

BEST WINE BOOKS 2011

Authentic Wine: Toward Natural and Sustainable Winemaking

By Jamie Goode and Sam Harrop, MW
(University of California Press, 2011; \$29.95)

Reviewed by Joshua Greene

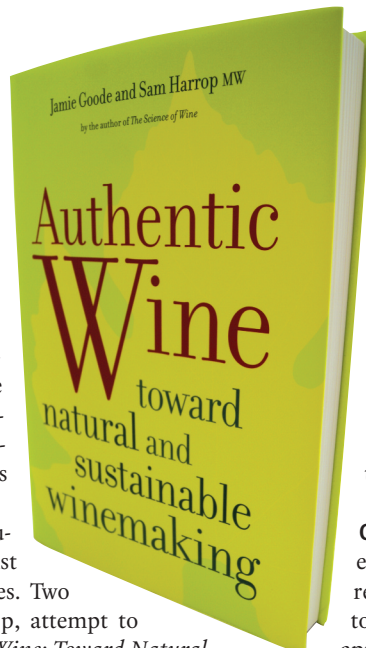
If you've never seen a bird get drunk on berries, one of the videos on youtube might make you laugh. It's a phenomenon that hasn't gone unnoticed by creative winemakers such as Ales Kristancic of Movia in Slovenia, a leader in the natural wine movement. He has developed winemaking strategies based on this natural occurrence of individual fermenting berries—a process that does not require the hand of man.

While Kristancic and other partisans of natural winemaking discuss their non-interventionist strategies, scientists are often rolling their eyes. Two wine scientists, Jamie Goode and Sam Harrop, attempt to bridge that philosophical divide in *Authentic Wine: Toward Natural and Sustainable Winemaking*. They are not out to promote or deride the natural wine movement, but to change the discourse: to admit that wine is about human intervention and to focus on how those interventions either homogenize wine or help to frame its distinct identity.

Goode and Harrop are two rare birds, articulate scientists who are also skilled wine tasters. Goode has a PhD in plant biology and worked as a science editor before launching his wine-writing career. He's best known for his website, wineanorak.com, and for his earlier book, *The Science of Wine*. Sam Harrop began his career as a winemaker in New Zealand and at Littorai in California before moving to the UK to serve as buyer for Marks & Spencer. Now a Master of Wine, he co-founded Domaine Matassa with Tom Lubbe, a project with old vineyards in the Roussillon farmed under biodynamics, and works as a consultant to wineries and to Lallemand, a supplier of yeast and bacteria to the wine industry.

The authors explore the practices of organic, biodynamic and sustainable farming, presenting relevant scientific research on each and considering the impact of these techniques on the vineyard, the workers and the finished wine. They then explore winemaking techniques, viewing these interventions in light of how they might obscure or highlight what is authentic in the wine. The book includes case studies of farming and winemaking decisions at estates such as Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Domaine Leflaive in Burgundy, Millton Vineyard in New Zealand and Henschke in South Australia.

In the process, the writers help to tighten the meaning of the word terroir, and comment on other terms, like minerality, often used in



current parlance to connect the taste of a wine to its site. Those seeking a more useful understanding of this overused term could do no better than to read Goode and Harrop on reduction in wine. Harrop, as one of the chief judges at the International Wine Competition in London, is charged with assessing and tracking faults in the wines (see *W&S* 8/09, “Master of Faults”); the chapter devoted to wine faults in the book is brilliant.

Goode's background as an editor suits this book project well; he and Harrop have attempted to select what's relevant to their argument and protect the reader from too much information. The only lapse in this disciplined approach is the occasional presentation of opinion as fact.

For instance, when discussing the common usage of a sweet dosage to balance Champagne's high acidity, the authors state, “While non-dosage Champagnes may have a claim to being more natural, those with some dosage are the more complete and compelling wines in the best cases.”

They also, occasionally, set out to parse good science from bad: “Integrated Pest Management (IPM) represents a paradigm shift in agriculture: previously the prevailing attitude was one of blitzing all pests with chemicals, leaving just the crop species, perfect and unblemished. Farmers intervened to prevent any crop loss to disease or pests. This approach was based on a simplistic understanding of nature and a failure to recognize the complex network of relationships that exist in most ecosystems. Thus science wasn't the problem; it was bad science that led agriculture in this direction.”

Or was it an incomplete scientific understanding, coupled with a worldview that claimed to be right until proven wrong? It is, after all, a scientific worldview that most winemakers are trained in today.

Leave aside Goode and Harrop's opinions, their push for sustainability or their occasional scientific blinders. This is one of the most engaging, thoughtful and enlightening books on contemporary wine to have been published. Winemakers may well be the book's most immediate audience, but it also offers insights for anyone interested in what they are drinking. And by taking a practical approach to matters that have often been discussed in vague and romantic terms, Goode and Harrop have created a manifesto for an industry looking to shape its future around wine as a natural and sustainable product.

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