

For wine-lovers on your Christmas list

Borrowing a page from 19th century French novelist Jules Verne, Tacoma writer Mike Veseth has conceived his own globe-trotting book.

But in the 21st century, Veseth — who is a University of Puget Sound professor emeritus of international political economy — doesn't face the same challenges that Phileas Fogg did. Instead of trying to beat the clock, Veseth's goal is to refill his wineglass as much as possible (in the name of research, of course) as he travels to vineyards on every continent except Antarctica. You can read about the results in "Around the World in Eighty Wines."

Hewing to Vernian tradition at the beginning of his quest, Veseth makes a pilgrimage to the Reform Club in London, the site that Verne chose as the starting point of Phileas Fogg's journey.

But for the symbolic launch of his own travels, Veseth selects a spot that is just a few blocks away — a wine shop that has been in operation since 1698.

Veseth notes that London's beginnings as the epicenter of the wine industry go back another 500 years before that, when the future King Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose extensive landholdings in France included the Bordeaux region, famous even then for its vineyards.

And in that manner, the author continues to flavor his discussion of wines, vineyards, vintners and oenologists with fascinating notes on history, geography, technology, even sports and politics.

The signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence was toasted with Madeira, for example, while Thailand's wine industry got a big boost from a populist political movement in the early 2000s.

Veseth first travels to France and Italy, both of which have top reputations for their wines.

He provides a primer on the differences between Bordeaux and Burgundy wines. Bordeaux wines are judged by the skill of their producers, while Burgundy most highly prizes the terroir — the soil, topography and climate in which the grapes are grown. Bordeaux vineyards are "broad and abundant" and represent wine "as a business opportunity," while Burgundy wine production, limited to a much smaller region, has a more mystical appeal.

"Burgundy isn't for the world, it is for France," Veseth remarks.

Italian wines, on the other hand, are more difficult to categorize, with a vast range of



**"Around the World
in Eighty Wines"
By Mike Veseth
Rowman & Littlefield
224 pp
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regional variants, depending on where, along that long boot into the Mediterranean, the grapes are grown.

The journey gets even more interesting when Veseth ventures to places like Syria, the war-torn country whose Domaine de Bargylus has a reputation for being "the most dangerous wine in the world." Then it's on to vineyards in India, Thailand and Bali, which are producing "New Latitudes" wines that challenge the conventional belief that wine grapes grow only in certain climates.

Veseth also tours the Americas, and a Walla Walla wine — L'Ecole 41 Ferguson Vineyard — wins one of the coveted spots on Veseth's limited list.

"Around the World in Eighty Wines" is affable and informative — and should be a sure bet for the wine-lovers on your Christmas list.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com.

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