

The
Midwest
Wine 
Connection

Volume 13, No. 11

February 2009

A new age for South African Wines

As South Africa's wine industry celebrates its 350th year, the wines are better than ever and ready to catch more steam in the United States



Roy Goslin speaks passionately about the South African wine industry. He should. His company, Twin Cities-based Z Wines USA, was started a few years ago to import wines from South Africa and other countries into the United States.

It's no surprise that he and his wife and business partner, Dianne, are involved in the wine business. Roy spent years on the production side, working for one of the largest wineries in his native South Africa. Dianne's family owned vineyards, enabling her to learn vineyard management at an early age.

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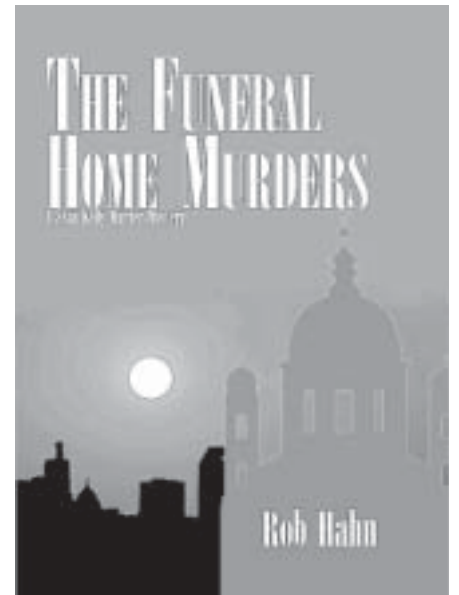


BOTTLES AND A BOOK

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Publisher's Note



Rob Hahn

Have you heard lately? The country is going through tough economic times. Well, no kidding. However, instead of a recitation of job cuts, housing woes and ballot recounts, I thought we could take a different approach and suggest ways to use wine to help ease whatever economic worries might exist.

Using wine to ease economic worries

- ♦ Seek out restaurants with wine specials like half-price bottle nights. Not only do these represent good deals, but a visit once or twice a week to one of your neighborhood joints helps the restaurants, one of the areas hit hard recently by the economic downturn.

- ♦ Buy more wine for less. This might be obvious, but there are always deals to be had: spring wine sales, weekly specials and close-out bins. Broaden your palate. The savvy wine shopper, who's willing to experiment a little more than normal can find loads of great wines at great savings. If your competitive nature calls, challenge a friend or two to find a couple new values and then share the wines with each other, brown bagging them and comparing whose "finds" are better.

- ♦ Use wine for simple get-togethers with friends, neighbors or family, even though sometimes these are mutually exclusive groups. Nothing says "Screw the economy" better than a few glasses of wine, some cheese and a loud group standing around someone's living room. Want to add a little twist to this? Flip on Lou Dobbs on CNN and take a sip (or gulp) of wine every time he rails accurately about yet another greedy Wall Street buffoon. Playing this game might require a designated walker to get home safely.

- ♦ For the sports fans among us and with March Madness nearing, consider a slightly different approach to the eponymous office brackets. Instead of just cash or in lieu of money, use bottles of wine as part of the equation. I've never been one to get too carried away with these basketball brackets, but adding wine might give me reason to reconsider. Winners could be determined at different points such as the Sweet Sixteen, Elite Eight and Final Four, claiming bottles at each stage and hopefully sharing them at game-watching gatherings. What does this have to do with easing worries about the economy? Probably nothing, but it could be a fun way to combine wine and March Madness.

- ♦ Half-full or half-empty? Should there even be a debate? The best way to keep from going crazy while watching what seems like endless reports of dread on the nightly and cable newscasts, make sure your glass is always more than half-full, figuratively and literally.

Here's to good reading, fine drinking and reaching for another half-full glass of wine that doesn't require a bail-out.

Rob Hahn
Publisher



The Midwest Wine Connection

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Uncorked



Dan Sobiech

I have always joked with my wife that we don't need to celebrate Valentine's Day, because everyday being married to me is like Valentine's Day. She never laughs. While the latest economic news continues to put a damper on people's dining out budget, more and more people seem to be continuing to enjoy wines at home. And the idea of cooking a romantic dinner at home is my idea of a good way to spend Valentine's Day. You are able to avoid the high costs of restaurant wine lists and splurge a little at your favorite wine shop.

Keeping this idea in mind, I have had the opportunity to revisit a wine that for me has always been synonymous with Valentine's Day, and I never understood why. This wine is called Amarone. Looking

at the word it is easy to make the association with the Italian word of Amore, which means love. Restaurants feature it with their special dinners for Valentine's Day, and wine shops would make it the February wine-of-the-month.

The wine of Amarone is very rich and full-bodied, and upon tasting it, you can immediately see yourself sharing this wine with your lover in a romantic setting. But upon a further look at the origins of this wine and examining the name Amarone, I learned it has nothing to do with love at all. The legend of Amarone states that in an attempt to make the sweet wine Recioto with Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara grapes in the Veneto region near Verona, a producer left the grapes too long fermenting in the barrel. All of the sugar was fermented into alcohol, and the end result was a dry wine. The opposite result of the Recioto sweet wine, this wine was named "Amarone," which means big bitter. First documented sales were in 1938, and the official trade began in 1953. In 1990, Amarone was given a DOC status by the Italian government.

Add some Amarone to your amore

Today this wine is a great for those who love the big wines of California and the Super Tuscans of central Italy. It is slightly higher in alcohol, exhibiting sturdy tannins and ripe fruit flavors. Amarone is a value when compared with the Super Tuscans and even the wines of Barolo and Barbaresco in the Piedmont, which have increased in price in recent years. For those of you who drink big California Cabs and Zins, this wine is the perfect way to make a foray into Italian wines.

Now for a moment let's get back to its association with Valentine's Day. In addition to the translation of Amarone and its meaning of big bitter, this wine displays a deep red color, perfect for your romantic day. Drink it on Valentine's Day, and drink it whenever you want an outstanding, unique wine of Italian origin. Share it with your spouse or partner and drink it with good friends. Help take this wine beyond a silly holiday, and drink it all year long.

*Dan Sobiech writes this regular wine column for
The Midwest Wine Connection.*



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Spirits

BEAM'S RYE NOT AS SUPERFICIAL AS YOU MIGHT THINK

By Charles K. Cowdery

I am an American whiskey enthusiast. So are many of my friends.

By that I mean the object of our enthusiasm is American whiskey, a category that includes several different types, primarily bourbon but also Tennessee and rye.

Recently, much has been written about the revival of rye whiskey. Rye dominated the 19th century, then nearly died out in the 20th. Its current popularity is tied to cocktail culture. Many classic whiskey drinks such as the Manhattan, Sazerac, and even the mint julep were

historically made with rye. That product is now here. It is called Rye One, aka (r+)¹. The gimmicky name, high-style packaging and deluxe price (about \$45) was all enthusiasts needed to see to know that we are not the intended audience. Clearly, the target is buyers of premium vodka and other luxury spirits, the type who think “Effen Vodka” is clever too.

I sympathize with my enthusiast brothers who have already rejected (r+)¹, but now that I’ve tried it, I say we should get past all that, because it’s a very nice whiskey. Price is still an obstacle, so let’s just pretend it isn’t and consider this whiskey only on its merits.

I like it. I like it very much.

What I like best is that it captures the whiskey at just that point in the aging process when the wood has softened most of its harshness, but before the barrel takes over completely. That’s a neat trick and it shows me the people who developed this product did, in fact, spend as much time getting the whiskey right as they did getting the package and imagery right. Bravo! Good for them.

(r+)¹ has the same basic flavor profile as the other Jim Beam ryes except as noted above, and it also seems drier. It has rye’s spice, especially white pepper, but little of its muddiness. From the wood it takes a lot of vanilla, a little oak, but no ash, smoke or char. There’s citrus, but of a preserved lemon variety. That’s about it. (r+)¹ does not have multiple layers, but what it has is crisp and well-mannered.

Is it complex? Not particularly. Is it challenging? Not at all. If that is what you want, especially if that is what you are willing to spend \$45 for, don’t bother. But if you want a rye that tastes good, mixes well, and looks fabulous, here you go.

Because (r+)¹ doesn’t hit you over the head, some enthusiasts find it bland. I prefer to call it subtle and sophisticated. It’s not a rye that makes you say “wow,” it’s a rye that makes you say “nicely played.”

This is what rye whiskey never tasted like before, but probably should have. If it had, more people would have liked rye and maybe even kept drinking it instead of dropping it like a bad habit when lighter, milder drinks became available during and after Prohibition.

Most American whiskeys bear little resemblance to scotch or Canadian, but a few do. Blanton’s and Basil Hayden’s, both bourbons, are often compared to scotch. (r+)¹ falls into that category, with its subtle flavor and sophisticated character. (r+)¹ makes me think about scotch

and also about the better Canadians, which flaunt vanilla and some of rye grain’s friendlier qualities.

The main similarity is approachability. American whiskey, as a rule, is the most flavorful of the world’s spirit types and can easily overwhelm drinkers who come to it from milder drinks. Instead, (r+)¹ goes down easy.

Wild Turkey Russell’s Reserve Rye is a similar product that came out about a year ago, but didn’t go so far with the packaging, positioning, or price. They tried to have it both ways, with something for cocktailians and bourbonians. Beam went all in cocktailian, with launch events at the leading cocktail bars in major cities. In spite of all that it’s a terrific whiskey that bourbonians should not ignore.

By the way, Beam has suggested there will be a (r+)², (r+)³, and so on.

This could get interesting.

Rye Whiskey FACTS AND TRENDS

Fact: Despite all the buzz, American straight rye is still a drop in the bucket. Several distilleries make it, but it doesn’t take long to produce all they need. Typically they spend about one week per year on rye. The rest of the time they’re making bourbon.

Trend: Most major cities in the USA now have cocktail bars where the bartenders are like celebrity chefs and drink mixing is treated like an art form. In those places, rye-based cocktails like the Sazerac are fixtures.

Tip: In Minnesota and other states along the border with Canada, Canadian whiskey is often referred to as rye. Although Canadian whiskey contains rye, its main ingredient is usually corn.

Fact: In addition to Beam’s (r+)¹, Jim Beam Rye and Old Overholt, and Wild Turkey’s Russell’s Reserve Rye, some other rye brands are Wild Turkey Rye, Sazerac, Rittenhouse, and Pikesville.

Fact: The whiskey colonial distillers such as George Washington made was rye whiskey. Why? Because rye was a familiar grain from Europe. It took them a while to get comfortable distilling corn.



historically made with rye.

American straight rye whiskey differs from bourbon in only one respect. Bourbon is mostly corn, rye is mostly rye. In every other way they’re the same.

Beam Global Spirits and Wine has long made straight rye whiskey at its distilleries in Kentucky. Beam makes Jim Beam Rye, obviously, but also Old Overholt, a venerable 19th century brand that originated in Pennsylvania.

Other Kentucky distilleries also make rye whiskey and have, in recent years, developed new products or line extensions. Some tout long aging, as much as 23 years, to justify a premium price. These products, like many others, are aimed directly at whiskey enthusiasts, i.e., my friends and me.

So, several months ago, hearing rumors that Beam was getting ready to drop its own premium rye, many of my enthusiast friends asked me about it. As I learned more about what Beam intended, my message became, “sorry, but it’s not for us.”

Closing Time

THE CLONE WARS

By Alan Cook

Reader Warning: The following column may cause some readers to become agitated, angry, upset, confused, alarmed or even amused. Good. That is my intention. In each issue, I will reflect on the absurdities of life. Life as it pertains to wine and all things related as I see them from my barstool looking through the bottom of my empty glass when the lights come up at closing time. Agree or disagree, I don't care. As an old English professor once told me when I wasn't happy with him, "Hard Cheese." Nope, I never understood it either. On with the column; you've been sufficiently prepared.

"Cool! The same old crap is on this wine list, too." If I collected a nickel for every time I uttered these words, Motor City could ask me for their bailout money, and I'd still have change left over. Don't play dumb with me: you know exactly what I am talking about. Take one lazy wine buyer and pair them up with a wet-behind-the-ears sales rep who has been given a quota to sell a million cases of Chateau le Corked to every restaurant in town. Top it off with the preprinted wine list carrying descriptions that resemble nothing you will taste in the glass. It's like a B-grade horror movie. Oops, forgot to mention that those million cases are from some long forgotten vintage that was too hot, too dry, and too ugly to sell at a reasonable cost so quick get your volume discount today!

Don't get me wrong, Applebee's has a standard corporate list, and I understand why. The menu is the same, the food is the same and even the décor is the same whether you are in Minneapolis, St. Paul, or even Duluth. But, there is no excuse for the neighborhood restaurant – some of whom even dare call themselves *Originals*. If you have a passion to create a great food concept and plenty of cash to burn from salivating investors who just gotta have your \$25+ a plate entrée, more power to you. So why not carry this thinking through to the drinks you serve, especially wine, which can actually complement that signature dish? Shocking!

Now don't get your undies in a bunch. I know that the uninformed majority need to have their creature comforts like White Zin or that over oaked mega-winery Chardonnay, because they just can't risk trying something new, but consider this: 1) they probably aren't going to be your regular customer because you don't serve Applebee's riblets, and 2) 80% of a good restaurant's wine profits will come from the 20% of us who want – no

need – something daring, something adventurous, something new or heaven forbid, something unique. We can accept that it might be different from every other wine we've swilled because that is what we want! We are also the same people who "get" your funky entrées and WILL pay to come back.

As my techie friends say "Rant Off." There are plenty of people out there who actually take the time to taste, learn, and explore wine; and some of them even work in restaurants. Seek them out and thank them with your business! Although wine sales continue to grow and surpass beer, I'm seeing more beer joints understanding and embracing this uniqueness than wine bars or restaurants who understand the concept. Take a look around at all these by-the-glass craft beers on tap now. Even the upscale restaurants that have decided to buck the trend are serving new beers. Notice that they don't all serve the same three beers? (yes, they still need to serve the white zin of beer for "those" people). And the prices actually encourage you to purchase a second glass! Samples are even pushed because they know a happy educated customer is a repeat customer and the tips won't be bad either.

Change is coming, and I challenge you to join the fight. When confronted with the same old cloned wine list, rebel. We vote with our dollars, and it is clear we like selection and diversity or our liquor stores would also only stock the same dozen wines the wine lists carry. Order water, bring your own, demand better!

FIVE WINE SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE THAT WANT TO BE DIFFERENT

1. ALBARINO

2. WHITE BURGUNDY (YES, THEY AREN'T ALL RED)

3. CARMENÈRE

4. GOOD RED BLENDS! THINK CÔTES DU VENTOUX OR EVEN AN AUSSIE GSM

5. MALBEC (NOT TOO TANNIC, NOT TOO ANGULAR)

BONUS WINE

6. LOOK AT THE MENU - WHAT MATCHES? ITALY, FRANCE, SPAIN, ARGENTINA? FIND IT, BUY IT, ENJOY IT



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South Africa: More quality wines around the corner

The *Midwest Wine Connection* recently did an interview via email with Roy Goslin. Here are some excerpts.

Will 2009 be a "break-out" year for S. African wines?

I think we might just be a little ahead of ourselves this year. The industry in South Africa is seeking ways to approach the United States market, and it seems that there are some embryonic movements that will start getting the country's wines greater exposure as the year plays out. There is some very encouraging press in the UK and also on the east coast of the United States. I think we want to be watching the South Africa space during the year. There are also some excellent wines entering the market.

What's been missing from South Africa wines in America? Why have they seemed to lag in popularity behind wines from other countries?

Firstly, I think that many South Africa marketers have been using some outmoded models, i.e. the cute animal names. Secondly, there has been some very poor wine brought into the United States, which has hurt the industry. While there is persistence on the part of some importers to bring sub-standard wines into the country, this is slowly but surely becoming the exception rather than the rule. Some of the wines that we are seeing in this country do not well represent what South African wine is really like and thus tarnish the image of the industry overall. Thirdly, the wines are poorly understood and represented; Pinotage should never smell like a rubber boot or acetone. These characteristics are not a true representation of South Africa terroir as some distributors pronounce; this is poorly made wine! Then, there are some importers whose wines are not certified by the Cape Wine and Spirits Institute. The simple rule when looking for South Africa wine is this: If there is no "Bus Ticket" on the bottle,

then the wine does not stand up to the quality standards applied within South Africa. There is one prominent brand where the wines do not carry the "Bus ticket." And then, there are very few wine people in this market who have an in-depth knowledge of the South Africa wine industry, its history, where to look for good wine and how to present it to the public.

What are some important strategies to get United States consumers to start buying South Africa wines regularly?

Find good wine. Prepare the customer for an experience that will be different from Californian, Australian, Chilean, or for that matter, any other countries wines – they are South African and should be! Pour the wine and watch the response. The educated palate recognizes quality. When you have found a person

who is receptive, make good friends with them as he or she will become your advocate. Serve the wine with food. Educate the customer about the wine regions, the history of the industry, the producers and the wines.

The true South Africa style of wines is quite unique. How do you explain it to consumers?

As mentioned before, we let people know that they are going to have an experience that will differ from their experiences of the wines from other countries. One needs to prepare people, so they can drop their pre-conceived notions of what a wine should taste like. Describe what the customer should expect and why, i.e. South Africa Shiraz presents itself in a unique way and will not be similar to Australian Shiraz. I have not heard many people who are able to do this as most people in the trade don't know very much about South African wine. The best educators are well informed about their subject matter. We serve the wines with food that complements them. South Africa has a centuries old wine tradition and many of our wines work better with food. We also need to talk about the individual style of the winemaker; one cannot do this if you don't know the winemaker and the wine.



Recommended South African Wines

Hugo's Hill Pinotage 2006 - Hold this bottle up for an example of the quintessential South African Pinotage, the way its meant to be. Earthy and peppery with a long finish. Excellent. 91

Sebeka Cabernet-Pinotage 2007 - A touch of mint on the nose. Well-rounded with a touch of sweetness. Just a touch. 90

Darling Hills Ovation - Comes in a bag in a box that purportedly keeps the wine fresh for up to six weeks. You won't need that long. This blend of Cab and Cinsault is delicious. Easy to drink and complex enough to stand out among its peers. 89

Bush Camp Our Daily Red Origin - For a wine billed as a daily wine, this one exceeds expectations. Fairly complex with ripe fruit flavors and a slightly tannic finish. 89

Sebeka Shiraz-Pinotage "Cape Blend" 2006 - Intense nose of plums. Dirty, earthy, peppery flavors. A dry finish. 88

Sebeka Chenin Blanc "Steen" 2007 - Light and fresh. A fun sipper. 88

FairHills Merlot 2008 - Medium-bodied, well-balanced and tasty. 88

Heron's Nest Reserve Chardonnay 2008 - Tart green apple flavors up front with a mellowing finish. 88

Bush Camp The Sunflower Chenin Blanc 2007 - Distinctively alive on the palate and almost chewy, somewhat rare for a white. 87



The Cork Report

Wine of the Month

**Trinchero
Napa Valley
Petit Verdot
2005**

Rich cherry and strawberry fruits. Slightly spicy and tannic. And there's a chalking, almost Burgundian-like quality that puts this over the top. **91**



**Solaire
Robert Mondavi
Cabernet Sauvignon
2006**

Luscious fruits fill the mouth. Every sip is enjoyable. This is the new vintage, but there are still some bottles of the 2005 vintage. another good one, on shelves. **89**



**The Rhoning Stones
Côtes du Rhône
2007**

From name to flavors, this is one of those fun wines you share with friends at home or take to a party. Lively fruit flavors and easy to drink. A great Rhône value. If you start me up... **88**



**De Loach
Merlot
2005**

Well-balanced, medium-bodied. A great sipper and excellent with foods like red sauce pastas and pizza. **88**



Guide to the Cork Report

90-100	Outstanding
80-89	Very Good
70-79	Good
Below 70	Really bad and probably won't even be mentioned

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POINTS

Recommended!

STEVE HEIMOFF,
WINE ENTHUSIAST
NOVEMBER 2007

3½
STARS

Very Good!

RONN WIEGAND,
RESTAURANT WINE
JANUARY 2008

90
POINTS

Best Buy!

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THE ANTI-CUPID

Born on these pages seven years ago to offset any romantic fluff that might appear elsewhere in the February issue, The Anti-Cupid returns this year with a different take: recommendations for wines with an obvious romantic connection. What gives? Has the Anti-Cupid been drinking too much? Has something warmed his heart? Or is this just an attempt to fool everyone?

Romance Red and White

What is it with Argentina and its romance? These wines, fittingly named Romance, might answer part of that question. The red is a blend of Cabernet, Malbec and Bonarda. It's simply delectable (rating: 91). The white, meantime, is a young, fresh offering, a pleasant blend of Chardonnay and Torrontes (rating: 87). These wines make the Anti-Cupid want to tango.

Salvatore Principe Artist's Collection

Salvatore Principe's woke up one day after a late night/early morning at Studio 54 and decided he needed a change in lifestyle. He became an artist. Well-known for his Signature Hearts, he has partnered with Prestige Wine Group to produce the Artist's Collection of wines.

This 2006 Cab from Argentina is a sultry little vixen, rich in color with plum and cherry flavors. Great by itself and even better with meat or pasta dishes (rating: 90). To paraphrase Elaine Bennis, this wine is Anti-Cupid worthy.





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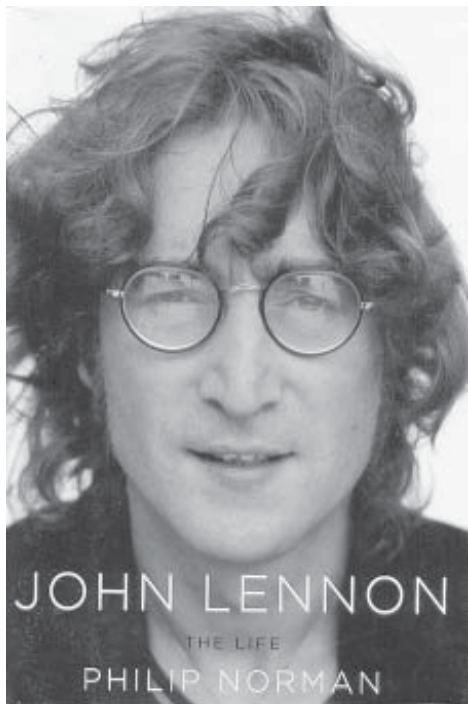
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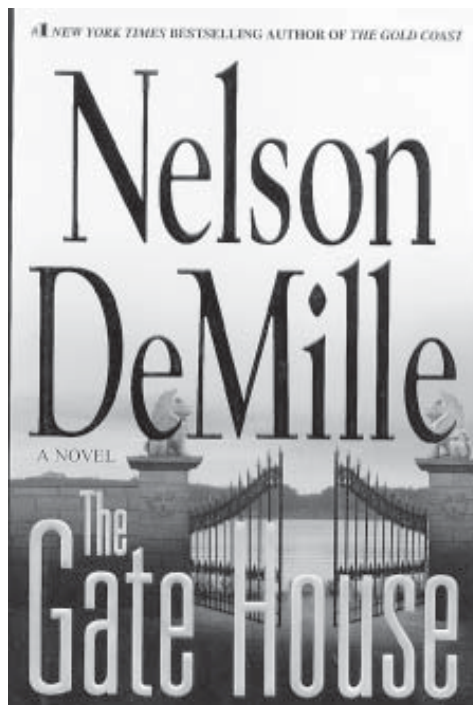


John Lennon
The Life
Philip Norman
(Ecco)

Does the world really need another book about John Lennon or the Beatles? Philip Norman and his publisher obviously thought so, and with good reason.

Norman, the author of *Shout! The Beatles in Their Generation*, provides a well-researched and elegantly written account about Lennon, arguably the most complex of the Fab Four. What Norman does that other biographers have not successfully is capture the essence of Lennon's internal drive, talent and insecurity. Using recurring themes about troubled relationships, the author helps explain the complexities that manifested themselves in a hard exterior and vulnerable interior.

Most interesting are the stories of Lennon's post-Beatles days, fighting the Nixon administration to stay in the US, the birth of his son Sean and the release of "Double Fantasy" after taking years off from the music business. Set aside a good amount of time, this is a tome but well worth it.

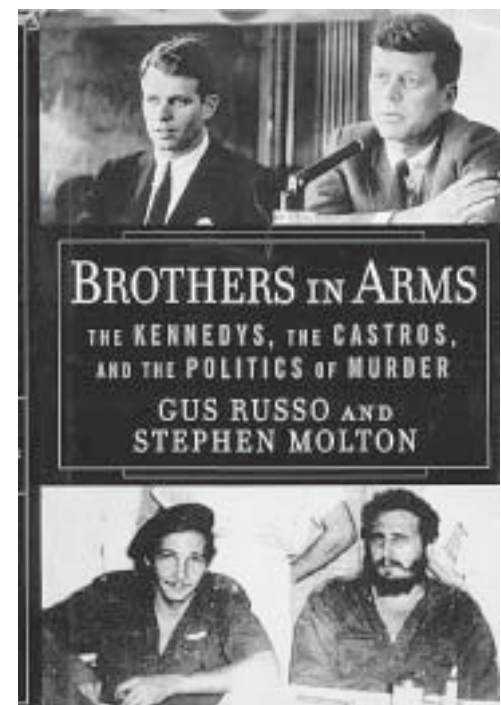


The Gate House
Nelson DeMille
(Grand Central)

Nelson DeMille's much-anticipated follow-up nearly 20 years later to his huge success *The Gold Coast* is very good, but like so many sequels, it fails to match the first book.

John Sutter, DeMille's main character, returns full of his unique social and cultural insights to the United States ten years after his wife killed a Mafia don. He encounters his ex-wife, Susan Stanhope Sutter, shortly after his arrival and also quickly meets Anthony Bellarosa, the son of the don his wife killed. Bellarosa the younger is determined to lure John Sutter back into the dark underworld as a legal advisor and seek retribution against Susan for his father's death.

The twists are full of DeMille's humor and commentary on the upper crust society. The story perhaps rambles on a bit too long but is very enjoyable nonetheless.



Brothers in Arms
Gus Russo and Stephen Molton
(Bloomsbury)

Tracking the Kennedy and the Castro brothers has rarely appeared as intriguing as this work from Gus Russo and Stephen Molton. Detailing the rise of John Kennedy and Fidel Castro in their respective countries, the authors explore the role of the brothers and confidants, Bobby and Raul, and how their lives shaped Cold War politics for years.

Included in the book is a thorough examination of Lee Harvey Oswald and his connection to Communism both in the Soviet Union and Cuba. The work of thirty years of investigation, *Brothers in Arms* is a thriller of sorts, driven by well-known charismatic personalities along with immensely competitive spirits.

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De Loach

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DON'T MISS THE MEAT RAFFLE FEATURING THE FLESH OF CLANCY'S BUTCHER SHOP IN LINDEN HILLS

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES LINDEN

The **Wine Vibe**

with Sam Haislet of Sam's Wine Shop
 in Downtown Minneapolis

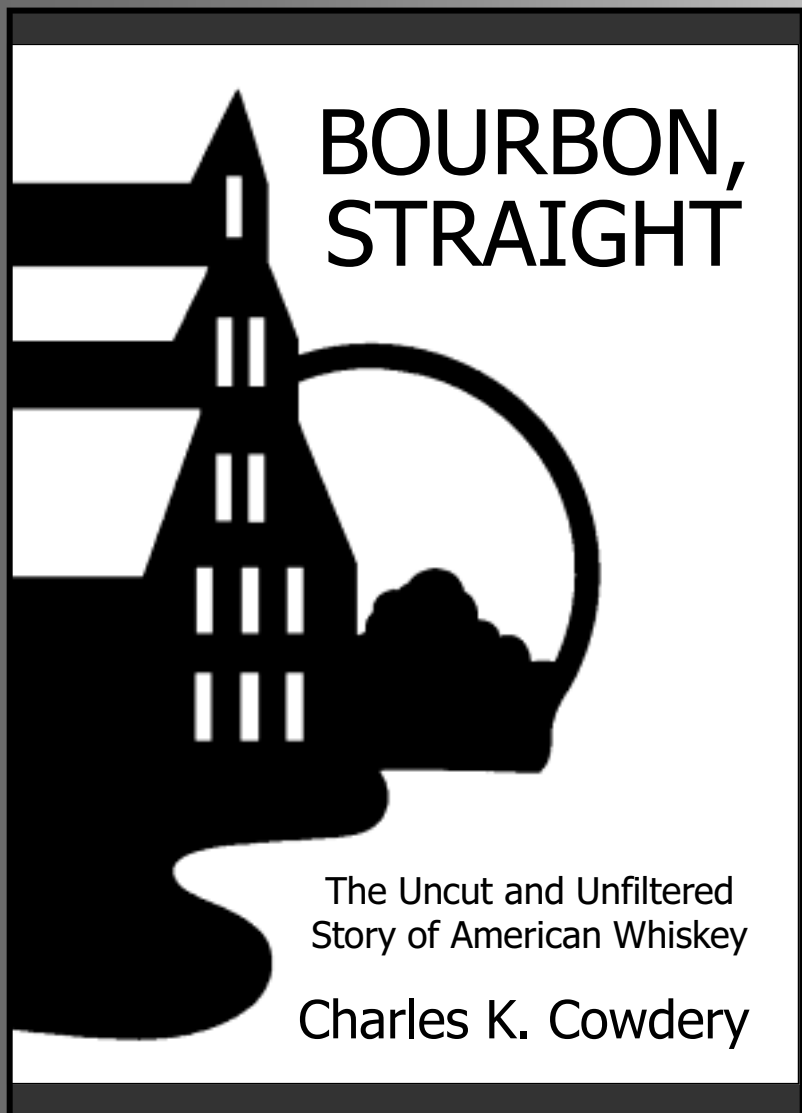
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