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# Wine Savvy In 108 Steps

A guide offers shortcuts to a connoisseur's confidence. **BY JEFFREY M. LADERMAN**

**H**AVE YOU EVER ORDERED a bottle of wine in a restaurant that wasn't exactly what you had asked for? Wine expert Mark Oldman had no problem rejecting a red Burgundy at a French bistro in New York recently. He ordered Savigny-Les-Beaune 1999 from the wine list, but the bottle that the waitress presented was a 2000 vintage. "There is a difference," he insists. "In France, especially the more northerly regions, the weather can be iffy, so the vintage matters."

Does that mean you have to know the best of the vintages before selecting a wine? Not at all, says Oldman, author of *Oldman's Guide to Outsmarting Wine: 108 Ingenious Shortcuts to Navigate the World of Wine with Confidence and Style* (Penguin Books, \$18). If you're unsure, choose a "New World" wine—one from California, Chile, Australia, or New Zealand. "The weather's almost always good for the grapes," he says, "and vintages don't vary much at all."

That's Shortcut No.94 in Oldman's book, a guide for what he calls the "wine-curious professional." In fact, his target audience is a businessperson somewhat like himself, co-founder and president of Vault, a Manhattan publisher of career guides. Oldman developed his love for wine back in his days at Stanford University, where he earned three degrees and founded a wine club that invited California vintners to talk about their wines and offer samples. He has been teaching wine classes in New

York and other cities since 1991.

The shortcuts are the book's chapters. Almost all are two or three pages long and get right to the point, with tables that feature the foods that go best with a particular wine, a guide to favored producers, and even pronunciation help. "Why do you think chardonnay and merlot are so popular?" asks Oldman. "They're easy to pronounce. How many people can say gewürztraminer [guh-VURTS-trah-mee-ner]?"

### SAVVY SIPPERS

ONE THEME THAT runs through the book is that the most popular wines are often the most overpriced, both in wineshops and in restaurants, and that savvy sippers can save by seeking the lesser-known alternatives (table). "In a steak house, the California cabernet and red Bordeaux are the most overpriced," says Oldman. "A Spanish rioja or an Argentine malbec will be better buys." Another trick: Ask what wine the chef drinks. "It will usually be a lower-priced wine that goes well with the restaurant's food."

When it comes to choosing what to



**RED, WHITE, AND GRAND CRU**  
Mark Oldman has been teaching for 14 years

drink with your meal, Oldman says the color of the wine isn't as important as matching its "weightiness" with that of the food. "A very light white like pinot grigio will be overpowered by red meat," says Oldman. "But a rich-tasting white like a viognier or a California chardonnay won't." Light-bodied reds, such as Beaujolais, Burgundy, or New World pinot noir, work well with full-flavored fish such as salmon, tuna, and swordfish, or lighter meats such as pork, veal, and chicken.

With spicy ethnic foods, a white wine "with a little sweetness"—say, a German riesling or an "off dry" gewürztraminer—fits the bill. "The sweetness cools down the spiciness," says Oldman. Don't even think of a tannic red wine. "The spices could make the wine taste tinny and bitter," he says.

If you're stumped for a choice, Oldman says sparkling wines' refreshing bubbles and lighter alcohol content complement almost everything from foie gras to sushi and even pizza. It doesn't need to be Dom Perignon. Italian prosecco, Spanish cava, or American sparkling wines are sometimes the best buys on a wine list. Besides, says Oldman, a bottle of bubbly can make any meal seem like a celebration—and you don't have to worry about the vintage. ■

## Expanding Your Palate

IF YOU LIKE	TRY	WHY
Cabernet sauvignon	Australian shiraz	Much like cab, but with less tannic bitterness—and no sticker shock
Chardonnay	Viognier	Rich and tropically scented, but less likely to suffer from oak overload
Merlot	Argentine malbec	Smooth and plummy wine offers great value, especially in steak houses
Pinot grigio	New Zealand sauvignon blanc	Light and crisp, with invigorating grapefruit-and-grass aromas

Data: Mark Oldman