



# The Relevant Wine List

## YOU WORK FOR YEARS TO FINALLY BE

given the opportunity to create your own wine list. After carrying boxes, doing maintenance in the wine cellar and mopping the floor, it's now your turn to use your long experience to select a killer wine list. Be very careful.

Many who are given this opportunity blow it. Too many tyro wine directors see this as a chance to show how much they know, so they load the list with fancy labels and obscure, esoteric wines. What results is a "show off" list—a list that is choppy, unfocused and confusing.

So, what is the best way to go about creating a new wine list—one that is relevant and balanced? The first thing to do is *talk to the chef*. Learn about the restaurant's menu and the chef's concept. Let the chef suggest what type of wine he/she envisions with each dish.

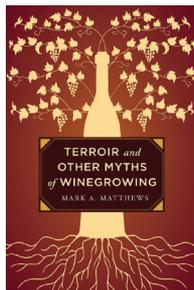
Building on the ideas the chef has, construct your list. Nevertheless, don't slavishly follow every suggestion; feel free to use your imagination, but keep the menu in mind when you are building the list.

I've been to many restaurants where the wine list and the menu bear no relation to each other. This makes for a jarring and incomplete dining experience. When the list and the menu work together, each enhances the other and makes it better than it would have been by itself.

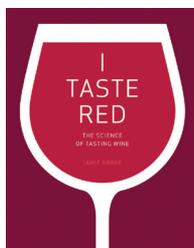
So, the bottom line is: Tame your ego and make your list the perfect partner to the menu. This synergism will go a long way towards making the restaurant a huge success.

**Anthony Dias Blue**

As might be expected from the official higher-education institution in America's top wine-producing state, the University of California Press publishes many of the country's most important books on the subject of wine. Here's a brief run-down of four recent releases from U.C. Press.—David Gadd



The title alone is meant to provoke. In ***Terroir and Other Myths of Winegrowing*** (\$34.95), Mark A. Matthews takes on one of the most controversial and hotly debated topics in wine today: Does terroir really exist? Matthews, Professor of Viticulture at U.C. Davis, candidly states that his book "flies in the face of most writing on the nature of grapes, but resides well within the boundaries of conventional plant biology." (Don't get him started on biodynamics.) With 37 pages of cited works in the bibliography—including French wine texts from the 16th century, when *goust du terroir* was a pejorative descriptor—this is a meticulously researched volume that every serious sommelier should read . . . if only to disagree.



Keeping with the scientific approach, U.K.-based wine writer Jamie Goode's ***I Taste Red*** (\$29.95) explores the exact science of wine tasting, while also drawing on the related disciplines of psychology, language and philosophy. (The section "The Effects of Music on Wine Tasting" informs us that Tchaikovsky's String Quartet No. 1 is a good match for Château Margaux, at least in that wine's 2004 vintage.) You don't need a Ph.D. in chemistry to get through this dense little book; then again, it wouldn't hurt. But more fascinating than the discussion of methoxypyrazines and polyfunctional thiols is Goode's investigation of questions such as: Where do our flavor preferences come from? Is it possible to have a superior sense of smell? And the nail-biter: Is wine-tasting expertise just an illusion?



A decade in the making, like a well-aged Syrah, Patrick J. Comiskey's ***American Rhône*** (\$34.95) was worth the wait. Comiskey moderated a Washington Rhône panel at this year's Hospice du Rhône, and his intro to that session was a preview of his distinctive style in this narrative, which manages to be both erudite and engaging. Many *Somm Journal* readers will already be familiar with part of this story, especially the discussions of the Rhône Rangers and their wines. What may be less familiar are the earliest history of Rhône varieties in America (which date back to before the Civil War, Comiskey informs us) and the backstory of the pioneering promoters of American Rhône varieties such as Dr. David Bruce and Joseph Phelps in the 1960s and 1970s. Thoughtfully conceived and very well written, this is essential somm reading.

We rarely meet a sommelier who doesn't confide that Riesling is his or her favorite white varietal, if not favorite varietal period. John Winthrop Haeger's ***Riesling Rediscovered*** (\$39.95) takes a fresh, contemporary look at this venerable grape and its wines. As Haeger notes early on, "Riesling carries more stylistic baggage than any other major international variety," with a bewildering variety of sweetness levels. The author's preference is clear from the book's subtitle: *Bold, Bright and Dry*. (There's no entry for "Liebfraumlisch" in the index, even as a historical reference.) The core of the book is a look at today's major Riesling producers, from Okanagan to the Rheingau, from Mendocino at Alto Adige and beyond. A superb reference for a new generation of Riesling lovers. SJ