

Educating Peter



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Lettie Teague knows wine. She has been the wine editor at "Food & Wine" magazine for almost a decade. The only question she is asked more than "Can you recommend a great wine for under \$10?" -- great cheap white: Argiolas Costamolino Vermentino from Sardinia; great cheap red: Alamos Malbec from Argentina -- is "What is the best way to learn about wine?" After many years of fielding these questions, Lettie was determined to debunk the myth that learning about wine is hard. She decided to find just one wine idiot and teach him a few fundamentals -- how to order off a restaurant wine list without fear, approach a wine merchant with confidence, and perhaps even score a few points off a wine snob. Enter her neighbor, good friend and complete wine neophyte Peter Travers, "Rolling Stone" magazine's longtime film critic. Peter Travers proved the perfect Eliza Doolittle to Lettie's Professor Higgins. As a film critic he made bold pronouncements ("This movie stinks," which could be readily translated to "This Cabernet tastes like Merlot") and exhibited a finely tuned visual sense ("The cinematography could be improved" could easily become "This wine is too white"). But, most important, Peter knew almost nothing about wine. As Lettie begins their lessons, Peter puts down his ever-present glass of "fatty" Chardonnay and learns that there is a huge world out there full of all kinds of wine. He is taught to swirl his glass to release the wine's aromatic compounds -- or esters -- above the rim and vows, "I'm

going to do that for Martin Scorsese next time I see him. I'll volatize my esters for him." Thus Lettie enlightens her wine-challenged but film-savvy friend about the Facts of Wine: how to hold a glass; the vocabulary of wine; how wine is made; how to read labels; how to tell the difference between grape varieties; how to make sense of vintages; how to glean information about a wine simply by looking at the shape and color of the bottle; and an overview of the great wine regions of the Old World and the New. Finally, after many fact-filled, hilarious lessons, Lettie takes Peter to the most famous American wine region of all, Napa Valley, where he hobnobs with wine and Hollywood royalty and finally puts his new skills to the test in the real world. Part buddy movie, part serious wine tutorial, "Educating Peter" is as much a treat for oenophiles in on the joke as it is for beginners who think Chablis is a brand name of wine.

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