



Sideways

Rex Pickett

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Sideways is the story of two friends--Miles and Jack--going away together for the last time to steep themselves in everything that makes it good to be young and single: pinot, putting, and prowling bars. In the week before Jack plans to marry, the pair heads out from Los Angeles to the Santa Ynez wine country. For Jack, the tasting tour is Seven Days to D-Day, his final stretch of freedom. For Miles--who has divorced his wife, is facing an uncertain career and has lost his passion for living--the trip is a weeklong opportunity to evaluate his past, his future and himself.

A raucous and surprising novel filled with wonderful details about wine, *Sideways* is also a thought-provoking and funny book about men, women, and human relationships.

Sideways Details

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Author : Rex Pickett

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Download and Read Free Online Sideways Rex Pickett

From Reader Review Sideways for online ebook

Asghar Abbas says

Comradeship and the Road.

Hilarious.

Men.

Women.

Read this.

Phil Brody says

Like many, I loved the movie Sideways. However, like many, I never got around to reading the novel by Rex Pickett that it was based on -- that is, until last month. Reading Sideways was like catching up with an old friend. While I would have loved to have read the book first, I do feel my familiarity with the characters (from the movie) added to my reading experience. I found myself excited to spend more time with Miles, Jack, Maya, and Stephanie, and was delighted to dive deeper into their personalities amid the prose. While the movie, for the most part, does stay true to the adventure in the novel, there are more than enough differences and added scenes to satisfy the reader. I guess the point I'm trying to make is that Sideways: A Novel is a not a movie adaptation. Rex Pickett was struggling to get his book published when it fell into the hands of filmmaker Alexander Payne -- and the rest is history. However, that history began with a delightful novel by Rex that should be read by all.

Jonathan says

Sometimes I'm glad that when I've seen a film before I've read the book. I'm not sure I would have appreciated the film as much had I read this book, which was fantastic, beforehand. I think Alexander Payne made some good choices in what to keep and what to cut in the film, but there were some significant differences. The characters were far more multi-dimensional in the book -- neither was quite as pathetic as in the film, and their friendship was more interesting, and more believable.

Toby says

I'm usually not fooled into buying novels by movies. In this case, however, I liked the movie and a spot-check of the novel made me think I might actually enjoy it. Well, I think I got about 20 pages in before I cast it aside in disgust. Even if I could overlook the pretentious wine-talk masquerading as prose (paraphrase: "I took a drink of the Pinot and my palate was massaged by the subtle blackberry highlights and the nutty finish. It turns out that none of the adjectives I and my pretentious colleagues attach to wine are actually present, since there is usually very little essence of blackberry present in grapes, but boy do I sound smart

when I say shit like ‘quietly tannic with a touch of currant and cardamom’ to describe what is essentially grape juice.”) — where was I? Oh, yes: Even if I could overlook the pretentious wine-talk masquerading as prose, I cannot, in any configuration of mind, overlook the rank lack of style and substance that Pickett exhibits. The first 20 pages were so full of cliché and lazy writing (does every character have to “throw back their head” every time they laugh? No; they do not) that even should I suppose that he quits blathering about currants and dates and sparkly bits of smoke and oak, I have to assume that people will be throwing or tilting their heads to laugh through all 300+ pages of this drivel-soaked narrative. These characters should all have whiplash; maybe they drink enough wine that they’re nice and loose for their headbanging chucklefests. (Another winningly awful line was “[We had] collectively reduced our zeitgeist to a tribal low common denominator.” What the fuck does that mean? I am not cool enough for this book. I know what all the words mean, but when you string them together like that...the hell?)

Cecilia says

I really loved this book. I liked the movie, but as someone who knows a little about wine I had a real problem with the movie's reference to Central California as Wine Country. The book made it really clear that Santa Barbara was the poor man's wine country. The book also did a good job to giving some insight to California's wine culture and how the tasting bars are becoming the local pubs. The other thing the book did was to reference real California wines and wineries. The minute I read that the main character prized Gary Farrell wine (it was written before the winery's sale) I knew the book was the real deal, and not a Hollywood dressing up of things that needed no such attention.

I guess being someone who collects wine and lives in Northern California with quality wineries just minutes away, I viewed the movie as So Cal's version of the truth (since the hardly acknowledge that anything above Santa Barbara is part of California) and entertaining. But, if you are a true wine lover, and want to read how it played a part in two men's last hooray, skip the movie and read the book.

If you do read this book, take special note of the passage about smelling the cork. It is true! I was given this tidbit of knowledge when I was in my twenties, and have always giggled when I saw someone do it. Now that I know it is actually written down somewhere, I burst out laughing.

Ross says

I read the novel because I have read the screenplay a number of times. I think it and the film itself are perfectly structured and my reading the source material was a study of adaptation. In a rare turn, I think the screenplay/film is actually a better product than the novel. Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor made the story simpler and more elegant. They distilled the novel's intent; taking the characters, some dialogue, and its general plot, while also amplifying the emotional power of it. I find myself very moved by the final product, whereas the book didn't leave me with the same meditation on maturity, trial and error, love and the loss thereof, competition, adult life, etc.

I'd continue reading the series because I enjoy the characters but also because it's a quick read and well-written. I highlighted lots of great words, phrases, and references, as it is written from Miles' perspective, which is over-the-top erudite but endearing.

I wouldn't recommend this in lieu of the screenplay/film, but if you are interested in film adaptation, read the screenplay and then the book and appreciate the supreme craft of the adapters who saw such potential in a

book that needed polish before becoming cinema. The experience of that deserves five stars rather than four I gave it here.

Gigi Davis says

Jack and I wound our way up the US-101 North towards Buellton. The freeway ribboned before us and my mind again began to wander and curl itself around the endless and decadent tasting possibilities that lay before us in what I had described to my agent Evelyn on that phone earlier that day as "the poor man's wine country." Jack's mind seemed preoccupied as well; he gazed longingly and vacantly into the gray clouds that loomed before us. I wondered for a brief moment if he was absorbed in thoughts about the wedding...about Babs. Was he making the wrong choice? Suddenly, he turned to me.

"You think we're making a mistake letting Sideways get turned into a movie, Homes?" he asked.

"Woah!" I said, gripping my fingers against the wheel a little more tightly. "No," I replied abruptly. "Why? Do you?"

Jack was silent for a moment.

"I don't know," he sighed finally. "It's probably fine. It's just that...I wonder how much they're going to change the story. Do you think they're like, totally going to fuck it up? Because that would be weird..."

"They'll probably keep the general structure intact," I reassured him, though truth be told, I had wondered the same thing myself and it had even kept me wide awake on a few torturous nights. "Maybe they'll simplify things a little," I opined. "Cut down somewhat on the sex and the cursing."

"Why would those fuckers do a stupid thing like that?" Jack asked indignantly.

"Well how the hell should I know, Jackson?" I said, beginning to feel the familiar sting of irritation creep up the back of my spine and wondering if I had misplaced my bottle of Xanax after the most recent pit stop at the State Street exit. This wasn't exactly the ideal time to be sans happy pills, even with all the wine I accurately anticipated I would be imbibing that week.

"I just don't want all those people to walk out of the movie thinking we're even bigger assholes than how we're portrayed in the book," Jack explained, still staring off into nowhere.

"Trust me," I said to him confidently. "That just isn't possible."

**

Now that you've waded through my bad imitation tomfoolery, let me just say that Sideways is one of my favorite movies...ever. I saw it in theaters in the winter of 2004 in Berkeley, California. At the time, I don't think I appreciated it fully. Then again, I was 19. I didn't appreciate anything fully. It took me traveling 6000 miles from home the following year to connect with what the story was saying, and the humanity of the characters. I was missing my home state very much at the time, and the film just captures the place in such a comfy, homey, relatable kind of way.

The book does the same. Here are my thoughts:

1) great writing: about two months ago I attended a Toastmasters meeting in Glendale. During the course of the night, people would give out extra points to the speakers who spiced up their speeches with particularly smart, clever expressions. If Rex Pickett were a Toastmaster, he'd probably come home every week with the biggest prize. One of my faves from the book: "Nuts is nuts, and I ain't going Planters!" (delivered by Miles). Who doesn't love that kind of thing?

2) thank GAWD for those name changes: In the book, the woman Jack is about to marry is named "Babs." In the movie, they changed it to "Christine." Smart choice. Babs is, in my opinion, one of the ugliest female names known to female-kind. Why not just name her Francis or Geraldine for crying out loud? I'd prefer "Barbara" any day of the week. They also changed "Terra" to "Stephanie." Another smart choice on the filmmaker's part: "Terra" is too similar-sounding to "Maya" (Miles' love interest). Come on, Rex! (I mean, I know your wife is named Babs/Barbara, but still...)

3) The characters Jack and Miles are, in the movie...jerky. Yet there is a humanity to them that cannot be denied. I don't get how people on this website are saying stuff like: "I HATED the characters in the movie because they're such jerks, but after having read the book, I feel better about them because now I understand WHY they're jerks." Er...that doesn't make any sense. If anything, they're MORE jerky and stuck up and supercilious in the book than in the movie. And no, the book does not explain the origin of their jerkdom (And honestly, at the end of the day, is it that important to understand WHY someone is an a-hole? Think about it. Actually, don't think about, I'll tell you: the answer is no.)

4) Maya is a complicated character. She's the one with the soul. You'd have to have a soul if you watch the guy you're interested in repeatedly make an a** of himself (the scene where he sings Crystal Blue Persuasion on karaoke night cracked me up) and basically screw up in nearly every possible way and STILL at the end of it all go out of your way to be with him. Either the woman has a serious screw loose or she's a compassionate saint. The jury's still out on that one.

5) If you liked the movie as I clearly did, and you like the characters Miles and Jack and the dynamic of their dialogue/relationship, reading this book will feel like a treat. It will feel like spending an extended amount of time with old friends and eavesdropping on their conversations...not that you'd eavesdrop on your friends...I'm just saying...

Greg Branch says

The plot here is well known. A shallow yet charming and handsome soon to be married actor travels to wine country for a week pre-wedding getaway to Santa Barbara's wine country with a depressed, alcoholic, want-to-be author friend. The problems that ensue all relate back to the characters internal flaws.

I saw the movie before reading the book which is usually the preferred order for me. Here, I think it really didn't matter since (unlike other reviewers) I found that the book did not give the characters much greater depth than the movie. In fact, the female characters were even less developed and understandable than the movie version.

In my mind, this book most reads like a Michael Crichton novel, simply substituting pretentious science terminology for pretentious wine drinking terminology. The characters move through a series of events that are easy to picture and provide entertainment, but do not really teach you much along the way.

Rob says

Like most of the readers of this comic novel with its wine-themed middle-age crisis extrovert/introvert division, I saw the film first. Which means it's actually physically impossible not to imagine these guys as Paul Giamatti and Thomas Haden Church. I've tried. You get 1 page away with your new vision and then you lose it. This is both good news and bad news. The good news is that the work by these two actors was so spot-on that it redeemed some of the casual navel-gazing misogyny of the novel. The bad news is that you are reminded constantly of the film, which means your relationship to these scenes is based around your memory of how they played in the film.

The novel is often very funny, something we should applaud. It's also occasionally insightful. It's also rarely boring, although it sometimes repeats itself a little. The wine descriptions are a little too textbookish, something that works in the film, where immediacy lets you take Miles' tutorials on trust, but a little less so in a novel, where your mind wanders in thinking that maybe he's quoting some wine eminence (Jancis Robinson, in fact). Pickett is at once bawdy and wordy, but keeps his light touch throughout. However, there's a sense that the film got to see Miles both objectively and subjectively, whereas here we're in first person all the way. Which is actually kudos to Pickett, because Miles ends up rounded, although it has to be said Jack doesn't, being priapic to various extremes.

The wine setting is done well enough that it has carried many of Miles' opinions into the wine drinking mainstream, such as Pinot Noir good-Merlot bad, Cab-Chard boring and Syrah unpredictable. These are generalisations, albeit not far wrong in my view (Pickett exempts the Bordeaux Merlots and focuses rightly on the overoaking of the Cabs and Chards), but the truth is they have shockingly marked the market in the decade since the film's release: many Pinot Noir grapes sent from Spain to US to slake demand, Merlot treated as a pariah grape outside Bordeaux and people focused too much on the varietal being used and not enough on the winemaking itself (there's really no such thing as a 'good' varietal).

And possibly coloured a generation of women in their views on men, not to mention the ins and outs of unpublished writers... The novel is satisfyingly paced, often very funny, if overly liberal with Jack's physical integrity, as he suffers multiple setbacks. It would be interesting, however, to find and speak to anyone who has read the novel before seeing the film, who sees Maya as a statuesque brunette rather than Virginia Madsen (who, by the way, did a superb job) and Terra as a dyed blonde fox rather than as Sandra Ho. How do they read it? I happen to think Pickett received a true gift: a talented and going-places director (Alexander Payne) and his screenwriting partner breathed a special kind of life into this tale, which is already rather cinematic. They cut the flab and got to the heart of it. They casted brilliantly. They made it more than the sum of its parts. But the parts are still worth reading here.

Snotchocheez says

When "Sideways" came out a few years ago, I remembered promising myself to read the book; given that I thought the movie was generally pretty interesting, and that it (rather, Alexander Payne) won an Oscar for best adapted screenplay, I figured it would be worth taking a look at the source material.

Ummmm...no. I wouldn't say that Rex Pickett's oenophilic buddy novel was terrible or anything, but I really don't see how Alexander Payne saw the kernel of a great story in this vapid, moribund homage to wine (as channeled through, say, Laurel and Hardy) and turned it into a pretty interesting and funny movie.

The idea is fascinating (to me, anyway): Jack, a well-off actor wants to have a last fling before getting married in Paso Robles, California, and recruits his best friend Miles, a not-yet-published writer (and Pinot

Noir aficionado) to take a week-long road trip through the Santa Ynez valley (the poor man's Napa, as it's described), culminating in a Pinot Festival at Fess Parker's Vineyard outside of Buellton.

The biggest problem with this novel was our two protagonists, Jack and Miles: Jack, the stereotypical man of privilege, had one thing in mind while on their wine tour (getting laid), and his whole character (a one-dimensional cutout, exhibiting zero wit and charm as he channels every bad-boy actor ever in trying to get some action before his wedding)...and has a proclivity for punctuating every comment to friend Miles with the word *homes* (as in "What the f*** are you doing, homes?" like he was some sort of gansta from the hood...an annoying affectation when read once becomes insufferable after about 50 instances of it). And then there's his friend Miles (our narrator) who just can't stop whining long enough to care about his Gourmet-magazine-esque descriptions of the wines they sampled on their tour ("full-bodied, with undernotes of butterscotch, cardamom and raspberries")...coupled with him kvetching and puling about never getting published and watching his friend Jack try to boink the entire female population of Buellton. It's tedious in the extreme, and it's certainly a testament to Mr. Payne (and the tremendous acting jobs of Thomas Haden Church and Paul Giamatti, who breathed life and humor into the roles of Jack and Miles) to turn this whiny-wine fest into something worth watching on the big screen.

Sue Bridehead (A Pseudonym) says

Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor made some very, very wise decisions when adapting this to film. Some of the most meaningful moments of "Sideways" the movie are not in "Sideways" the book (Miles touching Maya on the back of the neck outside her door; Maya's monologue about grapes; Maya's career aspirations; Maya's very kind voicemail message to Miles at the end of the movie, wherein we finally learn the topic of his failed novel - a writing choice which redeems Miles as a character worthy of the love of a good woman).

Otherwise, the film is pretty faithful to the source material. Pickett's descriptions of wine are sublime.

Kimberly says

Granted, I hated this movie before reading the book. In fact, as I can attest alongside other females in my friend group - we all hated it. The men? Loved it. Of course, I was never one to cheer for a douchebag protagonist that can't keep his fly zippered.

That was until I encountered the book. Here, Rex's text makes sense - creating a fuller life of Miles and That Other Asshole that the movie could not do justice. Far from being a douchey wino's primer on what wines to drink (ahem... the Merlot comment still makes me throw up in my mouth a little) and something that I still overhear winery winer drinkers quote when I eat at the Hitching Post (Ugh), this book is a fine view into the life of the maladjusted 40 year old modern male. One that can be a great friend - but also his own worse enemy. A wine snob trying to have one last hurrah with a friend - but one that also realizes that it's a funeral for his former life.

In short, the book made me not hate the movie anymore. So, read the book.

Denis S says

This is a delightful book, well written, funny, sweet, earthy, full of life and meaning. Apparently some reviewers couldn't get past the "wine speak", feeling it pretentious and elitist, and thereby, in my opinion, not getting it.

The combination and interaction of the two main characters, Miles and Jack, is magical. Add to that the scenic wine country where all this takes place (is there anywhere more wonderful?) and this book simply registers with me on nearly every level.

These characters are seriously flawed, perhaps to an exaggerated proportion. Miles is a neurotic introvert except in his world of wine; Jack is exceedingly outgoing, a guy with triple libido and ample charm. Together, through author Rex Pickett, they challenge each other's flaws and somehow together create a form of balance and normalcy (as normal as we men can be).

But what seems far clearer in the book than the superb movie (one of my absolute favorite flicks) is the degree of alcoholism these two very different men clearly share. I'd assumed from the movie the word "sideways" referred to being stuck and unable to move forward in one's life, something quite appropriate for these two characters. In fact it is a reference to being wasted drunk.

Miles uses wine with gorgeous descriptions as a sort of metaphor, his "tie" to wine goes well beyond taste and poetry and, sadly, to addiction. While this sobering (excuse the pun) piece of the "story" is heavier than depicted in the movie, Mr. Pickett does an incredible job telling this delightful, funny, memorable story. I loved this book.

Jonathan Janz says

4.5 stars.

I love the movie SIDEWAYS. Love it. And I owe this book a debt because it spawned the movie.

Rex Pickett is an extremely perceptive writer. Most of what made the movie so wonderful is in this book. And though--don't hate me--I still prefer the movie to the novel, I feel a great deal of affection toward the author for creating Myles and Jack and Maya, three characters who absolutely leap off the page. Myles, particularly, is poignant and well-drawn.

Is it wrong that I pictured the film actors throughout?

At any rate, if you enjoyed the movie, you'll enjoy this book. Pickett did a great many things right here, and because of that, I'll be reading the sequel (VERTICAL) at some point in the next year.

Lydia says

I have read this book many times. Six? I have never read a book that is so perfectly written, in terms of proper word usage. The first time was a little frustrating because he uses so many obscure words, however appropriate. I resolved to keeping the dictionary by my side. By the third time I was so in love with Rex Pickett as a writer I had to read it again and again. He is a language master. Every word is so absolutely perfect and specific to exactly what he means to say. It is the most fun I've had reading in a very long time.

Charles Clymer says

When the film "Sideways" was released in 2004, it became a sleeper hit, launching from initial arthouse status to worldwide acclaim. And for good reasons: the writing and acting are superb, the wine theme is interesting enough to lure in oenophiles without being inaccessible for folks who know nothing about "drinking grape", and the interplay between Paul Giamatti and Thomas Hayden Church is flat-out fantastic. Why a sequel was never made is beyond me.

As conventional wisdom goes, a film adaptation--even a good one--is usually inferior to the original source. Sadly, this is not the case. Although "Sideways" is a fun read--and enough so that I do plan to read Pickett's sequels starring the ever-tortured Miles Raymond--it falls short of a great novel. Pickett can turn a phrase and is clearly inventive with his plot points, but overall, the story feels a bit clunky throughout.

A great novel is good enough to draw the reader completely into the story, so much so that it feels like it really happened. The whole "reading takes you places" saying is rarely true when you're reading a work in which it seems like the author is trying too hard.

Pickett has written a good novel in that it's entertaining, but it could have been so much more if he had showed restraint with the tricks, which are all too obvious. I definitely recommend the book but with the caveat that not everyone will find it charming and those who do will, indeed, wonder what it could have been.

John Mitchell says

Oh dear. This is a great story but the worst writing ever. Who would describe a waitress as, "Her compulsory cheerfulness sounded psychopharmacologically tuned to a constant even pitch."? Utter nonsense. This book is written the way a computer would write. A bad computer with access to a thesaurus. Watch the movie but don't waste your time with this appalling prose that tries to impress with words that no one cares about.

Mags says

When I was younger, I vowed to myself that I will finish every book I will ever start, to see every novel until the end. Now, I've learned myself a new lesson: if you don't like it, don't read it. Continuing to pursue something that you're growing to hate will dampen your spirits. It's not going to get any better.

This one-star rating is based on the first 9 pages that I've read. I know, it's not much to go on, so I will tell you to not trust that rating. Trust me when I say, though, that if a novel is striking out for you that early, it's not going to be worth it. It's going to keep disappointing and disappointing you until you reach your boiling point and throw it across the room, thereby damaging your walls, which would upset your landlord. And we don't want that to happen.

It's not just because the book is about wines and I don't know shit about wines. Or maybe it is. OR MAYBE, it's the fact that he's writing about wines and he's sounding like a complete douchebag while he's at it. A pretentious douche, my friends. We have a pretentious douche for a narrator! And I have some fair

experience with pretentious douches (ta-dah!). And anything that a pretentious douche says will always come out wrong, and he's never going to make you feel any better.

He's not helping me like wines at all.

I've read the first 7 pages, like really read it. The first impression was that it's another cheap novel; you know the ones that pass off as a light read but really, the reason why they're so easy to read is that they're lacking substance and direction. They're more likely to be built up around clichés that are no longer amusing. Oooh, a financially-challenged unpublished novelist living in L.A. Terrific. We've never heard that one before.

However, after the said first 7 pages, my eyes started skipping paragraphs, coincidentally around the same time that he started to talk about wines, in depth, in an exceedingly careless manner where he believes that everyone would get the inside joke. And if you didn't get the wine references, he looks at you quizzically as though wondering which rock you've been living under. D to the OUCHE.

Anyway, that's my review of the first 9 pages of this book. May I find this a good thrift store to throw at tomorrow.

Paul says

Here we are presented with something new: a book with the capacity to ruin a movie.

This is a remarkably poorly-written book, and on the basis of the evidence presented here, Rex Pickett is an appallingly bad writer. I'm not engaging in hyperbole: I was truly shocked at the execrable quality of the writing. To say that the movie script is a more accomplished work of literature doesn't begin to capture the indefatigable badness of this book. There is some indication that this book was published only *after* the movie had become a huge hit, which suggests that a number of publishers had passed on it as a stand-alone novel. I can understand why.

The elemental awfulness of the writing does not extend to matters of plot or characterization: these are generally workable and are in any case so familiar from the movie that the reader automatically fills in any gaps, making evaluation of these elements of the book difficult.

So if it's not plot or character that marks this as an affront to taste and literary talent, what does? The most basic writerly element of all: the ability to use words to tell a story.

Here, instead of serving as the means of communicating a story, words are dragooned into duty as markers of the author's manifest and indefensible self-regard. "*Oh what a clever boy am I!*" is the chorus they're forced to sing, and if you harbor any tender feelings for literature, a grim dirge it is.

Simply put, Pickett rapes the language, over and over and over again, without benefit of clergy or lubricant. Not content merely to rest upon hoary, cliché-clotted overwriting ("*In the sky, when I arched my neck back for a view, stars riddled the blackness, the really dense clusters forming opalescent rivers of luminescence... Maya and I remained out front admiring the empyrean in all its amplitude.*"), he girds his entrepreneurial loins and releases new product into the marketplace of awful.

Take this gem from the very next page, which I'm guessing wouldn't have made the cut as an old *Penthouse Forum* letter:

"I noticed that Jack had removed his bandage...quite obviously, not wanting to diminish his chances of one

last circumnavigational exploration of a willing woman's every soft fleshy curve, and warm wet orificial vent of sin. 'Ah,' he sighed, settling down until his chin rested on the surface of the water, dreaming of sucking and fucking in his quest for the nadir of perdition. 'Ahh, this is life.'"

Where to begin? Perhaps with "circumnavigational exploration," the sort of thing an over-eager high school senior might write. Surely "circumnavigation" by itself would have sufficed. Or perhaps the lazy and flaccid alliteration of "willing woman" with "warm wet"? Naturally her curves are both "soft" and "fleshy:" why use one clichéd adjective when you can use two?

"Quest for the nadir of perdition" and "orificial vent of sin" simply exceed my capacity to critique. I can only point and sputter. This nadir of writing stimulated a bilious juicing of my warm wet orificial maw of vomit.

"Bilious juicing"...pretty bad, isn't it? But that's paltry tribute to Pickett's unrelenting efforts to assume his rightful place in the long history of language-rape. Every two or three pages will find Pickett gleefully plunging into the thickets of his much-abused thesaurus, taking nouns and throttling them with gratuitous adjectives until they confess their secret identity as verbs. Mother Language screams in agony as innocent words are ripped from her womb and hurled into sentences like so much verbal cannon fodder, as witness these choice nuggets:

- *"As the wine rose to our lips, we were vertiginously winched up to a more rarified plateau."*
- *"Our shoulders were touching, and there was something electrifying in that glancing tactility that I couldn't wrap my brain around."*
- *"High up, a fighter jet divided the sky in two with a zippered gash that bled white."*
- *"We would soon find ourselves free-falling together into that rollercoastering void of alcohol's blissful nepenthe."*

And perhaps most awe-inspiring of all:

- *"Palate properly whetted, I spelunked for her clitoris, tasting Bourgogne Rouge and Maya's body."*

I used to think that MFA programs weren't all that valuable, but this book is an effective counter-argument. This would've been laughed at openly in an MFA workshop and properly so. Shame on Elizabeth Beier, the nominal 'editor' of this work, and shame on St. Martin's for publishing it as is.

Casey says

Let's get this out of the way up front: the movie was much better than the book. Objectively, Sideways deserves only two stars, and that's really pushing it. I mean, this is a book that contains this sentence: "Maudlin classic rock for the 70's saccharined [sic] the emptiness with its plangent strains, further sickening me." Seriously, come on. However, for completely subjective reasons that really have nothing to do with the book, I'm giving it three stars. I'm just that kind of reviewer.

Sideways is a book about wine grown in Santa Barbara county, on the central coast of California. I spent five years of my life in Santa Barbara, attending social events that involved copious amounts of wine. But, lest you think I was swilling the finest pinot, let me disclose the fact that social events at UCSB (an acronym, I am told, for "u can study buzzed") looked something like this:

Also, again in the spirit of full disclosure, our wine looked a little something like this:

Serious wine geeks will tell you that wines really deserve varietal specific stemware. As something of a connoisseur, I do recommend a red solo cup for two buck chuck. It really brings out the cloying, unbalanced sweetness of the White Zinfandel like nothing else.

Alright, so reason number 1 for giving Sideways more stars than it deserves: the Santa Barbara connection. Reason number 2, perhaps unsurprisingly, is pinot noir.

At this point in my adult life I'm something of a snob. Not a wine snob in particular, just a snob in general. I do like wine, though. A lot. Given that I have a lot more taste than money, I mostly explore as many different grapes and regions as possible. This means I'm happy trying out the "quality red wines" from Hungary that I can score at my local Eastern European Mexican grocer. However, if given the option, I'm gonna splurge on Pinot Noir.

Side note: yeah, there are some fantastic pinots coming out of central California, no question about that. However, in terms of new world wine, I'm really partial to the Willamette Valley pinots: I seem to be able to get a more complex wine at similar price points with wines coming out of Oregon, and they also seem to have more of a sense of place than those coming out of California (I try not to use the word terroir because it's hard to pronounce and makes me sound like an asshole). Although, when I have my hands on some serious cash money, I'm definitely getting a straight up Burgundy, because, I mean, come on.

Actually, with money to burn, I'm probably going to buy a nice single-vineyard Willamette pinot for about \$40, then I'm going to buy a bunch of ducks because duck pairs perfectly with pinot AND it's my favorite thing to eat in the entire world. Then I'm gonna buy some Champagne, because hey, pinot noir is pretty common in Champagne and in this strange world where I can buy whatever I want I think it makes sense to keep everything pinot themed.

So yeah, I like pinot.

The third, and final, reason that I'm arbitrarily boosting the rating on this book: merlot.

That's right: thanks to Sideways, people think that if they proclaim a hatred of merlot, they can trick other people into thinking that they possess an infinite font of wine wisdom. That means that decent merlot is a seriously good value. Have fun with your Yellow Tail Pinot Noir, winetards. I'll be sippin' on a single vineyard Napa Merlot and eating a medium rare rib-eye with my home-prepared horseradish butter, feeling quietly smug.
