



## The Juice: Vinous Veritas

*Jay McInerney*

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### **The Juice: Vinous Veritas** Jay McInerney

This new collection by the acclaimed novelist—and, according to Salon, “the best wine writer in America”—is generous and far-reaching, deeply knowledgeable and often hilarious.

For more than a decade, Jay McInerney’s vinous essays, now featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, have been praised by restaurateurs (“Filled with small courses and surprising and exotic flavors, educational and delicious at the same time” —Mario Batali), by esteemed critics (“Brilliant, witty, comical, and often shamelessly candid and provocative” —Robert M. Parker Jr.), and by the media (“His wine judgments are sound, his anecdotes witty, and his literary references impeccable” —*The New York Times*).

Here McInerney provides a master class in the almost infinite varieties of wine and the people and places that produce it all the world over, from the historic past to the often confusing present. From such legendary châteaux as Margaux and Latour and Palmer to Australia and New Zealand and South Africa, to new contenders in Santa Rita Hills and Paso Robles, we learn about terroir and biodynamic viticulture, what Champagnes are affordable (or decidedly not), even what to drink over thirty-seven courses at Ferran Adrià's El Bulli—in all, an array of grapes and wine styles that is comprehensive and thirst inducing. And conspicuous throughout is McInerney’s trademark flair and expertise, which in 2006 prompted the James Beard Foundation to grant him the MFK Fisher Distinguished Writing Award.

### **The Juice: Vinous Veritas Details**

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### Tuxlie says

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One of America's best novelists Jay McInerney is also well-known for being a wine connoisseur. Since beginning to drink wine, in emulation of his literary and cultural heroes - which he admits were not only Hemingway and Fitzgerald but also the characters that they gave birth to - the writer's understanding of and fascination with wine has only grown. *The Juice* gives an insight into a passion and pastime that McInerney believes should be accessible to everyone, from those popping down to the supermarket to those popping down to their wine cellars. Using his trademark flair and expertise, McInerney paints a collage of the almost infinite varieties of wine across the globe, extracting the best and the most affordable from the intimidating selection offered by the modern world. His tour embraces a vast array of countries, moving from such legendary chateaux as Margaux and Latour in France and the revered Friuli and Piedmont regions of Northern Italy to new contenders in the Santa Rita Hills and Paso Robles in the US. Even whilst stretching as far as the vast lands of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, he never abandons the details, exploring the intimate history behind each bottle. With contagious curiosity, McInerney explores the huge world of viticulture, from *terroir* to biodynamics, and sets out to answer the big questions: whether French should mix with American; why rap stars no longer drink Cristal; why you shouldn't be intimidated by German wine labels; and whether it really is acceptable to drink Pinot Grigio. Far-reaching, deeply knowledgeable and often hilarious, *The Juice* provides a masterclass in a wide range of grapes and wine styles, as well as the people and places taking such meticulous care over each and every glass. Stretching from the historic past to the often confusing present, McInerney captures the excitement that is felt by millions of people for the expansive world of wine.

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### Will says

*The Juice* won't teach you much about the history of wine, or the genesis of modern wine styles, or the background of major players in the wine industry. The chapters are too short (usually about four pages) to dive deep. You won't learn much about the many types of wine covered in the book, although you'll learn enough to wish that McInerney had taken the time to tell an actual story about each one rather than calling it a day after a brief introduction. You will, however, find plenty of hazy recollections of extravagant meals and social events, with lots of conspicuous name-dropping concerning the various figures that McInerney dined, drank, and spent time with while writing the book.

## **Maria says**

I learned something new " Alaskan Currents help cool off the Santa Rita's hills" creating the perfect environment for Chards. Very cool. Literally!

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## **Julie says**

Though McInerney's writing style is zippy, humorous, and approachable, its content reveals an elitist, chauvinist jerk (someone who is entertaining in small doses, but quickly becomes insufferable). His collection of essays could have used a bit more editing to make up for repetitions (it's fine if you define "terroir" once in a magazine article, but when you're reading a couple dozen articles in a row, and every single one of them defines "terroir," it gets a bit annoying). McInerney's tendency to name drop (for no reason other than to say that he was at the same restaurant as Martha Stewart while tasting wine with some Great Name) is irksome and unrewarding for the reader. And though he has a certain wit, after the first dozen or so essays, one begins to see the same few tricks that he pulls repeatedly, i.e. comparing wines to hollywood stars or luxury automobiles. There are some instances in which comparing wine to certain well-known characters works and is an entertaining and way to think about wines (for example, a "chiseled" vs a "fleshy" wine is like "Kate Moss" vs "Pamela Anderson"), but it gets to a point where the constant comparison of vintages to women is no longer flattering, and begins to feel obnoxiously misogynistic and inappropriate. Here are just a few quotes that made me find McInerney and his wine world loathsome:

"It's his party, and his magnum is bigger than anyone else's magnum. He didn't build a billion-dollar real estate empire by acting like a pussy."

"The very few women in attendance are used to the high-testosterone world of competitive oenophilia."

"'Tighter than a fourteen-year-old virgin,' says Big Boy of one of the champagnes he has brought to the table, and everyone seems to know what he means." He later calls a Burgundy, "Stinky as the crack of a ninety-year-old nun."

Fortunately, the articles are short, and the economy of language makes it a fairly quick read, albeit one that requires wading through an inundation of celebrity names and vintages that most of us will never have the pleasure to encounter.

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## **Jessica says**

Maybe it's just me, but I find reading about wine much like dancing about architecture--impossible to experience the actual beauty of the thing in the documented form. But I bet the audiobook playing in your ear while sipping a bottle of something great is a much more satisfying experience...

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## **Athena says**

All in all a pretty enjoyable read. McInerney is a good writer, and there are some terrific moments in the book. Since the book is mostly a collection of (some very) short essays that were published separately,

though, you encounter a lot of repetition. You also start to envy his lifestyle by the end - but that is part of the fun, I think.

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## Max says

### AUDIOBOOK:

Very much Jay McInerney's take on wine. This can be wonderful as he intimately describes journeys to producers, astounding wines tasted in impeccable company, but it can also be tedious as Germany is dismissed as a country with confusing wine labels. I believed the book offered many inspirations for what wine to try next, but these must be sorted from his pre-Broadbent style of explaining wines as famous women. This process can be difficult if a reader is to determine if they would like to try the wine. Fairly informative, fairly self-centered as books go. A tip: having some humbling stories about oneself may mitigate the enormity of ostentatious stories. Feels like if Paul Giamatti's character from *Sideways* wrote a book and was also a jock before getting into wine. Again, this review should be taken with a grain of salt as the pretentiousness of the book seemed intensified by McInerney's reading of it on audiobook.

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## John says

Another collection of McInerney's columns (I had recently read his earlier "Bacchus and Me"). This one continues his oddly irreverent/fawning interactions with vintners and restaurateurs. It is generally interesting, but, for my taste, this one spent too much time and ink in Burgundy and California. McInerney can come across as a braggart and name-dropper, but he has had the experiences to do so. Since this is a book of short discrete columns (3-5 pages), the reader can read a few, stop for any amount of time, and go back when the surfeit has passed. My problem with his stories is related: he chases the big names and wines that most of us will never afford. It would be interesting if he scouted out more exciting new regions and told us about them. By the time of this book (2012), a fair number of new-ish wine areas had opened up, such as Argentina (Mendoza area and Cafayate), and Chile's numerous valleys. Both were producing very good premium wines in the \$70 range. As well, many old world areas were producing good wines at reasonable prices. Still, a bit at a time, it is a decent read for wine lovers.

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## Brian says

The inside jacket of the book purports this to be a "master class in the almost infinite varieties of wine". Truthfully, I found this to be more about the people involved in making wine, than about the wine itself. Sure, there were some smattering of comments on various wines and styles of grapes, as well as regions, but the book become more about the people involved in wine. Which was disappointing, especially as none of the chapters really were very educational.

So, this was a sampler... a tasting... of the people, not the wine. Not a master class.

That being said, I found the writing style of be very haphazard and difficult to read. With the way that names were thrown about, it became very hard to follow which person was doing what, and what vineyard the writer was visiting, or even the style of grape the author had started writing about. Given this was a sampling of different wines, I shouldn't be surprised that each chapter was a bit of a jumble. But there was really no common thread to follow, or even much connection from one chapter to the next. If a sampling, where was

the thought to bring things together? The style or theme? It just wasn't present and left me simply lurching from one chapter with tons of names of people I wouldn't meet, and little but a sentence or two about the wine.

Further, I found the book to be a bit inaccessible. Perhaps it's just me, but while I enjoy wine, I don't get hung up on some of the very, very "big names" or the cultism that some get caught up in. In that respect, I felt that I was not the audience for this book, as the author wrote about many wines that would represent a house payment for me, or even a down payment on a car. Is a \$10,000 bottle of wine that good? Perhaps. But, the appeal doesn't exist for me, and even the esoteric nature of purchasing something like that doesn't appeal for me either.

Still, there were aspects of the book that were good, and hearing a bit of the history on some areas was interesting. Especially when the author did visit particularly old vineyards, that had a long family tradition. More emphasis on that part would have been far more interesting to me, if the emphasis wasn't to be on the wine. Even some perspective on the establishment of newer vinters and regions with a developing presence.

But, in the final analysis, this really wasn't as enjoyable a read for me. I found most of it a bit pretentious and bombastic, much like some of the wines described by the author himself.

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### **Jada Tullos says**

Interesting. Entertaining. Moderately educational. Convenient for those who want to read a few pages before bed as each essay is standalone, although at least they are grouped thematically. Downside is the lack of a continuing story as this seems to be his WSJ columns strung together for the purpose of a book. Beware: Hints of an unapologetic sexist crop up in multiple essays.

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### **Brian Rogers says**

Not valid for a review, but this book reminded me Scottie dogs and particle physics. To unpack that, our old neighbor used to raise and train scotties and I got confirmation from her that Proximity Breeds Complexity - the closer you get to a hobby the more detail there is, and the more there is to learn about it, and once you know that there is still more to learn.

several years ago I read several books on particle physics, including Gamow's Thirty Years that Shook Physics. The books were all good, well written engaging, and I absorbed maybe a quarter of what was in them and retained about a tenth because I just didn't have the framework to grasp all of it.

These are both indicative of my relationship with wine: I know nothing, and am amazed by how much there is to know. McInerney can write the hell out of sentences, which makes this collection of essays fun to read in itself, even if it took me a week to get through and I know I missed a lot just because he has to assume the target audience for his wine column is not people who have such a narrow knowledge of the stuff as I do. The book has a particular Terroir (see, I did learn something) in the authors New York Bad Boy image in that many a wine is compared to various beautiful film or music stars, and sometimes specific parts of their anatomy. He's a masculine oenophile, to be sure, but if you already know something about wine I'm sure these would be great.

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## **Kate says**

This collection of McInerney's wine columns for different magazines is a fun read, and has a lot of interesting and useful information on wines, wineries, and viticulture; it's great if you're interested in reading about 'wine culture' in the U.S. and Europe but aren't actually planning on participating in it.

But if you're looking for a book that will describe wines that are worth trying when you're on a slightly stricter budget than McInerney is working with (his low range is generally \$30-\$70), Veseth's Wine Wars is probably going to be more useful.

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## **Chris Lytle says**

The most recent collection of Mr McInerney's article on his adventures in the world of wine may have something for everyone ~ the trick will be finding the story(s) that will make you grab a corkscrew, pop open one of your fav bottles and with glass in hand dive into the rest of these juicy tales.

There certainly is a variety of yarns to choose from here, nicely organized in some broad themes. At about 4 pages long each, these 'essays' can either be a nice light snack or a quick and quirky sampler. I found that many of these articles gave some neat historical background to many of the world's great wine regions, often sharing attractive insights into corners that may not always get the attention they deserve. As well, Mr McInerney does a superb job of introducing us to a varied and unique cast of characters - both past and present - that ply the wine world. Finally, across the pages McInerney subtly sneaks in the debatable and increasingly accepted practice of biodynamic winemaking.

My one pet peeve, and perhaps a big one, is that McInerney continuously commits one of the most heinous crimes in wine journalism - label drinking and name dropping. He drones on about drinking this famous old, rare and of course expensive wine at such and such restaurant with this or that celebrity. One of the last - and longest pieces - entitled "My Magnum is Bigger..." was just so over the top. This is the kind of stuff that helps keep wine snobbery alive.

With a couple more volumes to peruse, perhaps Mr McInerney can prove that wine is in fact an amazing drink made by everyday people to be enjoyed and shared by everyday people.

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## **Simon Bullock says**

Wonderfully written with vivid descriptions to make your mouth salivate and your nose tingle. Jay's ability to speak fluently on the rarest and most coveted wines without overt pretension is a refreshing take on the noblest of grapes and vintages. The humour sprinkled through out had me bursting with giggles and urged me on with growing zeal. For a more recent vintage of reader, many of the names, dates, and jargon may go beyond recognition, but there remains good value in familiarizing oneself with the likes of fine burgundies, bordeauxs, and elite vintners. Those with some familiarity on the topic will absolutely marvel at the remarkable epicurean delights McInerney has savoured and induce prolonged periods of jealousy.

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## **Andy says**

The writing about wine and winemakers is great, but I got so fucking tired of his chauvinistic comparisons of wines to women. What a tired ass, lazy cliché.

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