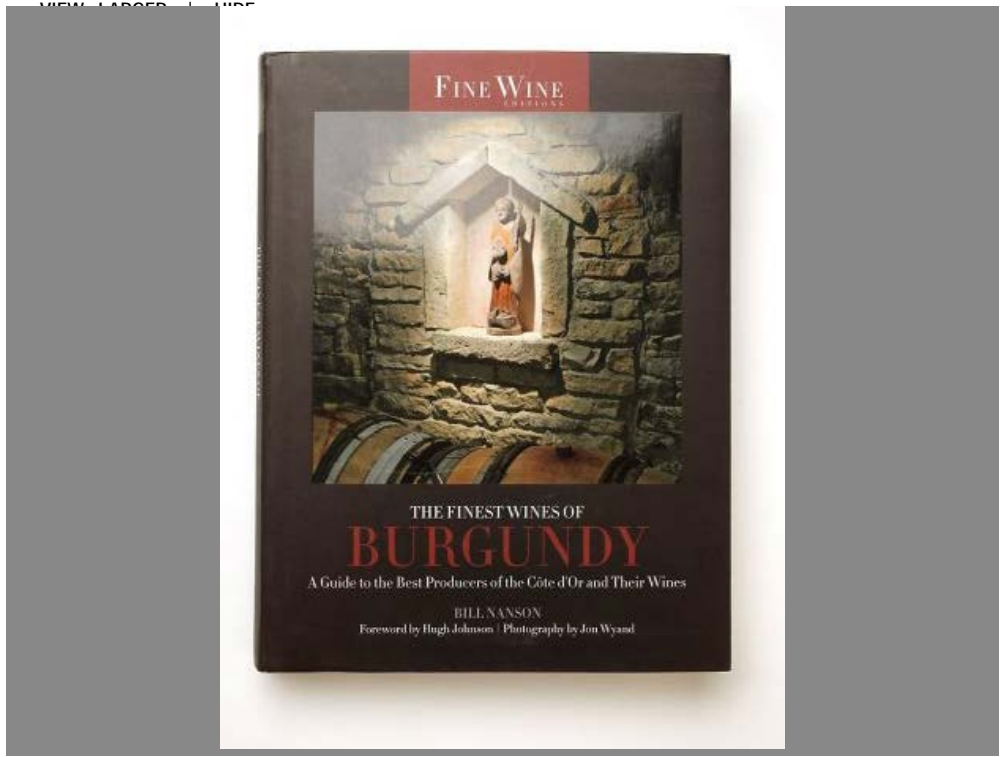




Summer's new wine books

Jon Bonné
Updated 04:01 a.m., Sunday, June 17, 2012

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It takes special dedication to detour your beach reading from potboilers to drink. And yet ... another summer season of wine books is upon us.

The beach, however, may be the perfect place to tackle the latest translated edition of "The Drops of

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Nation in Focus



World in Focus

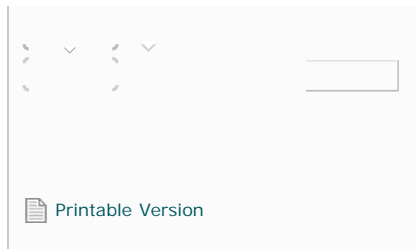
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God," the wine-focused manga series from Tadashi Agi (pen name for brother and sister Shin and Yuko Kibayashi) and illustrator [Shu Okimoto](#),

around which there remains a sheer frenzy. Wine comics that move markets?

Why not? It was a crazy hit in its native Japan. The lushly romantic story lines of Kanzaki Shizuku trying to live up to the fame of his wine-critic father - by hunting for the mystery wines known as the 12 "apostles" and the "drops of god" - mix a dose of "Hamlet," a splash of [Sherlock Holmes](#) and the fetishism of your average Internet wine board.

The latest release of its English translation, "**The Drops of God, Vol. 3**" (Vertical, 408 pages, \$14.95), continues the line of intrigue - amnesia, romance, the Cote de Nuits. If nothing else, it's worth reading for the rapturous (and intricately illustrated, thanks to Okimoto) descriptions of the wines: "The scent of flowers. Countless tiny crimson flowers."

On more serious pleasures:

The collections of writing from former Gourmet wine editor [Gerald Asher](#) are always a joy, but "**A Carafe of Red**" (UC Press, 285 pages, \$21.95) is worth buying for one particular chapter. "Chardonnay: Buds, Twigs and Clones," originally from a 1990 issue of Gourmet, unfurls the whole messy history of California's most beloved grape in a masterly piece of scholarship that should be tattooed on every wine writer's forehead.

Asher plays detective, hunting down the convoluted twists of Chardonnay's time on these shores - exposing, in due course, the pingpong of genetic material from France to America and all over California. Not only is it an essential read for those with even a passing interest in this grape, but in a year when Chardonnay's 100th anniversary on these shores is somewhat misleadingly being touted, Asher's diligent work is more essential than ever.

In the food world, it's a frequent habit to invoke [M.F.K. Fisher](#) at just the right moment. Can the same be done with wine? San Francisco writer [Anne Zimmerman](#), author of the Fisher biography "An Extravagant Hunger," tackled that task with "**Musings on Wine and Other Libations**" (Sterling Epicure, 288 pages, \$18.95), which compiles Fisher's beverage-focused writings.

Fisher finds her best footing when wine isn't strictly being discussed. When aperitifs are up for discussion ("Sherry is a subtle potion, but it needn't be taken too solemnly") and when conversation turns to hard stuff, like how to get cocktails in postwar Europe, her prose is radiant. And she's on point when she rhapsodizes about familiar spots (Napa, Sonoma) or evaluates the subjective work of wine competitions: "Judges are as unpredictable as the invisible line which divides Northern from Southern California."

Ultimately, though, here is an epicure trying on a wine hat. Much talk of wine is filtered through Fisher's accompanying meals. Nothing wrong with that. But if some writers (R.W. Apple) switched hats effortlessly from knife to corkscrew, the prism here is very much of the glass viewed from the plate. You'd often like to hear more about the glass.

In an era when many newspapers have let wine coverage wither, "**The New York**



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Times Book of Wine" (Sterling Epicure, 592 pages, \$24.95), to be published in August, is a reminder that wine is a subject more than worth its place in daily ink. (Ahem!)

A compilation of wine coverage from Times writers like [Eric Asimov](#), [Howard Goldberg](#) and [Frank Prial](#), it's full of stories that will feel familiar to loyal readers - Asimov's 2011 piece on the Champagnes of the Aube region is a welcome inclusion - but informative to everyone. The newspaper-length pieces are easily digestible, a wine education in 10-minute bites.

Certainly it'll go down easier than "**The Finest Wines of Burgundy**" (UC Press, 320 pages, \$34.95), the latest in the Fine Wine Editions series. Author [Bill Nanson](#), who publishes the Burgundy Report website, is a sage guide. But Burgundy is a thicket, and the profile-heavy format of the series works against him. For one, "The Finest Wines of the Cote d'Or" would have been fairer, since Chablis and Burgundy's other outlying regions don't even appear.

While the scope of profiles is ample (where are you, [Anne Gros](#)?), the task itself might have been more than was fair to deliver to Nanson's door. ([Clive Coates](#) remains the benchmark for achieving this insane task, in his indispensable "The Wines of Burgundy.")

Nanson is strongest when delivering opinionated takes on geography ("We have to consider whether even Corton-Charlemagne is a grand cru") and the detail in the profiles is valuable to the studious drinker, but Burgundy-philes may be at a loss as to why they should add this book to their libraries. If nothing else, it's worth a peek at [Jon Wyand](#)'s cheeky portrait photos. Can you imagine [Laurent Ponsot](#), of the prestigious Domaine Ponsot, striking a pose next to a white Ford Mustang?

Imagine no more.

Jon Bonné is The San Francisco Chronicle's wine editor. Read more of his coverage at sfgate.com/wine. E-mail: jbonne@sfchronicle.com Twitter: [@jbonne](https://twitter.com/jbonne)

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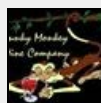
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swillmonkey 10:40 AM on June 18, 2012

Gerald Asher is a real treasure. A true wine writer, not some boob who assigned points with poorly constructed tasting notes.



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brnf 3:38 AM on June 20, 2012

Agree about Clive Coates' Wines of Burgundy. If you love Burgundy, you have to have this book.



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