

# fine wine

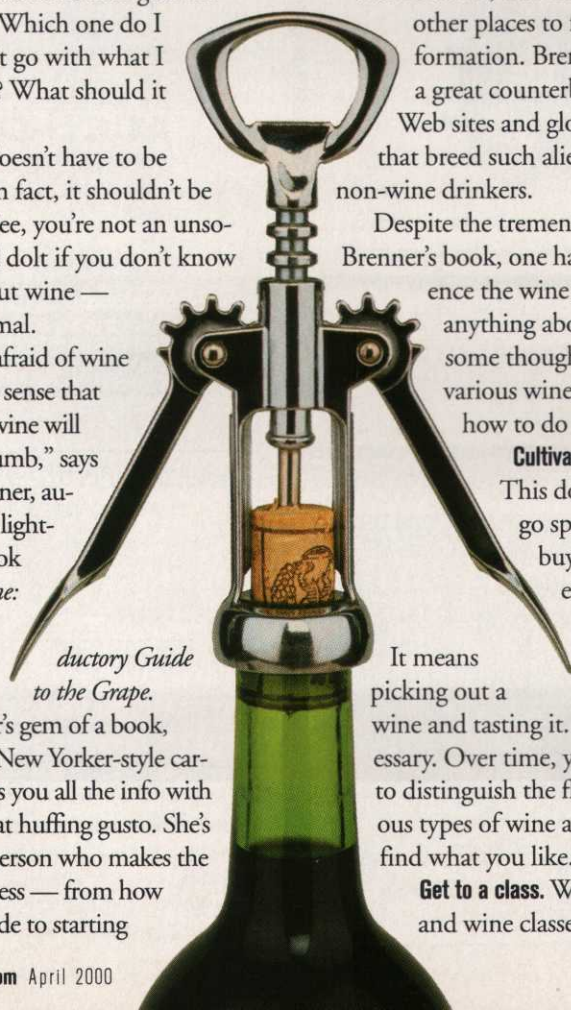
In that American cinematic classic “Bachelor Party,” Tom Hanks has a line that most people consider a throw-away. However, those who enjoy a good glass of wine understand the down-home good sense locked inside it: “A little vino would be keen-o.”

Most of us regular folk know just enough about wine to get us into trouble. Consider the simple phrase, “Would you like a wine with dinner?” Those seven evil words cause more etiquette alarms than Miss Manners at a tractor pull.

The mind kicks into gear immediately. Which one do I get? Does it go with what I am having? What should it smell like?

But it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, it shouldn't be that way. See, you're not an unsophisticated dolt if you don't know grapes about wine — you're normal.

“We're afraid of wine because we sense that somehow wine will make us dumb,” says Leslie Brenner, author of the light-hearted book *Fear of Wine: An Intro-*



*ductory Guide to the Grape.*

Brenner's gem of a book, with nice, New Yorker-style cartoons, gives you all the info with none of that huffing gusto. She's a normal person who makes the entire process — from how wine is made to starting

## DON'T LET CHOOSING A BOTTLE OF VINO INTIMIDATE YOU.

### IT'S NOT AS SCARY AS YOU THINK. BY MARK LUCE

your own collection — not too much different than choosing what book to read or what compact disc to purchase.

In tight little chapters, Brenner cuts through the intractable wine snob vocabulary to deliver helpful advice. She even suggests food pairings, gives the non-connoisseur tips on how to decipher a wine list and how to open and store a bottle, and alerts you to other places to find more information. Brenner's book is a great counterbalance to the Web sites and glossy magazines that breed such alienation among non-wine drinkers.

Despite the tremendous merits of Brenner's book, one has to experience the wine world to learn anything about it. Here are some thoughts culled from various wine experts on how to do so:

#### **Cultivate your tastes.**

This doesn't mean to go spend \$500 buying the most expensive wines you can find.

It means picking out a wine and tasting it. Repeat as necessary. Over time, you will begin to distinguish the flavors of various types of wine and begin to find what you like.

**Get to a class.** Wine tastings and wine classes run you

about \$25 to \$75, but you will get exposure to many different wine types. And when the knucklehead next to you starts droning about the “wood notes accent the blackberry and cinnamon undercurrents,” just smile, nod and pay not a lick of attention.

**Make friends with the local wine seller.** If you decide to become serious about wine, there is nothing better than a good source. Keep it local, if possible, since the people stocking your online orders are not going to point out bargains, know your quirks, give you a 10-percent discount on a case or hold back a couple of special bottles for you.

**Wine writers are not prophets.** Just because *Wine Spectator* raves about something, it does not mean you are somehow deficient because you find you don't like it.

**White with fish and chicken, red with red meat, right?** Wrong. You should drink whatever you feel like drinking and as you get more experienced you will learn what you think complements a certain dish — and you will never be wrong.

**Enjoy.** Don't get so caught up in all the wine ephemeral that you forget the most important part — the pleasure that comes with drinking wine, especially with others.

I'll drink to that.

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*Mark Luce, a freelance writer based in Lawrence, Kan., stomps on grapes in his bare feet to make homemade vino.*