



## Gary V's passion shines through his '101' favorites

Wednesday, May 14, 2008

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I like to watch Gary V on Wine Library TV, which is a blast. I heard the other day he's written a book. Do you know anything about it? Is it worth reading?

-- Call me a "Vayniak"

While still in his 20s, Gary Vaynerchuk revolutionized the business of wine retailing, first by building one of the world's most successful online wine operations, then by erecting one of the biggest, most impressive wine stores in the country. He later launched a wine webcast called "Wine Library TV," an irreverent and entertaining program that's one part Emeril Lagasse, one part Jim Cramer and one part Crazy Eddie.

Now in his early 30s, Vaynerchuk has written his first book, "101 Wines Guaranteed to Inspire, Delight and Bring Thunder to Your World" (Rodale, \$19.95). The 235-page paperback, which arrives in stores this month, bears little resemblance to other wine books. There are no introductory sections on the history of wine or the basics of winemaking; no step-by-step guide on how to properly smell, taste and evaluate wine; no chapters covering the major grape varieties or wine regions. Just 101 bottles Vaynerchuk believes will change the way you think and feel about wine.

"These are the 'it' wines, the real shizz, the wines that bring the thunder," Vaynerchuk writes in a brief introduction before getting down to business. "I also considered value, which is not to be confused with price. A wine that offers value over-delivers for the its price: I look for \$10 wines that taste more like \$30, and also \$200 wines that taste like \$5,000."

This may sound like bluster, but Vaynerchuk samples thousands of wines each year for the Wine Library, his store in Springfield, and "Wine Library TV." And he's widely recognized in the industry for his precocious palate, a razor-sharp sense of smell and taste that allows him to pick out the true talent among the pretenders.

Vaynerchuk devotes two pages to each of his 101 favorite wines, providing a little history here, a touch of theory there, but mostly describing exactly what it is that makes these wines exceptional. And he does it in a fresh, raw, colorful voice that is the antithesis of typical winespeak -- the way a teenager might describe a new action-adventure flick loaded with special effects.

Here's Vaynerchuk on wine No. 82, the 2004 Edmunds St. John "Rocks and Gravel," a \$16 red from California:  
"I'm really feeling this aroma! It smells like strawberries drowning in Aunt Jemima pancake syrup."

And here he is on the bouquet of wine No. 6, the 2006 Domaine Wardy Private Selection, a red wine blend from Lebanon, of all places:

"It's obnoxious with marmalade and mandarin. It's almost like being in a spa, like I got locked in the mall after hours and I'm in the Body Shop in the dark fumbling through the oils and gels and creams. It is just so tropical, with enormous amounts of explosive raspberry and orange."

Vaynerchuk mixes it up by tossing in brief entries on the major grape varieties ("Meet the grape"), wine label terminology ("Label lore"), and some of the unusual analogies he uses to describe the wines ("Palate primer").

For example, the chapter on the 2005 Lachini Vineyards Pinot Noir from Oregon is titled "Smells Like Poop" and includes a "Palate primer" on -- what else? -- poop. In it, we learn that the "poop of herbivores is milder than that of carnivores, but should still be considered inedible."

Aside from its comic value, the discussion of poop sheds light on the pinot noir grape, which under certain growing conditions can produce some pretty unusual aromas that aficionados find alluring.

The book is organized like a David Letterman top-10 list, from wine No. 101 all the way down to No. 1, which Vaynerchuk describes as "my most exciting" find of the year. It's a dessert wine, a super-sweet French Sauternes from Chateau Doisy-Vedrines. Here's a little of what he has to say about it:

"The flavor is just stupid good! It is shocking to me that there is a wine that can taste like this. ... I feel like there is a waterfall of flavor pouring into my mouth, including papaya, guava, and ... a barrel full of lemons."

"The Oxford Companion to Wine" it's not, but "101 Wines" sure is a lot of fun.

One of my favorite things to order when I go out to eat is oysters on the half shell. I've tried different wines with oysters but I have yet to find the perfect match. What do you recommend?

-- Don W., Red Bank

What is it about oysters and wine? I'd be willing to bet Americans consume 100 plates of nachos and 1,000 buffalo chicken wings for every dozen oysters they order. But when's the last time you heard someone ask, "What's a good wine to serve with buffalo chicken wings?"

Yet I've spent hours with fellow oyster lovers debating the pros and cons of various wine accompaniments, from champagne to chablis. (A strong argument can be made for Guinness Stout, but that's another story.)

For years, a group of food and wine writers has convened annually on the West Coast to taste dozens of wines in an effort to identify the perfect match for raw oysters. They just held the 14th annual Pacific Coast Oyster Wine Competition, and the results are in.

A dozen wines were deemed particularly oyster-friendly, all but three of which were made from the sauvignon blanc grape (aka fume blanc). Two were made from the pinot gris grape and one was a pinot blanc. Here's the list of winners:

2006 Amity Vineyards Pinot Blanc, Oregon  
2006 Chateau Ste. Michelle Sauvignon Blanc, Washington State  
2006 Clayhouse Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, California  
2006 Clos du Bois Sauvignon Blanc, California  
2006 Covey Run Fume Blanc, Washington State  
2006 Dry Creek Vineyard Fume Blanc, California  
2006 Girard Sauvignon Blanc, California  
2007 Kathryn Kennedy Sauvignon Blanc, California  
2006 Robledo Family Winery Sauvignon Blanc, California  
2006 Simi Sauvignon Blanc, California  
2007 Van Duzer Pinot Gris, Oregon  
2007 Willamette Valley Vineyards Pinot Gris, Oregon.