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**The Little Black Book of Billionaire Secrets**

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## How To Drink Like A Billionaire: A Guide To Wine, Champagne, And Spirits For The 99%

**Karen Hua, FORBES STAFF**



We can't all be billionaires—but at least we can drink like one.

Wine expert and writer Mark Oldman has coined the term “billionaire drinker” in his third book, *How to Drink Like a Billionaire*. As he defines, it's not someone who can afford the most expensive spirits—it's someone who can find the most delicious bottles for the best price.

Oldman's primary motto is “price is not necessarily proportionate to deliciousness.”

“After a certain price, you're paying less for inherent quality—the grapes, the selection, the barrels—and you're paying for other things: the scarcity, the story behind it, the critical scores,” he said. “Or, it could simply be priced higher so we value it more—the luxury good effect.”

To get the best taste for your money, his first tip is to “buy wine from a region not known for it because you're probably going to pay a premium getting a Cabernet from Napa (Valley).”

As he explained, it's about the producer, not the region. One of his consistent favorites is Gruet, a \$13-20 sparkling wine made in New Mexico by a French family. American sparkling wines will almost always be more affordable than ones sourced from Champagne.

His second piece of advice is to “opt for the unpronounceable. If you can get over the slight embarrassment of (pronouncing the name wrong), there are great values to be had there.”

Because many customers experience performance anxiety while ordering, stores and restaurants usually charge less for wines with complex names because they're less popular. That's why some companies have names like "Opus One."



*"Billionaires drink from big bottles," Mark Oldman says. "It's just the best value." ©Patrick*

Finally, he advised, "Go for the pioneers—the wines that are not the new hot kids on the block. Some of the great old names, like Mondavi, Beringer, and Chappallet got to Napa early, so they're not being written up a lot because the media wants to write about the new thing. But, they never stopped making great wine. They may not be written about, but they've survived the test of time."

In an industry notorious for its snobs—strict rules, sky-high prices, specific food pairings—Oldman takes a completely different approach: he dares you to break the rules.

"Part of drinking like a billionaire is knowing which rules to break and which guidelines are helpful—but most rules are safe for breaking," he said.

One of the most popular misconceptions—and one of his only guidelines—is don't let wine age too long.

"We think the longer we hold onto a bottle, the better it will taste—when in fact, only about 2% of the world's bottles actually improve and taste better with age. And of those that taste better with age, they hit a peak and start fading out," he said.

Instead, over-aged wine evaporates inside the bottle, leaving murky sediment in the remaining fluid.

Oldman also laughs at the false exactitude of food and wine pairings. "Most wines have a much wider array of foods they pair with than the snobs would have you think. The snobs will set the range much narrower," he said.

Many consumers may have heard the age-old adage: "what goes together, grows together"—such as Italian food with Italian wine.

"Though that rule is a good shortcut, there is good wine from too many parts of the world and good food from too many parts of the world," he said. "So I say, instead of being an indigenist, be an internationalist."

Some unconventional pairings Oldman recommends include Bordeaux and enchiladas, Champagne and baby back ribs or xiao long boa (Chinese steamed pork buns).

Ultimately, Oldman gets to the root of his philosophy—it's all based on subjective taste. "The billionaire drinker is invested in his or her own pleasure, while snobs are the ones who make us think that we're bound by these rules of wine," he differentiated.

There's a fine line: billionaire drinkers are connoisseurs, not snobs. —who talk too much, flaunt their knowledge, and enforce strict rules.

“The snobs who don’t know that much about wine are often the ones who talk too much and the ones we hear from—like the sommelier that says, ‘you absolutely must to pair the Lingonberries with this wine.’ Or that person in the wine shop who’s like, ‘you’re mispronouncing this,’” Oldman explained.

Another common question Oldman receives is about how to score the hottest reservation in town. As he explained, it’s not about how much you spend or tip, but rather how you treat the wait staff—reverse hospitality.

Restaurants reward genuine, non-snobbish interest in wine—such as asking for taste tests. A common misconception is that you must say something knowledgeable about wine while it’s being poured. However, you’re actually just smelling for spoilage—usually cork taint (when it smells moldy). According to Oldman, all you really have to say is “it’s fine” or it's not.

“The snob pushes spoiled wine back in an imperious way,” he differentiated. “But the connoisseur brings the waiter or the sommelier into the situation, saying ‘would you mind tasting it?’ You make it collaborative; you give them ownership.”

Oldman is a big advocate for restaurant bars, which he believes people often overlook for the food. In New York, he strongly recommends the bar at Del Posto, Artisanal Fromagerie & Bistro, and Bâtard restaurants, as well as any of Danny Meyer’s restaurants (especially Maialino). For specialty wine bars, one of his favorites is La Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels on Centre Street.

Oldman estimates that he personally owns about 1,000 bottles of wine, the most expensive of which is a 1990 Romanée-Conti, which goes for at least \$15,000 today. Costs aside, though, he maintains that the best wine he’s ever had is a ’62 La Tâche.

His top "bang for your buck" picks include the \$12 Penfolds Bin 8, by the brand that makes some of Australia’s most expensive bottles. He also loves Brancaia Tre, a \$15 bottle that he claimed, “I stock for parties, and people think I’m serving billion-grade wine.” It's being smart, not rich, that makes a billionaire drinker.



Mark Oldman sabers a bottle of Champagne. (Regan Arts)