

BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

Stephen Brook: *The Complete Bordeaux: 4th edition: The Wines, The Chateaux, The People*

Mitchell Beazley, 2022, 736 pp., ISBN 978-1784727512, \$75.00

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Warning: If you read this book, it may cost you thousands of dollars. I am guilty of ordering a few cases of Bordeaux late at night while reading the book, learning about new chateaux and revisiting old classics. Stephen Brook's *The Complete Bordeaux* examines the world of Bordeaux wines from the *en premier* system, to the grapes varieties, to the wine making, and then dives deep into many hundreds of chateaux and the people who make the wine. This book is an educational tool, which also provides Brook's opinion on numerous vintages of many different wines.

Unlike other writers, Brook does not use numerical ratings for the chateaux. For some, this may be a disadvantage, but others may prefer it. I found it difficult to compare the different chateaux without a ranking system, but the lack of ratings does not detract from the overall enjoyment of the book.

When discussing voluminous books about Bordeaux, I would be remiss not to offer a comparison with Jane Anson's *Inside Bordeaux*, which, not surprisingly, is cited in the bibliography. There are only a few maps in *The Complete Bordeaux*, and the level of detail is substantially less than Anson's tome, which has several fold out maps with incredible precision. Anson also dedicates more space to rating wines with her own scoring system, while Brook never attempts to quantitatively rate any wine. Even though they cover the same topic, Brook's writing style, especially when he's discussing individual chateaux is conversational, which is entertaining. The reader feels like they are getting a truly uncensored view.

I kept asking myself, is this a book to read cover to cover or use as a reference? I did read it cover to cover and enjoyed it, and it will go on my shelf as a reference book, as well. However, I do not think everyone will be reading this cover to cover, but rather use it to look up individual chateaux or review broader Bordeaux regions, especially in the Medoc. The winemaking sections are in depth and the author does not shy away from more controversial topics, such as reverse osmosis, vacuum concentration, and micro-oxidation.

If I could make one suggestion to Stephen Brook for the next edition, I would love to see the label of the bottle in the write-up and current release prices, or at least a scale of one to five dollar signs. Some of his descriptions were so intriguing, he convinced me to go look up the wine to check on the price and availability. Having the pricing information in the book would have saved me considerable time, and ultimately, would have prevented frustration when a wine looked amazing on paper, but the price was too high to justify purchase.

Do you need another Bordeaux book? That's the real question. If you are looking for just one complete book, and care about maps, Jane Anson's *Inside Bordeaux* edges out this one. But if you are a fan of Brook's writing or are looking for another book and perspective on Bordeaux, this has my strong endorsement. Without question, Stephen Brook is an accomplished writer with a style that makes reading a 700-page book swift and entertaining.