



# Journal of Wine Economics

American Association of Wine Economists

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Kym Anderson  
Orley Ashenfelter  
Victor Ginsburgh  
Robert Stavins  
Karl Storchmann

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# **The Journal of Wine Economics**

*The journal of the American Association of Wine Economists*

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## Editorial

It is a pleasure to introduce the first issue of *The Journal of Wine Economics (JWE)*. The JWE is meant to provide a focused outlet for high-quality, peer-reviewed research on economic topics related to wine. Although wine economics papers have been, and will continue to be, published in leading general and agricultural economics journals, the number of high-quality papers has grown to such an extent that a specialized journal can provide a useful platform for the exchange of ideas and results.

The JWE is open to any area related to the economic aspects of wine, viticulture, and oenology. It covers a wide array of topics, including, but not limited to: production, winery activities, marketing, consumption, as well as macroeconomic and legal topics. The JWE will be published twice a year and it will contain main papers, short papers, notes and comments, reviews of books, films and wine events, as well as conference announcements.

In conjunction with the journal, we have formed a companion society - *The American Association of Wine Economists (AAWE)*. The AAWE is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to encouraging and communicating economic research and analyses and exchanging ideas in wine economics. Its principal activities include publishing *The Journal of Wine Economics*, which is fully owned and run by the AAWE. The non-profit character enables the Association to keep subscription prices low and, therefore, guarantees a wide distribution. Details of how to join are provided on the inside of the back cover and at [www.wine-economics.org](http://www.wine-economics.org).

The launch of this journal would not have been possible without the generous financial support of Whitman College. We are particularly grateful to George Bridges, the President of Whitman College, and Patrick Keef, its Dean of Faculty, for their support and encouragement.

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Orley Ashenfelter, *Princeton University*

Victor Ginsburgh, *Université Libre de Bruxelles*

Robert Stavins, *Harvard University*

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ALEXANDER PAYNE (Director), *Sideways*, Screenplay by Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor. Based on the novel by Rex Pickett. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2004, 123 min.

Anyone who is fairly serious about wine — from the relatively casual collector to the most knowledgeable oenophile — will tend to be skeptical about a commercial movie, particularly a Hollywood studio movie, in which wine consumption plays a central role. But very early in Alexander Payne's "*Sideways*," when Miles (Paul Giamatti) — a sad-sack, failed writer of novels *and* a lover of the grape — explains to his friend Jack (Thomas Haden Church) — a good-looking but over-the-hill television actor — how a white sparkling wine (1992 Byron) can be made from 100% Pinot Noir grapes and yet not exhibit even a tinge of red color, the first evidence appears that this movie about wine may have gotten it right.

That verdict was cemented for me just a few scenes later when the friends are driving through a bucolic countryside of vineyards in Santa Barbara County, at the beginning of what is to be a week-long bachelor party for the two in wine country prior to Jack's wedding, where they eventually meet up with love-interests, Maya (Virginia Madsen) and Stephanie (Sandra Oh). Miles recommends a local winery to visit because of its excellent Chardonnay, at which suggestion Jack says, "I thought you hated Chardonnay."

Miles quickly responds, "I like all varietals. I just don't generally like the way they manipulate Chardonnay in California — too much oak and secondary malolactic fermentation." At that moment, in a dark theater in Brookline, Massachusetts, I turned to my wife and said, "This is going to be good!" And it was ... the first time I saw it, the second time, and the third time (which was at home with friends and a meal and a set of wines to accompany each of the scenes).

This is a seriously good movie, indeed an excellent one, the most recent of a long line of "road movies" that themselves are part of a "road literature" that includes Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Henry Miller's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. But back to the movie, and the wine.

In "*Sideways*," Miles is a classic oenophile, even if most of us would prefer not to be identified with a character who is (otherwise) distinctly unattractive in so many dimensions. But Miles gives himself away with his assessment of the nose of the first wine he and Jack taste at the first winery they visit (which was in reality, Sanford): "... a little citrus... maybe some strawberry... passion fruit... and there's a hint of like asparagus... or like a nutty Edam cheese."

With such descriptions of wine — and that's only the first of many in the film — it may come as a surprise that there is no mention, none whatsoever, of wine ratings, those numerical assessments popularized in the United States by Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate* and *The Wine Spectator*. Long discussions in the film about specific wines — old and new — never mention ratings. Why? A clue is found in the novel on which the movie is based, Rex Pickett's excellent novel of the same name, published in 2004 (St. Martin's Press).

In the book, when Miles is packing for his trip, he tosses into his suitcase a copy of Jancis Robinson's *The Oxford Companion to Wine* (Oxford University, 1999), which he describes as the "brilliant and exhaustive tome on everything you ever wanted to know about the universe of wine. ... I wanted to have with me the one book that had supplied me with all the basics of my one undying passion..." So, Jancis Robinson is his guru. And if you have read Robinson's entertaining autobiography, *Tasting Pleasure: Confessions of a Wine Lover* (Viking, 1997), you know of her complete disdain for numerical ratings.

For those who have not yet seen the film, let me offer a checklist of wines that make appearances, some only very briefly. If you are able to identify every one of these in the film, you deserve to open a particularly good bottle tonight from your cellar: 1992 Byron Sparkling, Sanford Vin Gris, Kalyra Chardonnay, Kalyra Cabernet Franc, Fiddlehead Sauvignon Blanc, 2001 Whitcraft Pinot Noir (Santa Maria Valley), Sea Smoke Botella Pinot Noir, Kistler Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Latour Pommard 1er Cru, Hitching Post Bien Nacido Pinot Noir, Hitching Post Highliner Pinot Noir, Andrew Murray Syrah, and 1961 Cheval Blanc.

Another challenge: seven wineries appear in the film, but their real names are not used. It is not impossible to identify them: Andrew Murray, Fess Parker, Fiddlehead, Firestone, Foxen, Kalyra, and Sanford.

Enough questions. Here are some answers, although to other questions. For the readers of this journal, I offer some wine trivia from "Sideways:"

Most of the wine used in the wine-tasting scenes was non-alcoholic, and the actors wound up drinking so much of it that it made them nauseated. Hence, they had to switch periodically to the real thing.

The picture that Miles looks at when at his mother's home is actually a photo of Paul Giamatti and his father, Bart Giamatti, former Yale president and Major League Baseball commissioner.

The 1961 Cheval Blanc that Miles is saving for a special occasion is blended from Merlot and Cabernet Franc, the two grape varieties that Miles specifically denigrates in the film.

Anecdotal evidence, as reported by the international press, indicates that subsequent to the film's release, sales of Pinot Noir increased by between 20% and 500% in various markets.

The film's cheery advertising poster portrays a bottle on its side, suggesting that the title, "Sideways," refers to the cellar position of a wine bottle. But Rex Pickett's novel makes clear from the first page that "sideways" is the characters' slang for drunk. And, in truth, the novel is considerably more forthright and darker about the alcoholism that is very much a part of the story: Miles drinks to excess, particularly to drown his frequent sorrows.

Having said that, let me end with what is surely a high-point of the film, both for lovers of wine, and lovers in general. Maya asks Miles why he is so into Pinot Noir. His response, which is both moving and revealing, is this:

I don't know. It's a hard grape to grow. As you know. It's thin-skinned, temperamental, ripens early. It's not a survivor like Cabernet that can grow anywhere and thrive even when neglected. Pinot needs constant care and attention and in fact can only grow in specific little tucked-away corners of the world. And only the most patient and nurturing growers can do it really, can tap into Pinot's most fragile, delicate qualities. Only when someone has taken the time to truly understand its potential can Pinot be coaxing into its fullest expression. And when that happens, its flavors are the most haunting and brilliant and subtle and thrilling and ancient on the planet.

On hearing this, Maya's heart opens to Miles for the first time. A few moments later, it's Miles turn to ask Maya why she is into wine. Her answer:

I like to think about the life of wine, how it's a living thing. I like to think about what was going on the year the grapes were growing, how the sun was shining that summer or if it rained... what the weather was like. I think about all those people who tended and picked the grapes, and if it's an old wine, how many of them must be dead by now. I love how wine continues to evolve, how every time I open a bottle it's going to taste different than if I had opened it on any other day. Because a bottle of wine is actually alive — it's constantly evolving and gaining complexity. That is, until it peaks — like your '61 — and begin its steady, inevitable decline... And it tastes so fucking good.

Now Miles is swept away. And so am I.

Robert Stavins  
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