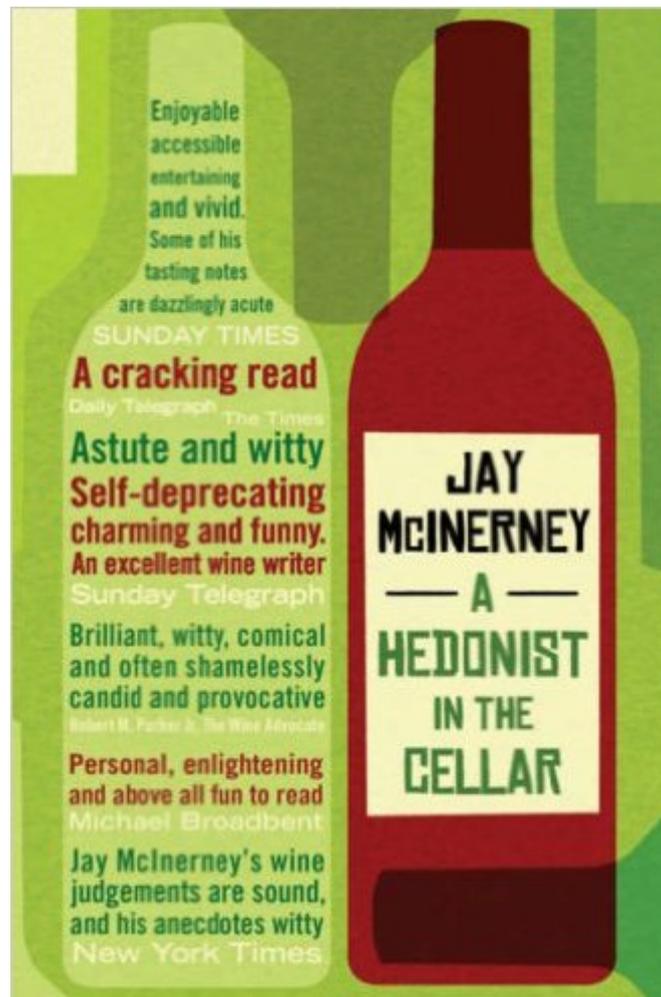


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A Hedonist In The Cellar: Adventures In Wine. Jay McInerney



Synopsis

Jay McInerney, internationally celebrated author of *Bright Lights, Big City*, turns his hand here to his lifelong love affair with wine. Peals of wisdom are offered on the subjects of the best wine for romantics, the parallels between Californian wines and floundering Hollywood stars, the choice of wine for the author's own debauched forty-eighth birthday party, the 'high-testosterone grape' that is Colin Farrell, absinthe, 'the wild green fairy', and what wine is best drunk with chocolate. At the same time McInerney is a genuine connoisseur, taking the reader on a tour through the wine regions of the world and imparting tried and tested advice on grapes and vintages, bouquets, noses and finishes.

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Customer Reviews

Christened "the best wine writer in America" by Salon, Jay McInerney is truly the master of the grape, sans pomposity. In the years since his previous collection, *BACCHUS AND ME*, he has traveled to more countries for his trade, sniffed more woody aromas and uncorked more bottles than most sommeliers in the world. His monthly House & Garden column is read by thousands of oenophiles worldwide. He is also the award-winning author of seven novels, including most recently the critically acclaimed *THE GOOD LIFE*. In his latest concoction, *A HEDONIST IN THE CELLAR*, McInerney combines his extensive and perpetually growing knowledge of wine with a penchant for telling a good cocktail hour story to create a collection that is thoroughly pleasurable to read and digest. As all essay anthologies should, *HEDONIST* begins with an informative introduction, written in McInerney's comfortable, laid-back style --- much like an evening's first glass of wine. He writes of

his formative years at his job as a wine clerk at a rinky-dink "boozeteria" in Syracuse, New York, called the Westcott Cordial Shop. It was there that he heard about the acceptance of his first novel by Random House, while studying under Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff in the Graduate Writing Program at Syracuse University. It was also there that he laid the groundwork for what later would be a career as a wine connoisseur, by reading the shop's books on wine and occasionally lifting a bottle or two to taste. Ten years or so later, he was offered the wine column gig, despite his minimal training. "I'd never taken a class, or attended a wine tasting, or spit into a bucket..." Yet he managed to pull it off, purely for the love of learning about it and the enjoyment factor. "It's an inexhaustible subject, a nexus of subjects ...

It should first be noted that Jay McInerney was a writer long before he became a writer about wine. That's an important distinction, because it's easy to forget, when reading McInerney's witticisms and anecdotes, that he's also got a pretty good street cred as a wine authority. "A Hedonist in the Cellar" is probably one of the more aptly named books ever to be published, because it's about a guy who truly loves what he gets paid to do. Unlike other books written about the perimeters of luxe lifestyles, McInerney's offering doesn't come across as a smug piece in which the author revels in highlighting what normal people will never get to enjoy. In "Hedonist," McInerney gets beyond the froufrou language that causes most of the civilized world to arch a brow at wine lovers (and collectors and writers) and dismiss them as pompous snobs. This latest book, a compilation of funny, frightfully easy-to-read essays about wine around the world, makes readers feel as though they've dropped in for a chat or were allowed to eavesdrop just outside the dining room door as a fabulous buffet of stories unfolds. McInerney -- and this is where the ordinary part ends -- takes readers to the hearts of the finest wine cellars and vineyards in the world. It's not an academic exercise, but rather like hitching a ride in the back of an old Mini (before they became fashionable) and rattling around for a year or so. In the case of the essays of the book, there are five years of writing. He shares how the wine world works, what to look for in certain wines and, most important, how to find a wine you like and, by God, be confident in that choice.

"Sir, a woman preaching is like a dog walking on his hind legs. It is not done well but you are surprised to find it done at all."-Samuel Johnson
I want to get one thing straight before I begin: I wouldn't know Jay McInerney from Hugh McElhenny, so I don't want anyone to think that this review is colored by my previous experience with McInerney as a novelist or anything else. I understand this book is a compilation of short articles he wrote for the magazine House & Garden over a five-year

span in the early part of this decade, although there are no dates on individual entries. That's too bad, because in 2007 there's virtually nothing new in the entire book, and if it turned out he wrote them all, let's say, in the period between 2000-2001, at least we'd know he was blazing some new ground at the time and it just took the rest of us a while to catch up. Instead I would describe the net effect as a romp through very well trodden territory with a half-baked, way-too-clever-for-his-own-good guide. In the introduction, McInerney informs us that he came by his gig at House and Garden by accident, when a friend and editor suggested he combine his growing passion for the grape with his writing. Hence the Johnson quote above- should we be impressed that a novelist knows anything about wine, or perhaps go with the flow and quote Maximus from Gladiator, dripping blood in the center of the arena and shouting, "are you not entertained?" My standard-bearer in this genre is Gerald Asher, who for 30 years has written brilliantly incisive articles about wine in Gourmet (The Pleasures of Wine).

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