

To John Novi, for allowing me to learn about wines at the Depuy Canal House in High Falls, New York.

To Craig Claiborne, *New York Times* restaurant critic, for giving the Depuy Canal House a four-star rating in 1970, which helped the restaurant's wine list grow to include 125 selections.

To Father Sam Matarazzo, who inspired me to take my study of wine to Europe.

To Peter Bienstock, who shared his older vintages with me.

To Herb Schutte, who gave me my first job in the wine business.

To Ron Koster and to Ulster County Community College, where I taught my first wine course.

To Joe Baum, creator of Windows on the World, who had the original concept of hiring a young American as cellar master.

To Alan Lewis, first director of Windows on the World, who hired me and was instrumental in the wine program.

To Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, New York, where ideas come easy.

To Kathleen Talbert, whose concepts helped greatly in the writing of this book.

To Burton Hobson, chairman of Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., who had the faith to put "another wine book" on the market.

To Lincoln Boehm, president of Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., whose passion for wine and food is the big reason for the annual update of this book.

To Felicia Sherbert, my editor, without whom this book could not have been written.

To Andrea Immer, a wizard at everything, whose research and editorial contributions were essential.

To David Emil, president of Windows on the World, who together with Joe Baum resurrected the "new" Windows on the World Restaurant and the Windows on the World Wine School in 1996.

To Gina D'Angelo, my assistant, for her excellent work and research on this 2002 edition.

And most of all to my wife, Ana, and our best vintages, Anthony (1991), Nicolas (1993), Harrison (1997), and Adriana (1999).

Foreword



The 2002 edition marks the sixteenth edition of this book. For the last fifteen years, over a three-month period around the same time of the year, I begin the editing process. In the ever-changing world of wine, the temptation to write too much is great. Especially since wine reinvents itself every year with a new vintage!

When I was in college, one of my favorite authors was George Orwell. In an essay on his rules of communication, Orwell wrote: "Use simple language, simple expressions, and a simple style." I always try to remember this when I begin my editing.

Every year it gets more difficult to control myself. Since the first edition of this book was published in 1985, interest in wine has exploded. To meet this consumer demand, hundreds of new wineries sprout up every year across the globe. So many new wineries, so many new wine-makers, more tastings, more field trips...and the reading about wine in newspapers, magazines, and new wine books is never-ending.

I am writing the foreword to this book after editing this edition. People often ask: "What did you add to make it better?" My initial response is, "It's not what I added, but 'What did I learn over the last year that I don't think the beginner/intermediate wine person needs to know?'" For the first time ever, I kept a record of how much time it took and how many changes I made. I was astounded to see how many hours I spent. The 2002 edition has over 500 changes: new statistics, new vintages, and new and deleted sidebars.

One of the most personal additions to the book that I have ever written is the "Best of the Best" section. Finally, I am expressing my opinions on some of the best wines, best wineries, best wine regions, and best investments in the wine world.

And then there are the tastings. I've tasted over 2,000 wines this past year. Some of them were good, some were not so good, and others, outstanding. These tastings helped me tremendously in selecting new wines for the chapter "Wine-Buying Strategies for Your Wine Cellar" and involved saying goodbye to some old friends, finding new ones, and maintaining my relationship with my best friends.

I also looked at which chapters had the most changes. Not surprisingly—at least to me—it was in the New World wines. California, Australia, Chile, and Argentina are where big changes are taking place on a daily basis. The most famous wine regions of the Old World—France and Germany—continue to make great wines in their "classic" styles. Spain and Italy are still going through an exciting period of change with better winemaking, new styles, and much more interesting wines than ever before.

Last year, 2001, was a very special year for me. I celebrated my 30th anniversary teaching wine and my 25th anniversary working with Windows on the World. It's still hard for me to believe that over thirty years ago I was so afraid of opening a bottle of wine, I used to pay one of the chefs \$1 for every bottle he opened.

I took my first and only wine course at the famed Waldorf Astoria in 1971. I remember vividly my Monday night classes, which turned into the format I used to teach class on the following Tuesday.

I still have fond memories of the first Windows on the World Wine School class in 1977. Since then, we have had over 14,000 graduates and a few failures!!

Back in those days, you started with French wines, then moved on to Italian, Spanish, or German wines; there was little talk of California wines. I went to bookstores and libraries in search of books that could increase my knowledge. The books I found were often encyclopedic in nature—500-page volumes that made the topic of wine seem overwhelming.

Before I knew it, my interest in wine had developed into a passion, until finally it became my profession. Working in a restaurant, I came to realize that diners didn't need to know everything there is to know about wine, but I also discovered that most of them did want to learn more than they already knew.

The big question back in 1977 was, "Which wine book should I give my students?" I tried several different books, but my students kept asking me for something easier to read. The solution seemed simple to me: Someone had to write an introductory guide. As time went on, I was fortunate to meet some of the authors of the great wine books I had read. I asked some of these authors if they'd consider writing a simpler guide to wine, but they usually responded that there was no need for such a book.

I had never intended to write a book, but I became convinced that someone had to fill the need, and so it began. The *Windows on the World Complete Wine Course* is one of my greatest accomplishments. I would have been happy to sell just one copy—to help demystify wine for just one person. Instead, to date we have sold more than 1,000,000 copies of the book.

I would like to thank all my colleagues in this business—the restaurant owners, hoteliers, retailers, wholesalers, importers, educators, and hospitality management schools—who have recommended this book to the new and “old” students of wine.

I wish I had had a book this easy to read when I began my journey. Enjoying wine should be easy, and I hope you enjoy my simple guide to wine!

I welcome all comments, suggestions, and even corrections, and would be happy to answer any wine questions you might have.

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Introduction



I first heard about Kevin from one of my European associates. Kevin had come to visit our winery during his self-training in Europe. He decided that the only way to learn about wine was to visit the wine country. For eight months he toured the vineyards of France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland. Somehow he made an impression—in blue jeans, on a very small budget, but with the right questions and a passion to learn. Europeans encourage wandering students—they can tell the real student from the phony one. They know that Americans have an insatiable thirst for knowledge.

Kevin's interest in wine started during his student days in New Paltz, New York. He took a job as a part-time waiter at the Depuy Canal House Tavern in nearby High Falls, and ended up as the manager of the only four-star restaurant in the Catskills. Since his job included the ordering of wine, he decided to learn more on the subject.

He returned to New York City knowing a lot about wine, and was hired by a wine-and-liquor wholesaler to sell accounts that were more interested in Wild Irish Rose than in Meursault and Château Lafite. Before you knew it, he was the wine buyer and sommelier at Windows on the World, which ultimately turned out to be the largest wine account in America, possibly in the whole world. The job title was cellarmaster, and he continued to expand the responsibilities of the position. He created what is probably the most innovative and most frequently revised wine list in the world. After all, with knowledge and a word processor and computer there is no longer any need to carve a wine list in stone. He trained a staff second-to-none to suggest and serve the wine, and, inevitably, he started a wine school. That wine school, being in the finan-

cial center of New York, has taught more top executives than any other how to select and enjoy wine.

The reward for success in America is promotion. Kevin was named Wine Director in 1980. Besides teaching the wine classes, he started entirely new ventures along with *Wine Spectator*: The California Wine Experience and the New York Wine Experience, each a three-day spectacular, where 1,000 people from across the country listened to lectures, attended tastings, seminars, and happenings, and met the people who made wine.

It was inevitable that Kevin would write a wine book sooner or later—and that it would be different from any other wine book. It is not written to impress the world with Kevin's knowledge or insight, both of which he has enough of and to spare. It was written to be less rather than more. It is reminiscent of that old saying: "If I had more time, I would have written a shorter book." Well, Kevin has written a shorter book. He has written the essential wine book, a succinct guide to the essentials—a basic guide that does not weigh you down with unnecessary information or erudition, which would only hamper you in your journey through the labyrinth of wine. And yet this no-nonsense guide is not lacking in the necessary trivia to make the material entertaining as well as informative—those little hooks of extraneous facts which are so essential for the mind to remember facts. The information is presented in a well-designed format, it is easy to use as a guide or reference book, and yet it is interesting enough to read at one sitting. Small wonder, then, that his publisher tells me that, since its initial publication in 1985, Kevin's book has been the best-selling book on wine.

In addition, the section on how to create a wine list and stock a wine cellar in a restaurant is the best account I have ever read on the subject. It is both diverse and economical, and it will no doubt serve as a blueprint for many a wine list across the land. The section titled "Wine Service in Restaurants and at Home" is a delightfully informative look at the ritual of ordering wine.

This book represented one of the first of a number of innovative, education ventures by Kevin in the world of wines. He gains new ideas for "spreading the wine faith" in his extensive contacts with the neophyte and the connoisseur. There exists an enormous amount of information about wine, which most other writers seem to complicate. This early venture has gained Kevin an enthusiastic new following among wine lovers and new wine drinkers.

—PETER M. F. SICHEL

Prelude to Wine



It is estimated that 4,000 different wines are available to the consumer in the U.S.

Breakdown of retail sales in the U.S. of 750-ml bottles of

California wine in 1999, by volume:

\$14 and up: 2%

\$7 to \$14: 8%

\$3 to \$7: 29%

Below \$3: 61%

2000 Top Ten Imported Wine Brands

1. Concha y Toro
2. Riunite
"Classics"
3. Georges
Duboeuf
4. Casarsa
5. Lindemans
6. Bolla
7. Marcus James
8. Walnut Crest
9. Folonari
10. B&G

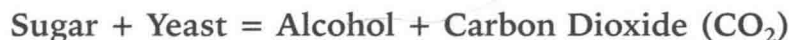
You're in a wine shop looking for that "special" wine to serve at a dinner party. Before you walked in, you had at least an idea of what you wanted, but now, as you scan the shelves, you're overwhelmed. "There are so many wines," you think to yourself, "...and so many prices." You take a deep breath, boldly pick up a bottle that looks impressive, and buy it. Then you hope your guests will like your selection.

Does this sound a little farfetched? For some of you, yes. The truth is, this is a very common occurrence for the wine beginner, and even the intermediate, but it doesn't have to be that way. Wine should be an enjoyable experience. By the time you finish this book, you'll be able to buy with confidence from a retailer, or even look in the eyes of a wine steward and ask with no hesitation for the selection of your choice. But first let's start with the basics—the foundation of your wine knowledge. Read carefully, because you'll find this section invaluable as you relate it to the chapters that follow. You may even want to refer back to this section occasionally to reinforce what you learn.

For the purpose of this book, wine is the fermented juice of grapes.

What's fermentation?

Fermentation is the process by which the grape juice turns into wine. The simple formula for fermentation is:



The fermentation process begins when the grapes are crushed and ends when all of the sugar has been converted to alcohol or when the alcohol level has reached around fifteen percent, which kills off the yeast.

Sugar is naturally present in the ripe grape. Yeast also occurs naturally, as the white bloom on the grape skin. However, this natural yeast is not always used in today's winemaking. In many cases, laboratory strains of pure yeast have been isolated, each strain contributing something unique to the style of wine. The carbon dioxide dissipates into the air, except in the case of Champagne and other sparkling wines, where this gas is retained through a special process.

What are the three major types of wine?

Table wine: approximately 8–15 percent alcohol

Sparkling wine: approximately 8–12 percent alcohol + CO₂

Fortified wine: 17–22 percent alcohol

All wine fits into at least one of these categories.

Why do the world's fine wines come only from certain areas?

A combination of factors are at work. The areas with a reputation for fine wines have the right soil and favorable weather conditions, of course. But, in addition, these areas look at winemaking as an important part of their history and culture.

Is all wine made from the same kind of grape?

No. The major wine grapes come from the species *Vitis vinifera*. In fact, both European and American winemakers use the *Vitis vinifera*, which includes many different varieties of grapes—both red and white. However, there are other grapes used for winemaking. The native grape variety in America is the species *Vitis labrusca*, which is grown widely in New York State. *Hybrids*, crosses between *Vitis vinifera* and *Vitis labrusca*, are planted primarily on the East Coast of the United States.

Where are the best locations to plant grapes?

Grapes are agricultural products that require specific growing conditions. Just as you wouldn't try to grow oranges in New York, you wouldn't try to grow grapes at the North Pole. There are limitations on where vines can be grown. Some of these limitations are: the growing season, the number of days of sunlight, the angle of the sun, average temperature, and rainfall. Soil is of primary concern, and proper drainage is a requisite. The right

86% of a bottle of wine is water.

There are more acres of grapes planted in the world than any other fruit crop!

Top five countries in wine grape acreage worldwide

1. Spain
2. Italy
3. France
4. Turkey
5. U.S.

A Sampling of the Major Grapes:

VITIS VINIFERA
Chardonnay
Cabernet Sauvignon

VITIS LABRUSCA
Concord
Catawba

HYBRIDS
Seyval Blanc
Baco Noir

Vitis is Greek for "wine."

Winemakers say that winemaking begins in the vineyard with the growing of the grapes. This is crucial to the whole process.

The most important factors in winemaking:

1. Geographic location
2. Soil
3. Weather
4. Grapes
5. Vinification (the actual winemaking process)

Vines are planted during their dormant periods, usually in the months of April or May. Most vines will continue to produce good-quality grapes for up to 40 years or more.

Don't forget that the seasons in the Southern Hemisphere—Australia and Chile, for example—are reversed.

A vine doesn't usually produce grapes suitable for winemaking until the third year.

"Brix" is the winemaker's measure of sugar in grapes.

It takes an average of 100 days between a vine's flowering and the harvest.

An April frost in Bordeaux destroyed over 50% of 1991's grape harvest.

Several years ago in Burgundy, certain villages were pelted by a 15-minute hailstorm that caused \$2 million worth of damage.

amount of sun ripens the grapes properly to give them the sugar/acid balance that makes the difference between fair, good, and great wine.

Does it matter which types of grapes are planted?

Yes, it does. Traditionally, many grape varieties produce better wines when planted in certain locations. For example, most red grapes need a longer growing season than do white grapes, and red grapes are usually planted in warmer (more southerly) locations. In colder northern regions—in Germany and northern France, for instance—most vineyards are planted with white grapes. In the warmer regions of Italy, Spain, and Portugal, the red grape thrives.

When's the harvest?

Grapes are picked when they reach the proper sugar/acid ratio for the style of wine the vintner wants to produce. Go to a vineyard in June and taste one of the small green grapes. Your mouth will pucker because the grape is so tart and acidic. Return to the same vineyard—even to that same vine—in September or October, and the grapes will taste sweet. All those months of sun have given sugar to the grape as a result of photosynthesis.



What effect does weather have on the grapes?

Weather can interfere with the quality of the harvest, as well as with its quantity. In the spring, as vines emerge from dormancy, a sudden frost may stop the flowering, thereby reducing the yields. Even a strong windstorm can affect the grapes adversely at this crucial time. Not enough rain, too much rain, or rain at the wrong time can also wreak havoc.

Rain just before the harvest will swell the grapes with water, diluting the juice and making thin, watery wines. Lack of rain, as in the drought period in California's North Coast counties in the late 1980s, will affect the balance of wines for those years. A severe drop in temperature may affect the vines even outside the growing season. Case in point: The wine regions of New York State experienced an unusually bitter cold winter in 1993–94. The result was a severe loss of production for the following year, particularly in those vineyards planted with the less-than-hardy European grape varieties.

What can the vineyard owner do in the case of adverse weather?

A number of countermeasures are available to the grower. Some of these measures are used while the grapes are on the vine; others are part of the winemaking process.

PROBLEM	RESULTS IN	SOLUTION
Frost	Reduced yield	Various frost protection methods: giant flame-throwers to warm vines
Not enough sun	Unripe grapes	Chaptalization (the addition of sugar to the must—fresh grape juice—during fermentation)
Too much rain	Thin, watery wines	Move vineyard to a drier climate
Mildew	Rot	Spray with copper sulfate
Drought	Scorched grapes	Irrigate or pray for rain
Phylloxera	Dead vines	Graft vines onto resistant rootstock

From 1989 to 1999 in Bordeaux, France, it rained during the harvest of eight out of ten vintages, which affected picking dates, yields, and the quality of the wine.

One of the few countries to escape phylloxera is Chile. Luckily, Chilean wine producers imported their vines from France in the 1860s, before phylloxera attacked the French vineyards.

Since the early 1980s, phylloxera has been a problem in the vineyards of California. Winemakers have been replanting the vineyards at a cost of \$15,000 to \$25,000 per acre. The total replanting bill is estimated to run up to \$2 billion.

Over the last twenty years, 22,000 of the 37,000 acres of vineyards planted in the Napa Valley had to be replanted as a result of phylloxera.

What's Phylloxera?

Phylloxera, a grape louse, is one of the grapevine's worst enemies, since it eventually kills the entire plant. An epidemic infestation in the 1870s came close to destroying all the vineyards of Europe. Luckily, the roots of native American vines were immune to this louse. After this was discovered, all the European vines were pulled up and grafted onto phylloxera-resistant American rootstocks.

Can white wine be made from red grapes?

Yes. The color of wine comes entirely from the grape skins. By removing the skins immediately after picking, no color is imparted to the wine, and it will be white. In the Champagne region of France, a large percentage of the grapes grown are red, yet most of the resulting wine is white. California's White Zinfandel is made from red Zinfandel grapes.