

For years, Lynch, who lives in Berkeley and near Bandol, [France](#), wrote about these values in a monthly newsletter and also in his 1988 book, “Adventures on the Wine Route: A Wine Buyer’s Tour of France,” which is being reissued by Farrar, Straus & Giroux next month. Today, wine culture is focused on natural and biodynamic wines, and wine bars named Terroir have opened in San Francisco, Scottsdale, Brooklyn, four locations in Manhattan and London. It seems fair to say the Lynch way is finally having its day.

**Q:** What makes you happy when you pick up a restaurant wine list?

**A:** I can tell you what makes me unhappy is when it weighs 40 pounds. I just don’t get that. Make the selection for us. But also, when I started bringing in a lot of these wines — Côte Roti, Chinon — nobody wanted them. Every restaurant in the States was fighting to get their one annual case of the obvious big-ticket wines like Raveneau or Beaucastel. Now I go into restaurants and I’m asking the sommelier, “Where’s this from?” It’s a treat. One of the most exciting things happening is sommeliers turning customers on to new wines.

**Q:** For the longest time, the Robert Parker way of thinking about wine was ascendant. Now the Kermit Lynch way is in fashion. Why do you think that happened?

**A:** There are so many people scoring wines these days. That might dilute Parker’s influence. And he’s hired other writers. I’ve read so many times that Parker’s great secret or invention or whatever — his route to fame and power — was that 100-point scoring system. I always thought it was his writing. He’s great at expressing his enthusiasm. You want to feel that way yourself: I want to get all excited! I think too, people are going for more natural wines — the Parker style and natural wines weren’t a good fit.

**Q:** Why?

**A:** I call the wines that have been ascendant during the Parker reign “pop wines,” because they’re created by people thinking, Oh, wow, if I make a wine like that I’ll get a hundred points and I’ll be as rich as so-and-so. They see, “Jeez, I’m driving my tractor, and he’s driving a Mercedes, and I have land here, too!” But my God, how many oaky alcoholic wines can you suffer before it becomes monotonous?

I hope that doesn’t come off as harsh — I don’t criticize Parker for his influence. Parker even denies the existence of the “Parker palate,” though he says humorously that his own wife disagrees with him about that. What is important is that he is the only person in the wine world who does not think there is a Parker palate, that there’s a wine style that he has a weakness for.

**Q:** Wine grapes are being grown all over the world, these days — is that good or bad?

**A:** I don’t stay awake at night about it. Look, there’s great *terroir* and there’s lousy *terroir*. A wine showing *terroir* doesn’t mean it’s good.

**Q:** To what degree does price reflect quality?

**A:** I don’t think you can make a blanket statement. One of the two best reds I’ve ever had was a ’61 Romanée-Conti. It was like discovering Bach for the first time, or seeing Michelangelo’s David. Ah! That a grape can do that! I think the new vintages are \$1,000 a bottle. Is it worth it? Ask a Russian billionaire. One domaine I imported, Henri Mayer, one of his wines just sold for about \$20,000 a bottle. Plenty of wines sell at auction for great sums — are they worth it? Not always, but every once in a while I wish I were a Russian billionaire.

**Q:** Is there no reliable difference between, say, a great \$100 bottle and a great \$1,000 bottle?

**A:** Demand, that’s the only difference. Some wines are in, some are out. It’s not quality.

**Q:** How about grape varieties — are there any you find particularly interesting right now?

**A:** I’m a big fan lately of vermentino. Probably 50 or 60 percent of the bottles I open at home, for my own drinking, are white burgundies or vermentinos. But that changes. It’s like, for a while I’ll just be interested in older wines from my cellar, and then, “Oh, no, all I want are young fresh wines.”

**Q:** Any others?

**A:** I just came back from a trip to where the Pyrenees meet the Mediterranean, and I found wines that blew my mind. Like a pure carignan blanc I heard about through the sommelier at a restaurant in Paris called Frenchie — the chef had done a *stage*, an internship, in England where they never called him by his real name; they’d just say, “Hey, Frenchie!” So he named his restaurant Frenchie. So I head down to this ugly little town near Narbonne, and I enter this cellar, and it’s narrow and there’s no oak casks and no stainless steel. All I see are plastic tanks, and I think O.K., how am I going to get out of here? I like to believe that after all these years, I can sense what I’m in for when I step into a winery. Instead, everything I tasted was beyond marvelous. Domaine Les Milles Vignes, it’s called. And places like this are popping up all over France — tiny cellars. It’s exciting.

**Q:** How about wines the rest of us can find — any tips on tracking down good bottles?

**A:** Find a good merchant and let her pick out four or five bottles and then give the wines a chance. Try to be open-minded when you taste. A lot of people say, “I don’t know much about wine, but I know what I like.” Maybe you *don’t* know what you like, because you just keep drinking the same style. The wine world is pretty vast and diverse, and it’s not marriage. You don’t have to be faithful to one style. So don’t impose your comparatively limited experience on every wine you encounter. Try to understand wine styles you’re not familiar with.

**Q:** Would it make sense for people to shop by importer?

**A:** Sure, buy three or four from one importer, then from another. You might run into one who satisfies. Get some friends together, go through a dozen wines. But it’s superimportant to taste the wines in the correct order — go from light to full-bodied, dry to sweet, young to old. If you taste a heavy, jammy red with 15 percent alcohol first, your palate will have trouble noticing the pretty little charmer at 11.5 percent. Also, temperature: we usually drink reds too warm. Room temperature is too warm. You don’t have to carry around a thermometer. Reds should be cool to the touch, that’s all.

**Q:** How about alcohol level — would it make sense to shop below an arbitrary ceiling of, say, 13 percent?

**A:** No, no, no. If you refuse to drink wines at more than 12.5, you’ll never enjoy a great Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape, which is always over 12.5. That’s what was so good about them, throughout history, when you had nice rich stew or whatever. What happened is that everywhere else in the world, now they want to make 14 percent wines. So don’t throw out a 14 percent Chateauf-neuf. A 14 percent Muscadet, on the other hand — that might be a good one to watch go down the drain.

**Q:** How about wine regions — any specific areas people ought to check out?

**A:** Well, I’m finding nice things on the Mediterranean coast of Italy — varieties that really aren’t known. There’s one that I import, the varietal is called mataoussu, it’s one guy, Paolo Ruffino, in one village, the only known vineyard of that grape in the world, and it really reflects the ocean. It’s got a salinity to it, with good flesh and a real vibrant acidity. Corsica, too. Americans haven’t really discovered Corsican wines, but La Revue des Vins de France recently called it the most exciting region in France today. The wines of Patrimonio are a good place to start — chalky soil, similar to Chablis, fossils of shellfish visible in the vineyards. If vermentino vineyards around the world were rated, Patrimonio would be the Grand Cru. They make a full-bodied, perfumed dry white that shows the stony soil to advantage. Look for the bottling of Antoine Arena or Yves Leccia, but try others if you can’t find theirs.

Also Domaine Abbattucci and Domaine Canarelli — both biodynamic growers on Corsica, smart guys, both working with grape varieties even I’ve never heard of. They’re also good pals of mine and like to party. We don’t just taste after all! In early October, I had the best wild boar of my life at Abbattucci’s. A boar raised on biodynamic grapes, roasted two hours. We must have tasted 40 wines — spitting out each taste, of course — until we sat down to eat and a couple of older reds appeared, which turned out to be extremely swallowable.

**Q:** Any food we should serve to show wines in their best light?

**A:** I don’t like pondering the food-wine question. I know a winemaker in the Loire who loves gamay with raw oysters. I didn’t freak out at the experience. It didn’t bug me. But I was thinking how much better a Chablis or Muscadet would have been and the pleasure missed, because the oysters were really tasty. And some people have weird tastes, like me. I’ve surprised more than one person by making popcorn and adding salt, dried thyme, and olive oil and serving a Raveneau Chablis with it. I call it Provençal popcorn. I can’t explain why, but I love it with Chablis.

**Q:** Any other recommendations? A few more bottles to help the rest of us taste what you value in wine?

**A:** Well, I import a custom blend of a red Côtes du Rhône that might be easy to find, it’s under my own label — 15 or 16 bucks and typical of that *terroir*. Another bargain is Domaine de Fontaine rosé, labeled Gris de Gris, at around \$15. It just misses being as good as any rosé in the world, at any price.

**Q:** You stopped selling American wine 30 years ago. Do you still drink any?

**A:** When a lot of California wineries started chasing high Parker scores, I lost interest. But last year I had a 1968 Joseph Swan zinfandel that lit me up, and an older Ridge cabernet. I wish I had purchased more California cabernets and zinfandels back then. It bugs me, all those great bottles I missed.

**Q:** How about recent California wines?

**A:** Right here in Berkeley, I found a great winemaker, Steve Edmunds, working with Rhone varieties. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised — I eat better in Berkeley than I do in France these days. My son now works for me, too, and he’s been talking about California wineries dropping the heavy-oak, heavy-alcohol style. He wants me to consider adding some to our portfolio, and I’ve given him the green light to scout around.

**Q:** Do you believe there are certain wines we should all be drinking? Or just that everybody should drink whatever they like?

**A:** Yeah — whatever you like, you should drink. But maybe you shouldn’t serve it to your friends.

*Daniel Duane is the author of “How to Cook Like a Man, a Memoir of Cookbook Obsession.”*