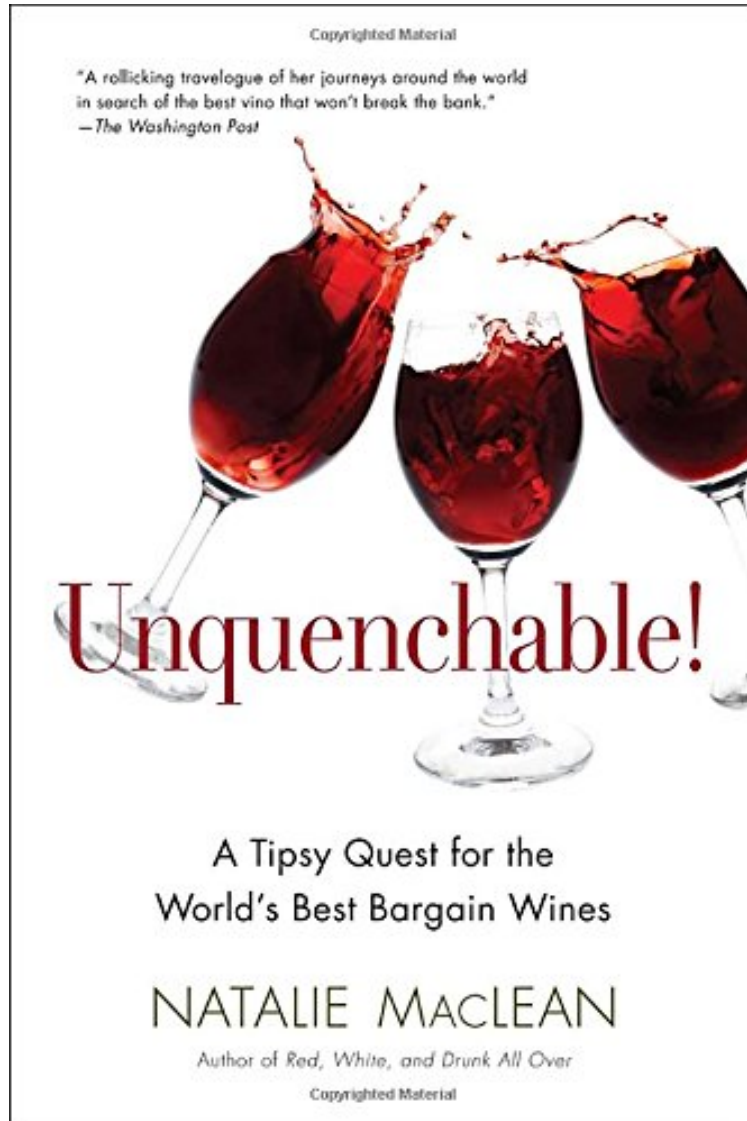


Unquenchable!: A Topsy Quest for the World's Best Bargain Wines

Natalie MacLean

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Natalie MacLean : Unquenchable!: A Topsy Quest for the World's Best Bargain Wines before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unquenchable!: A Topsy Quest for the World's Best Bargain Wines:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. International - That is WineBy Greg Dew Natalie has captured the uniqueness of wine internationally, whether it is here in Australia, or in South Africa, or in Europe, or in South or North America. All the Winemakers she talks with speak with genuine passion about their love of wine and their

involvement. We wine lovers, as consumers, should appreciate the "work of art" in each glass of wine we enjoy so much. I thoroughly enjoyed reading of Natalie's adventures worldwide. Of course, special interest to me being a South Australian were her interviews with the eccentric, but brilliant Wolf Blass, along with Peter Gago and Stephen Prue Henschke. It was of special significance to me when I recently drove past the Wolf Blass Visitor Centre at Nuriootpa (Barossa Valley) and retraced Natalie's talk with Wolf Blass. Very well done, Natalie. I know you would be welcome back here anytime (soon hopefully). Greg DEW, Adelaide, South Australia.

Unquenchable: A Topsy Turvy Quest for the World's Best Bargain Wines

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Value wine travelogue

By Ken Kardash

This gem of a book combines travelogue and wine tasting, which has been done before. What gives it an ingenious twist is focusing on those regions of the world that for various market reasons produce quality wines at a bargain price. Each chapter explores a wine-producing area from one of eight different countries spread over four continents. The author, a well-known online wine critic, interviews local vintners after giving some background on each area. The accounts of these interviews, invariably conducted during wine tastings, are one of the most charming aspects of the book. Maclean has a novelist's ear for dialogue and eye for detail, which makes the tastings seem personable and revealing of more than just the quality of the wine. Subtly, her biography and that of the vintners are woven into the experience. Instead of being distracting, this tactic highlights the social element that has always made wine drinking such a basic human pleasure. At the end of each chapter, there are a variety of lists - ranging from the practical, such as "best values" from the region, to the somewhat free-association "reading lists" that represent the author's attempts to capture the essence of a particular locale. Suggested food-wine pairings are also listed and often described in detail in the text. My only criticism, actually backhanded, is that the number of regions was so limited. A sequel seems natural and would be appreciated by non-pretentious wine lovers everywhere!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great stories about wine

By paulsharp

The author is a born storyteller, and the stories she tells about the world of wine and its creators are fun and fascinating. This is not a book about what wines to drink, although she does make some recommendations. This is more about understanding the wine making business and what makes it tick.

With her signature engaging style, Natalie MacLean takes you on a whirlwind journey through the world of wine, searching for great taste at a low cost. By turns confessional—with guilty admissions from a penny-pincher who loves simple pleasures—and spirited, *Unquenchable!* is informed by MacLean's decade-long career as an award-winning wine writer. MacLean recounts her adventure with the most passionate personalities in some of the most gorgeous, off-beat places in the world—from the crazed vintner who explains his wine philosophy while speeding down the Autobahn to the Sicilian winemakers you don't want to disappoint with your tasting notes. Yet there's plenty to take away, from her inspired recommendations for food pairings to favorite value wines and wineries, plus many pointers that will enhance your own drinking pleasure.

"I learned so much from Natalie MacLean's humorous, literate, lively adventures in search of great buys in wine. Fun to read, her book introduces you to many winemakers who could be in novels, to out-of-the-way places you'll want to add to your travel list, and, most of all, to an appreciation of vino as integral to the joy of living. I'm restocking my racks with her smart suggestions."—Frances Mayes, author of *Under the Tuscan Sun*

"With fully extracted prose that lingers on the palate, Natalie MacLean has wisely headed off the beaten path to get at the essence of wine. As she probes the elusive intersection of quality and value, we are lucky sidekicks on her well-observed journey through the landscapes, people, stories, and—let's just say it—buzzes that make wine so wonderful."—Benjamin Wallace, author of *The Billionaire's Vinegar*

"Natalie pulls us along happily into her wide world of wine—you are right there with her at the table or in an underground cellar. The conversations are lively and the wine flows. And when a winemaker pours a glass for her, you might look around wondering, 'Where's mine?' She made me itchy to get on a plane and hit the wine route myself."—Kermit Lynch, award-winning wine merchant and author of *Adventures on the W*

"A rollicking travelogue of her journeys around the world in search of the best vino that won't break the bank."—*The Washington Post*

"A light, informative adventure in wine appreciation that should have broad appeal. Highly recommended."—*Library Journal*

"Natalie MacLean's *Unquenchable* is one of this year's most entertaining—and genuinely useful—wine books."—*Louisville Courier-Journal*

"Passionate, witty, honest, and informative. This entertaining read is a must for wine lovers."—*VintageCellars.com*

"Highly educational and witty, neophytes and professionals will drink this up."—*Wine Enthusiast Magazine*

"The narrative is so captivating that *Unquenchable* becomes a page-turner after reading a few pages of the introduction."—*Winesworld.com*

About the Author

Natalie MacLean is the award-winning author of *Red, White, and Drunk All Over*, named the Best Wine Literature Book (English) at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards. An accredited sommelier and journalist, her wine e-newsletter, *Nat Decants*, is read by more than 130,000 wine lovers. Her free mobile app, "*Wine Picks Pairings: Natalie Maclean*," has been downloaded 100,000 times.

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The question I'm asked most often: "What's your favourite wine?" My answer: "The one someone else pays for." The second question I'm asked is, "Can you recommend a great wine that costs less than \$5?" Answer: "Not unless all you want is a wet

tongue.” When I’m not in a smart-ass mood, my answer to the first question depends on what I’m eating, who I’m with, and what the occasion is. But I never forget price. The reality is that wine from regions such as Tuscany, Bordeaux, and Napa Valley have become too expensive for most of us. Yet we still want that fleshy fruit pleasure that wine gives us rather than settling for tasteless plonk. Tasteless plonk, of course, brings to mind memories of homemade wine. When I was a student, I eagerly dipped a boy-band mug into a bathtub filled with “shablie.” After I graduated, I covertly doused the already well-watered fern at a friend’s house with her “True Love Chardonnay.” Years later, after I became a wine writer, I thought that my Château de Haute House Hooch days were over. Alas, they were not. Occasionally, dinner hosts serve their own homemade concoctions and lock eyes with me expectantly. I usually try to escape with half-spoken comments such as, “This is a delightful wine” out loud, and then under my breath, “if I were shackled in Kingston Penitentiary.” Or I might say, “This has a smooth texture,” mentally adding, “making it an acceptable antiseptic to clean a chest wound before knife surgery in the Brazilian rain forest.” Had I written a fancy-pants tasting note, it would have been: Under an initial layer of rotting roadside tomatoes, I detect nuances of a burning Fiat tire floating on a lake of rancid olive oil. Pair this wine with nasty divorce settlements or Supreme Court appeals. Somewhere between Super Tuscans and vinous Tang crystals, there are delicious wines that we can still afford. But while most people believe that they can taste the difference between a wine priced at \$5 and one at \$50, it gets trickier when the difference is between \$15 and \$30. And since most of us would prefer to shell out \$15 rather than \$30, one of the missions of this book is to demystify wine pricing in relation to quality. Some regions have natural advantages that make winemaking inexpensive, whether that’s climate or cheap land and labour. Other regions are still establishing their reputations and must keep their prices low to be competitive with better-known wines. So why even bother searching for today’s great cheap wines? Why not just be happy with whatever glass of vino is in front of you? Well, most of us don’t drink just for the buzz: we want better taste experiences. Many nostalgic hedonists recall our first good wines; their taste can transport us back to a beach, a first apartment, a small bistro. Some people spend their lives trying to recreate the intensity of that first taste. But because our palates mature as they age, the wine has to be much better as we get older to achieve a peak experience. My nose for a bargain was honed early in life. I grew up in Nova Scotia with my mother, who separated from my alcoholic father when I was two. Money was tight, and we moved from one town to another frequently as she took up teaching posts at various elementary schools. We lived in rented trailers and basement apartments. I wore bread bags in my leaking boots, and we rummaged through the piles of secondhand clothing at a store called Frenchies, delighted when we found something our size. At night, we joked that we were going “to mattress” since our beds didn’t have box springs or legs. Our weekly treat was to walk down to the local bowling alley on Friday evening and buy a Jos. Louis. In the morning, I’d look for lost change on the sidewalk. So I know there are good deals and great experiences to be had if you’re willing to search for them. As a mongrel taster, I know that even inexpensive wine is one of the most complex natural substances we consume, with more than a thousand compounds that contribute to its fragrances. The human nose can smell more than two thousand aromas, some at minute concentrations (think of a single drop in the equivalent of three Olympic-sized swimming pools). So with all the varying smells and their intensities, there are millions of unique combinations. In wine, such complexity is a stunning triumph of diversity, but like music, all the elements have to work together or the result is just cacophony. Rich, layered experiences hold our attention, whether they’re books, paintings, or wines. Our minds grapple to understand them as our senses play along their touch points. But who says that only expensive wines can be complex? I’ve tasted many inexpensive wines with flavours and aromas that lingered long after I swallowed, giving my mind time to wheel back and forth over my sensory impressions. It’s simply snobbery to suggest that only pricey bottles have the unexplained magic that leaves us reaching for the words to express what we’re smelling, tasting, feeling. As I discuss these issues in this book, my views will be influenced by the type of writer (and drinker) I am. Some critics pride themselves on their “objectivity,” and don’t use first-person narrative. Not me. I’m neurotically personal, prone to tangential digressions and Bridget Jones–like overreactions. I fall in love too easily with people, places, and wines. While some wine critics are afraid of vulnerability and intimacy with their readers, for me, these are the foundations of trust. I openly admit that I like to drink wine—and I like the buzz. I have personal preferences and I make mistakes. In these ways, I am like my readers and I don’t hold myself at a professional distance from them. We all share a glass around the kitchen table, even if it is virtual. That’s how today’s “experts” operate: with candour and closeness that’s as informal as your next tweet on Twitter or post on Facebook. That’s also why I get about two hundred emails a day from my website readers at www.nataliemaclean.com. My goal isn’t to dumb down wine, because I think it’s endlessly fascinating. I believe that it can be complex without being complicated. But some people misinterpret my approach. One website of male critics invited me to join as an afterthought just before launch, thinking that they needed some estrogen balance. I remember the mock-up screen they emailed to me. The men were described as respected, thoughtful, analytical. My description? I was fun and lively; in other words, the good-time wine gal there to provide blond relief in a sea of black stubble. I was a competitive Highland dancer for fifteen years, placing fifth in the world championships behind four men from Scotland. Highland dancing is one of the few sports in which men and women compete with each other without restrictions. Traditionally, this dance was the preserve of military men who performed its variations as physical

training drills to prepare for battle. The names of these dances still speak to that legacy: Sword Dance, Sailor's Hornpipe, Highland Laddie, and Wilt Thou Go to the Barracks, Johnnie. Years later, my MBA class at the University of Western Ontario was more than 80 percent men. When I graduated, I joined a computer company as the marketing manager. At techie tradeshows, I was sometimes mistaken for one of the "booth babes," models hired to draw prospective male buyers into the demo area. And now here I am writing about wine. That said, many of my strongest supporters have been men, not least my husband, Andrew, and my son, Rian. And I've never regretted being one of the few women in the room—it's a competitive advantage to be underestimated. I guess I'm drawn to these fields because I've always been a geek of one sort or another, which goes along with being socially awkward and shy. I bond with other geeks who share the same passion: it helps me make connections that don't come to me naturally. That obsessive-compulsive hunger for one thing also keeps me from rusting. Still, I have a terrible tendency to interrupt other people's thoughts (even my own). I often say awkward things that just hang in the air like mouldy laundry. I frequently trip over my own cleverness and have to recalibrate back to humility. My sense of adventure and my short attention span combine to make me vily allergic to the comprehensive, encyclopedia style approach to wine. I'm a sucker for a good glass of vino—and an even bigger fool for a great story about it. I just think that you should know what you're getting into with this book. We wine writers tend to be obsessive souls. How else can a person stay fascinated throughout a career with just one drink? Compare us to food writers. Over their lives, they'll encounter thousands of ingredients and ways of combining and cooking them. Wine, by contrast, is just fermented grapes. But it engages our primary senses—smell, taste, touch—in a way that is both hedonistic and cerebral. That's why I've spent the past several years traipsing around the world, visiting wineries, tasting their offerings and searching for the world's best cheap wines: one terrific bottle for each night of the week, plus an extra one for Sunday lunch. It's been an unquenchable journey to learn about new people, new places, and new wines. The narrative is as familiar as Arthur's quest for the Grail and as naive as the little bird's plaintive search for the affirmative in *Are You My Mother?* Inevitably, the emails will flood my inbox demanding how I could possibly leave out this region or that producer. But somehow, the subtitle "147 cheap wines to drink before you die" just didn't seem as catchy. In each of the eight regions I explored, I visited between thirty and forty wineries, and I've tasted thousands more wines from each place. Still, I don't claim to have found all of the world's best value wines; I've just selected a handful that I heartily recommend. I hope you'll also find, as I did, that the search is as pleasurable as the answer—and that just a taste will leave you thirsting for more. From the Hardcover edition.