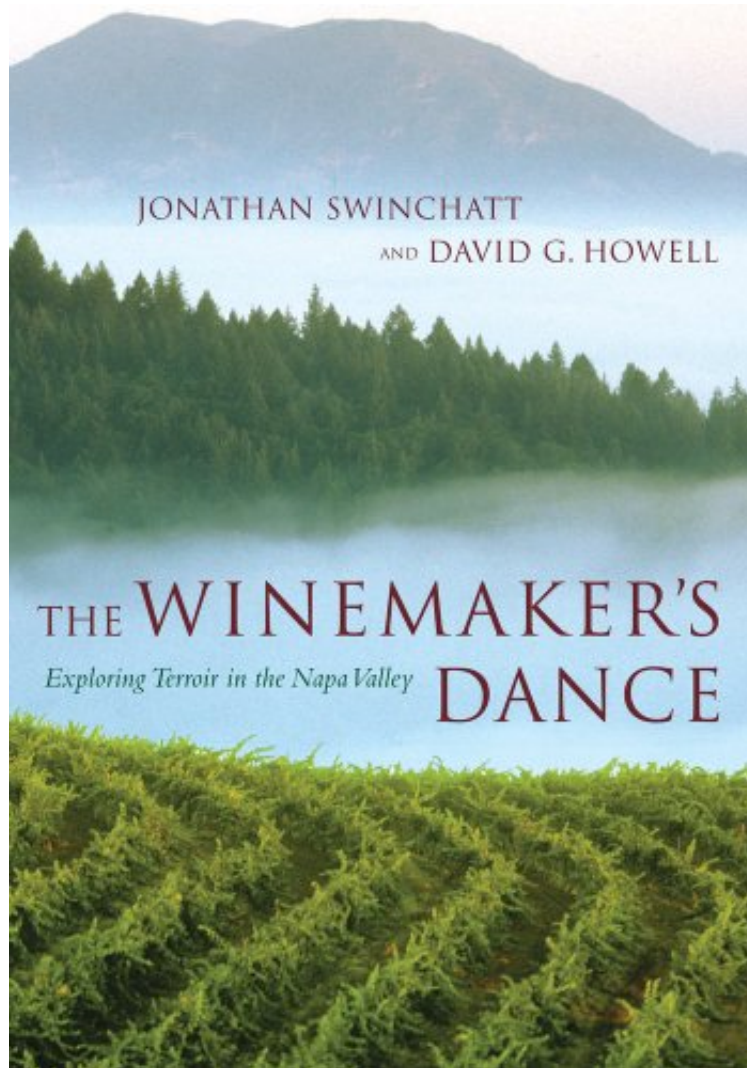


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The Winemaker's Dance: Exploring Terroir in the Napa Valley

Jonathan Swinchatt, David G. Howell

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Jonathan Swinchatt, David G. Howell : The Winemaker's Dance: Exploring Terroir in the Napa Valley before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Winemaker's Dance: Exploring Terroir in the Napa Valley:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Do not buy from this publisher.By MIKEDO NOT buy this book. I originally purchased this book from a couple of years ago. I misplaced the book and had to reorder. The publisher changed and the beautiful color photographs and diagrams are now in black and white. What a tragedy!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good background bookBy NelsI have a farm near Napa county and was interested in assessing the suitability of the farm for growing wine grapes. This book has a lot of interesting information in it. It is

especially suitable for someone interested in agriculture who will be visiting Napa county - there are probably far more people in that category than there are people interested in growing wine grapes. For my purposes I would have liked to see a summary table or listing of wineries, wine price, type(s) of grapes grown, soil conditions, soil water retention, elevation, slope, sunlight orientation, and perhaps native vegetation on the soil. It was a bit hard to get this information since it was scattered throughout the book and there were usually just a few factors mentioned when specific wineries were discussed. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Geeky but Great By T. Horton A thorough and valiant attempt at trying to define "terroir" in one of the world's great winegrape growing regions. I liked the book a lot more than I thought I would--it starts with the soils and geologic makeup, goes into climate, viticulture, and then tries to bundle it with how the grape growers and winemakers coax great fruit out of all of it. Fabulous maps and graphics. Worth the price for this alone. Terroir is a very difficult topic to get one's head around and I really appreciate the authors' work. A lot closer than you get from talking to grape growers and wine makers. (I have been an amateur winemaker for over 10 years, so I really appreciated the clarity of their approach.)

There is a saying among winemakers that "great wine begins with dirt." Beginning from this intriguing premise, *The Winemaker's Dance* embarks on an eye-opening exploration of "terroir" in one of the greatest places on earth to grow wine: California's Napa Valley. Jonathan Swinchatt and David G. Howell weave a tale that begins millions of years ago with the clash of continental plates that created the Napa Valley and go on to show how this small region, with its myriad microclimates, complex geologic history, and dedicated winemakers, came to produce world-class wines. A fascinating look at the art and science of winemaking and the only comprehensive book that covers Napa's geology, history, and environment, *The Winemaker's Dance* will help wine enthusiasts better understand wine talk and wine writing and, most importantly, wine itself. *The Winemaker's Dance* is animated by the voices of Napa's winemakers talking about their craft. The book also contains two driving tours through the valley that highlight the landscapes and wineries discussed. An array of unique illustrations—including shaded relief maps overlaid with color aerial photographs—provide a new and illuminating look at the region: its bedrock, sediments, soils, sun, wind, and rain. The expansive narrative considers how these elements influence wines from particular vineyards and how specific winemaking practices can bring out or mask aspects of terroir. It concludes with a discussion of the state of the winemaking industry today. Unraveling the complex relationship between the people, the earth, and the vines of Napa Valley, *The Winemaker's Dance* brings the elusive concept of terroir to a broad audience, adding a vibrant dimension to the experience of the valley's wines. It also provides insights that enhance our understanding of wines and winegrowing regions the world over.

From Publishers Weekly In this exhaustive and sometimes exhausting book, Swinchatt and Howell take on the Herculean task of explaining how the "topography, bedrock, sediments and soils, temperature and rainfall"—that is, the terroir—of Napa Valley affect the taste of its famous wines. The authors' previous books (*The Foundations of Wine in the Napa Valley* and *Principles of Terroir Analysis*) were solid preparation for the difficulty of unraveling this mystery. But the complexity of terroir nonetheless requires painstaking (and passionate) consideration of myriad geological, biological and cultural factors. Everything—the intensity of sunlight, the slope of hills, the length of shadows, the impact of different woods on the wine aging in barrels—comes under the authors' examination. There is even an extensive presentation of Napa's geological back-story: 145 million years of subduction, shifting tectonic plates and magma flows. Puzzling through this intricate matrix of influences are the winemakers themselves, who, the authors say, work with the land in a delicate "dance." Sidebars offer sage advice on everything from "organizing a structured tasting" to "Pierce's disease and the glassy-winged sharp-shooter." And the book lays out two wine-tasting tours through the different parts of the Valley with recommended stops at several wineries. Swinchatt and Howell pursue their topic with patience and profound attention to detail, and their writing is generally earnest and sharp. Though general readers may be daunted by the sheer density of this book's scientific information, even a quick flip through its many maps, photographs and diagrams can be tremendously informative. Copyright © 2005 Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Scientific American* Time was when Americans in Britain would be sternly corrected were they to use the term "English" when what they really meant was "British." These days the British themselves are no longer sure which is which. Yet one distinction still rises above all ambiguity, and its identity might be surprising—wine. "British" wine is made in Britain from imported grapes. "English" wine, in contrast, is a handcrafted, homegrown product. The distinction should be clear: whereas British wine is made without reference to its place of origin, English wine is sold on its location. A sense of place is central to its image, its taste and its success. In *The Winemaker's Dance*, geologists Jonathan Swinchatt and David G. Howell argue that this sense of place is central to the standing and the understanding of wine from California's Napa Valley, although their contention would be just as true wherever grapes are grown and wine is made. As such, Swinchatt and Howell take what they themselves see as a controversial stand, contending that winemakers should reassert a sense of place, to buck what they see as the trend toward a homogeneous "international" style of wine, fostered by the personal tastes of a small circle of influential critics. At the heart of their thesis is an

appreciation of terroir, which, like many words in French, is both untranslatable and full of meaning. Coming from the classic French tradition of winemaking, terroir means the situation in which wine is made. "At its core," Swinchatt and Howell note, "the notion of terroir refers to all the qualities that characterize place: topography, bedrock, sediments and soils, temperature, and rainfall. Some wine writers and professionals include viticultural practices, and others recognize the impact of ... the winemaker." Terroir is not an object, then, but an epiphenomenon, an indefinable summation of the winemaker's dance, which starts with the careful selection of a vineyard and ends with the bottle on your table. The authors venture that the story of any bottle of wine starts much earlier than that, with the history of the land itself. In the words of David Jones, winemaker and geologist, "What you're tasting in a bottle of wine is a hundred million years of geologic history." Using this as the cue to take the broadest possible view of terroir, Swinchatt and Howell sketch the geologic history of the Napa Valley, starting with its origin as ocean floor squeezed up against the North American mainland 140 million years ago. Volcanoes have come and gone, rivers have woven their courses, and the weather has exacted its remorseless toll, to produce in the Napa Valley a rugged terrain of great variety in bedrock, soil and microclimate, despite its tiny size (just 40 miles long and 21 broad). For much of the book, Swinchatt and Howell show how winemakers have exploited the varied topography and climate of the Napa Valley as an expression of a characteristically American individuality. Yet they note a paradox. The finest Napa wines come from hot, water-stressed grapes clinging to marginal hillside soils, farmed by winemakers often new to the craft and therefore free to experiment. On the other hand, the classic wines of Bordeaux on which Napa wines are modeled come from cooler, more fertile lowland settings and are crafted by winemakers steeped in regulation and tradition. And yet Napa wines have ranked alongside the best that France can offer for more than a quarter of a century. The relation between quality and terroir is, it seems, not a simple one--and this is the central problem of contemporary winemaking. In crafting the best possible wine, is it better to follow the latest global fashion or remain true to the terroir that gives wine its sense of place, come what may? This is where Swinchatt and Howell might find their message controversial in some quarters. After months of exploration in Napa, interviewing winemakers and learning their secrets, they admit that their favorite wines are those that seek to harmonize all the aspects of terroir, without any one aspect becoming dominant, and that these balanced wines are, more often than not, French. With disarming frankness they admit that their most memorable drop was a 1988 Chateau Clerc Milon from Pauillac: "By no means an overpowering wine, it nevertheless stopped conversation at the table on the first mouth-filling taste and kept drawing our attention just as vividly throughout a leisurely dinner.... If the winemaker's intent is to 'let the terroir speak,' then the goal will be to balance the elements." In the adherence to a certain style of wine that tends toward aggressive fruitiness at the expense of subtlety, Napa wine risks losing its balance and possibly its way. With increasing use of technology and analysis that characterize those elements of flavor that make certain wines distinctive, it is becoming easier for a winemaker to craft any wine in imitation of any other. Were this trend to continue indefinitely, wine would lose the sense of place on which rests much of its allure and become any other foodstuff. Like no other agricultural product, wine depends on its location for its appeal. Throw the dice of time a little askew, and the Napa Valley would have been a sleepy farming community like many others, not the greatest tourist draw in California outside Disneyland. Two sections of *The Winemaker's Dance* are guides for visitors to the Napa Valley, pointing out which vineyards are where and--in the context of geology and topography--why. While I was reading the book, I found these sections incongruous, and I had planned to add a patronizing note that every visitor to the region should have this book in his glove compartment. I'd say so still, but for a different reason. Now that I have drained the authors' beaker of warm South to the dregs, the tourist-guide sections have an elegiac quality. Go see the Napa Valley today, before fashion drains its individuality. *The Winemaker's Dance* is a full-bodied book with somewhat hard-edged, granitic notes and a distinctly disturbing finish. But don't wait for it to age, for it might be too late. It's ready to read right now. Henry Gee, a senior editor of *Nature*, is author of *Jacob's Ladder: The History of the Human Genome* (W. W. Norton, 2004) and the upcoming *The Science of Middle Earth: Explaining the Science behind the Greatest Fantasy Epic Ever Told!* (Cold Spring Press, 2004). (1,071)From BooklistAs one of the authors' chapter titles bluntly states, "Great Wine Begins with Dirt." The French have in recent years enshrined terroir as the vintners' touchstone and wine lovers' ubiquitous standard. Oenophiles argue that particular conjunctions of soil, rainfall, and other physical conditions affect grapevines from place to place and yield identifiable differences in the resulting wines. Geologists Swinchatt and Howell bring this principle to America and explore the issue of terroir in California's Napa Valley. Their analysis of the famous valley's distinctive geology and geomorphology yields scientifically based conclusions for vintners to exploit. In maps and charts, the authors illustrate how various sorts of bedrock, erosion patterns, soil profiles, rainfall, sun exposure, and the like combine to nourish grapevines. Irrigation techniques prove controversial, hand methods seen by some growers as superior to mechanized drip methods. Vine trimming procedures also come under scrutiny. This work sets standards for other winegrowing areas to analyze their own terroir. Regional collections in all winegrowing areas will find this book uniquely useful. Mark KnoblauchCopyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved