

proved European grapes could thrive in New York, adds some colour, as does winemaker Cathy Corison, shouldering the 'woman-in-a-man's-world' burden. Among the unsung heroes is Maynard Amerine, who helped establish the winemaking school at the University of California at Davis, and was forever chagrined at inventing a numerical scale for evaluating wine that was transformed into a pseudo-scientific toy for innumerate hedonists.

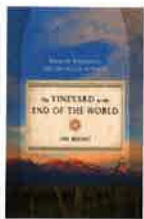
Good history, like this one, abounds in surprises; good history well told, like this one, is a rare pleasure.

Brian St Pierre

The Vineyard at the End of the World

Ian Mount

WW Norton & Company, £17.99



AMERICAN JOURNALIST IAN Mount arrived with his wife in Argentina in 2005 on what they planned as a 12-month move. But like so many of the foreigners Mount interviews in his book,

they fell in love with the country and stayed. He soon discovered that there were no 'serious' books about Argentina's wine history at a time when its wines were booming in the US.

After comprehensive research including more than 120 first-hand interviews, Mount takes readers through 400 years of Argentinian wine history: from the beginnings in the 16th century, to the arrival 300 years later of the immigrants who would shape the local wine industry, and the otherwise unwritten last two decades of history and rebirth of Malbec.

This book is about more than a vineyard. Its broader appeal lies in how Mount smartly sets Argentina's wine history in a wider context while providing an intimate account. As they learn about Argentina, readers will also be taken through Europe's phylloxera devastation, the rise of US critic Robert Parker and French consultant Michel Rolland, and the US wine market, to give a few examples.

The crucial past 20 years of Argentina's wine revolution are meticulously built up by stories told by the key movers and shakers themselves. Mount also provides humorous and personal insights into the Argentinian character and culture.

The Vineyard at the End of the World is written in a relaxed yet authoritative style, making it an engaging read for those with an interest in both wine and Argentina. **D**

Marina Gayan MW

Lightweight to heavyweight

Grape Expectations

Caro Feely

Summerdale, £8.99

The Grape Escape

Steve Hovington

Matador, £10

Unquenchable

Natalie MacLean

Perigee, \$24

The Juice

Jay McInerney

Bloomsbury, £14.99

What to do with a book that takes as its title a pun that is not so much lame as *mutilé*, as the French call their war-wounded? Reading Caro Feely's *Grape Expectations*, I had to constantly beat down any charitable urges. Put it this way: if your well-meaning cousins, the annoying, earnest ones who ditched their highly paid City jobs to buy a vineyard in Saussignac and now bombard you with links to their sub-Peter Mayle witterings about French bureaucracy and garlicky farmers who say things like 'Quelle vue. What a view' tried to charge you £8.99 for the privilege, well, you'd run, wouldn't you?

I did, and into the sweaty arms of Steve Hovington, of '80s band B-Movie (no, nor me) who in *The Grape Escape* sets out to make wine, for no real reason. Hovington is a step up from Feely in that his account – he persuades Nicolas Bergasse at Château Viranel in St-Chinian to let him loose on the basket press – is actually funny, interspersing reminiscences of rock 'n' roll excess with his current middle-aged hopelessness. Not just a load of old schist then, as he says.

Talking of Peter Mayle, patron saint of expats, he's name-checked by Natalie MacLean in the same sentence as Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges as one of her influences. I approached *Unquenchable – a Tippy Quest for the World's Best Bargain Wines* with caution, but MacLean is actually excellent company. Brought up in poverty, the last in a 'long line of alcoholics', and a former competitive highland dancer, she rollicks around the world's vineyards flirting with Australia's Wolf Blass, gaping at the slopes of the Mosel, chuckling with growers in Provence, reminding us every few pages of how much she likes a drink. There are useful goblets of history, handy advice for the uninitiated and endless plugs for her website. She ends up perched on a stool in a New York hotel knocking back cocktails and quoting Irish poet Brendan Behan.



But – heavyweight namedrops and all – I don't think anyone will cause Jay McInerney to lose sleep. The *Bright Lights*, *Big City* novelist-turned-wine-hack approaches wine with unpatronising informality in his collection of writings, *The Juice*. He asks good, obvious questions – 'is it possible to taste minerals in fermented grape juice?' (apropos Chablis) – and answers them unfussily. He skewers biodynamics by choosing some of its founder Rudolf Steiner's more out-there pronouncements, and quotes Keats without appearing too affected. He wears his urbanity easily – he describes sliding down a Cornas hillside in Gucci loafers, and casually drops in his friendship with US novelist Bret Easton Ellis. The impression is of an omnivorous intelligence and a keen wit. I can almost hear him shaking cocktails for MacLean...

Adam Lechmere