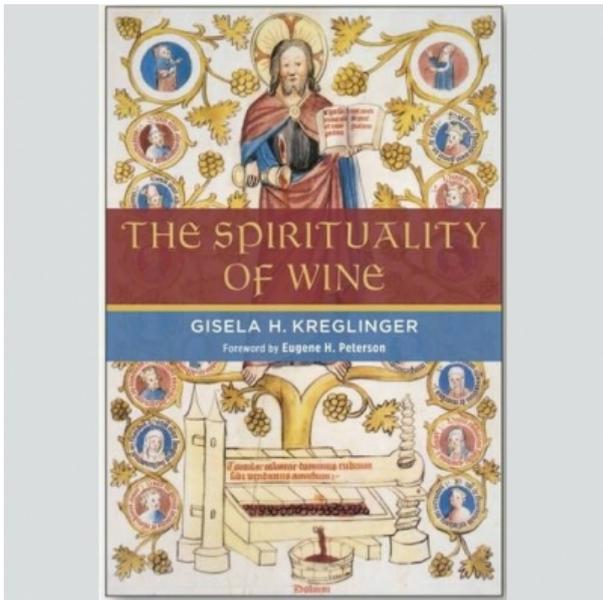


Jancis Robinson
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Written by
Tamlyn Currin
30 Dec 2016

Book reviews - politics, history and religion



For links to all of Tam's reviews of wine books published in 2016, see [this guide](#).

The Spirituality of Wine

Gisela H Kreglinger

Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co

£16.99, \$20.96

Dr Gisela Kreglinger is the daughter of a Franken winemaker who started her working life with a degree in economics and bank administration, then eight years later moved to Vancouver to do a degree in theology. She also has a PhD in historical theology from the University of St Andrew's and is currently a research fellow there. She is an author, theologian, speaker, teacher

and spiritual director. On her website she says that her 'primary interest lies in engaging theology with culture and the arts. I believe it is of utmost importance that we re-envision what Christian spirituality might look like in the 21st century and how we can engage contemporary culture in thoughtful ways'.

The 'spirituality of wine' is something she describes as her 'latest research interest and ongoing passion', and the purpose of her book is not just to examine the importance of wine in the Christian faith, but also to 'open up a conversation' with Christians and non-Christians alike about the role of spirituality in wine. The book is specifically concerned with Christian faith, although it has applications on a more broadly spiritual basis.

There are two parts to the book: Sustenance and Sustainability. The first chapter in Sustenance is 'Wine in the Bible', a fascinating study on just how pervasive and powerful the theme of wine is throughout the Old and New Testaments. Lothar Becker's revolutionary research 'on the cultural history of wine and wine-related themes in the Bible' has shown that there are no fewer than 979 references to wine. Kreglinger builds on that, examining first the historic culture of the Ancient Near East and Palestine, and the three-point axis of life at that time: bread, olive oil and wine. She suggests that the concept of wine as both blessing and essential food group - sustenance, as much daily bread as bread itself - is deeply entwined in scripture with our understanding of God as creator and sustainer of life. She demonstrates how the prevailing symbol of wine in the Bible is one of blessing, gift and celebration, and that it is used as one of the most powerful symbols of God's promises. She believes that the process of making wine - the work, the connection to the earth, the rhythm and mystery of it - is a direct parallel to our relationship with God, and that in many ways theology has become increasingly detached from the earth, and the earth has become increasingly detached from the sacred.

Her second chapter is about wine in the history of the church, and she charts the rich and powerful relationship of wine with the Judeo-Christian church, and the indelible impact that this has left on the world of wine today. Indeed, it struck me several times, as I read through 34 wine books in the last few weeks of this year, that the link between Christianity and wine cropped up over and over again in books with a totally secular focus. Vines, vineyard work and wine were integral to the lives not just of monks and missionaries, who tended to their work with a sense of worship and religious dedication, but also in the lives of ordinary believers. What was revelatory for me, as someone who grew up in a strictly teetotal, very religious Baptist home (with extended family members who still believe that my job is offensive to the Christian faith), is that the temperance/abstention gospel is a relatively 'modern' 19th-century invention, and has no scriptural basis. Many of the great church leaders/theologians, Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Calvin, John Knox, John Bunyan and even Jesus Christ himself among others, were known to drink wine, calling it a gift from God, although they were all opposed to immoderate drinking. Calvin even believed that 'it was unbiblical to forbid drinking wine under the pretext of preventing drunkenness'. Instead he encouraged people 'to eat and drink so that "it may sustain, but not oppress us"'. This then ties in with a later chapter on communal feasting, in which Kreglinger talks about how God designed good wine and good food for joy and community, the bringing together of people and breaking down barriers.

'Sustenance' also searches the symbolism of Christ and wine through the Lord's supper ('my blood of the covenant') and his declaration that 'I am the vine, you are my branches'. Redemption, sacrifice, the centrality of life, the physical and transcendent aspects of the Eucharist, the metaphors of tasting and receiving and sharing are all explored in some depth. Part 1 ends with 'Attentiveness' and talks about the act of tasting wine: 'To drink is to pray', she writes, and she explains how, when we savour a wine slowly, we come to know it and through

that comes a 'deeper appreciation for God's gift of wine and a more profound experience of joy and gratitude'. She strongly advocates that our sensual enjoyment and delight in things like food and wine cannot and should not be divorced from spirituality, that in the headiness and glory of a beautiful glass of wine lies the fingerprint of God himself.

Part 2, 'Sustainability', draws parallels between the life of a vintner and the spiritual life, and then looks at the role of technology in wine and in spiritual life. In these two chapters I felt that she lost a bit of focus. The path veered away from pure theology and more into the world of Alice Feiring (a self-confessed agnostic). Although, as I write this, I am reminded of a chapter in Feiring's book, *For the Love of Wine*, where she writes about a priest who gets up in the middle of a presentation on engineered yeasts and roars, 'Are you saying that God did not provide the grape with everything it needed to make wine?'. She goes on to say, 'I had absolutely never heard a religious argument for making wine naturally, and it was nothing short of thrilling...'.

One gets the impression that, a bit like Feiring, Kreglinger believes passionately in artisan wines and winemaking without unnecessary interference or technology. She does, however, approach the subject as she does everything in this book, with an exquisite caution, tightrope-walker balance and care. Quite the opposite of Feiring, in fact - Feiring would throw eggs, Kreglinger would walk over them without cracking the shells. But somehow these chapters lacked the spiritual backbone that the previous chapters had, and the interviews with the various winemakers occasionally came across as a little wooden.

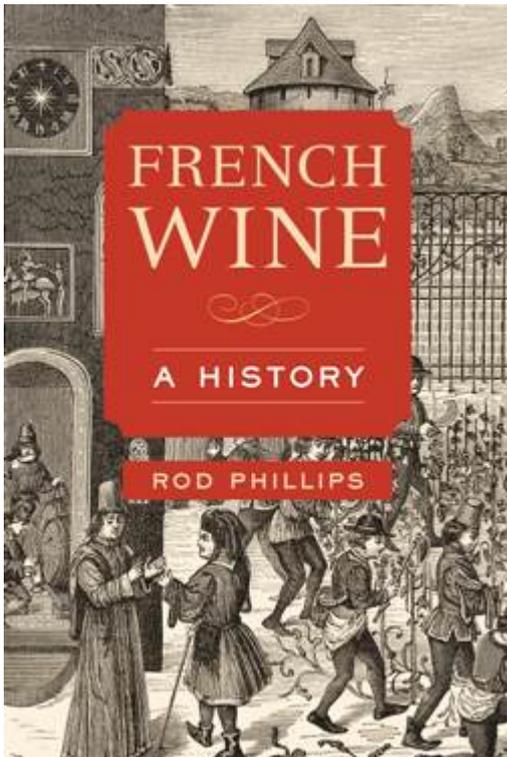
She picks up again with 'Wine and its health benefits' and 'Wine and the abuse of alcohol'. Both chapters demonstrate Kreglinger's strengths as academic and theologian in the meticulous historical research and the ability to find rather than wrest the spiritual metaphors.

Her final chapter, 'Wine, viticulture, and soul care', reflects on the parallels between 'life in the vineyard and life in the church'. It looks at the relationship between vintner and vine: the listening, the coming alongside, the watching and tending, the pruning and the bending, and in response, the fruitfulness. She compares the oneness of a vineyard (wine is not the product of a single vine) to the oneness of the community to which God calls the church. And she finds that just as the vintner has to 'trust in the cycle of death, decay and renewed life' and the strange paradox that suffering should produce greater fruit (as it does with the vine), so we should trust in that cycle of life and in the strength that comes from suffering.

I read this book with some trepidation. Being a wine lover with a strong Christian faith who rebelled against a prohibitionist upbringing, I've unconsciously kept these two worlds apart. I saw an inherent tension between the two that could not be resolved. This book goes straight to the heart of that delusion. I'd argue, however, that this book is not just for vicars who like a glass of claret with the Sunday lunch, or church-going wine geeks with a stash of Riedels next to the family Bible. The strength of this book lies not in passionate, evangelical argument and pulpit punching, but in the quiet and humble way that Kreglinger offers thoughts and invites discussion. Anyone who is interested in another dimension to wine drinking, anyone who has wondered about the mystique of wine, or has had that moment when a sip of wine seemed to surpass the ordinary, would find something thought-provoking - even soul-stirring - in this intelligent enquiry into a corner of the wine world that is rarely explored.

French Wine
A History

Rod Phillips
University of California Press
£24.95, \$34.95



Born in New Zealand, Phillips emigrated to Canada aged 19, studied and taught as professor of history in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, UK, France, Sweden and the US. As a writer, journalist and historian, Rod Phillips doesn't come at this daunting undertaking unqualified. But the size of the task doesn't seem to intimidate him in the least, as he casually sets out his aim: 'to provide a readable and relatively compact history of the 2,500 years that separate the present from the time when the Etruscans, Greeks and Romans first brought wine to ancient France...'

And this is where he starts, roughly 625 BCE, when France had no vineyards and no wine, and when the French, who were not even the French back then but pockets of Celts, were perceived by the Greeks as beer-swilling barbarians. It seems hard to believe that there was a time when the Greeks felt that they ought to civilise the French. They were at one point exporting around 10 million litres of wine each year to France. How things have changed.

Phillips has laid out the book in chronological chapters, each dealing with a period of time in French wine history, starting from 'the beginnings to 1000 CE', a broad but fascinating account of those first 1,500-odd years, and moving through to ever smaller and more detailed and more rapidly changing eras. Throughout, Phillips weaves various threads of particular themes through the weft of time, looking at how each of them has affected the fabric of the French wine world as we know it today. He examines the ways in which the recurring leitmotifs of war, politics, disease, tax and wealth, export and trade, fraud, commercial rivalries, class, colonies, consumer attitudes, medicine and religion have deeply shaped French wine to the extent that it has become one of the most powerful benchmarks of modern wine.

A book like this has the potential to be dry and academic - best left to MWs and history students - but Phillips has a gift. In his hand, the heavy flour sack of facts turns into a very digestible and

rather moreish loaf. He has a way of sprinkling little anecdotes throughout, many of which offer some amusement, such as the priest at Gilemerville who occasionally lost his clothes at taverns, and the dutiful 14th-century housewife whose daily tasks included obeying her husband, delousing hawks, and correcting bad wine by adding cardamom, elder wood, holly leaves, hot boiled corn, or a basket of sand from the river Seine. The modern housewife has it easy.

One of the things that becomes evident is how much debt France owes to other countries for her wine legacy. The impact of Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, Algeria and America, in many different ways, cannot be ignored. It was apparently Henry VIII who was instrumental in the shift in tastes from the rosé-coloured *clairet* to the deep red claret that we know today; the Dutch first sulphured barrels; and French Algeria shipped the equivalent of 41% of the world's total exports to France in the early 1960s. One could say that French wine has an awful lot of foreign DNA.

What's also amusing, if not sobering, is how little some things have changed over a period of 2,000 years and more: state-directed grubbing up of vines has been happening since 100 BCE; protectionism; good wine for the rich and plonk for the poor; the partiality of the popes for wine (even today the Vatican has the largest per capita consumption in the world); the snobbish view that beer drinkers are inferior; lists of and ratings for best wines; detox penance for errants who drank too much; underpaying producers and overcharging clients; adulteration and counterfeiting; complaining about and blaming other countries; regulating against other countries; cult wines; cycles of wine lakes and grape shortages. Ecclesiastes 1:9 sums it up: 'there is nothing new under the sun'.

Another interesting pattern begins to emerge from Phillips' forensic examination, and it's a little more hopeful. No matter how devastating the impact of events and catastrophes, the wine industry always seems to emerge stronger and better for it. Each setback has brought with it greater knowledge and a new, smarter way of doing things.

Phillips has packed so much into this book that no one-page review will ever do it justice, and neither would there be any point in writing more. He writes so much better than I can summarise. With so much exquisite detail, and yet with the rare ability to keep looping the reader back to the big picture, he rewards anyone who is remotely curious about how we've got to where we are with French wine. It is not a paean to French wine, and neither is it a deposition. It's the piecing together of a jigsaw puzzle, and whether you like the end picture or not is entirely up to you.

Footnote: Phillips has unwittingly offered us Brits a brilliant solution to the problem of importing French wine post-Brexit. See page 100 on privateers and fake confiscations.

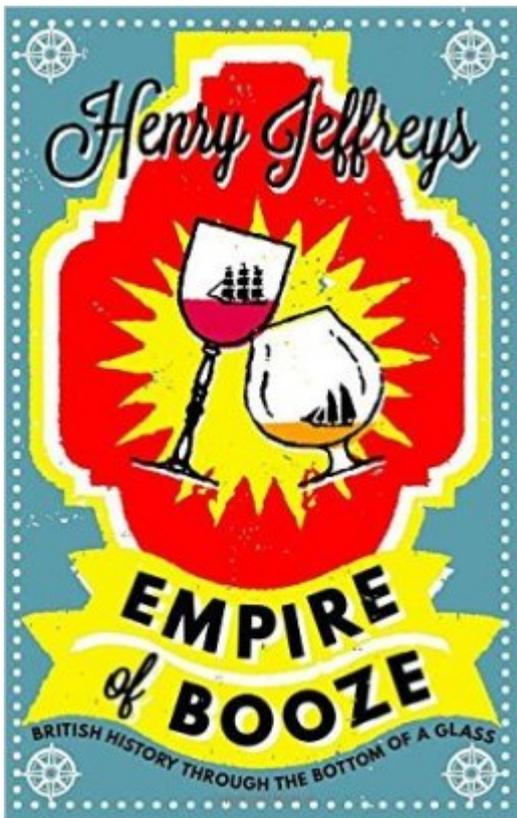
Empire of Booze

British History through the Bottom of a Glass

Henry Jeffreys

Unbound

£12.99



Henry Jeffreys, ex Oddbins, ex London Review of Breakfasts, is now blogger of Henry's World of Booze and freelance wine writer. Most importantly, he was the winner of our [restaurant-reviewing competition](#) in 2012. And in this, his first book, he's out to convince us that Britain is the one country that the world of imbibers simply could not do without.

Of course it's champagne that gets the first mention. Where would the British Empire be without Christopher Merret getting one over on Dom Pérignon? But Jeffreys steers his argument down a slightly less worn path via cider, incorporating the antics of the cavalier Sir Kenelm Digby and his Powder of Sympathy, glass bottles from the Forest of Dean, and a French libertine exile. Lord Scudamore also played a part. There is, at the end of the chapter, the reluctant admission that the French perfected the technique.

Port gets tackled next, and yet again, just as I was expecting the usual stuff about Taylor's, war with France and royal marriages, I'm suddenly reading about salt cod and English woollens, inns full of bed bugs, wine merchants being kidnapped by brigands and tied naked to a tree. That the original port tasted of goat (literally - it was stored in goat skins) was not what I expected, and I rather loved the complaint by a Scotsman: 'A bottle of thick English port is a very heavy and inflammatory dose. I felt it last time that I drank it for several days, and this morning it was boiling in my veins.' That's quite a hangover. Once port became sweet, however, attitudes must have changed, as evidenced by William Pitt the younger, who, according to Jeffreys, would drink a bottle of port before giving a speech to the House of Commons.

Jeffreys expands the British Booze Empire to include marsala, rum, sherry, madeira, beer, gin, cognac (a tenuous colony, it must be noted), claret, whisky and back to champagne. The book is a slightly crazy collection of alcohol-related trivia - it reminded me of a private museum I once saw belonging to someone who was madly, obsessively passionate about trains; his entire garden and home had been turned into a homage to British Rail, all beautifully organised into stations and signal yards. Ditto, *Empire of Booze*. If you love etymology you'll find out where grog and groggy come from, and the delightful parentage of the word rum. He should, without

doubt, contact the makers of Trivial Pursuit and offer to make a beverage edition based on this book (and other trivia he no doubt has up his sleeve...).

There are some rather strange detours along the way: a chapter on the Puritans (Cromwell wasn't the fire-and-brimstone teetotaler we all think); a chapter on red trousers and tweed; and then a couple more random chapters on ice (surely that's one for the American *Empire of Booze* sequel?), Nelson and Wellington. Interesting, but they didn't fit. It was as if Jeffreys had so many interesting facts and great little anecdotes that he'd gathered along the way, and was so desperate to share them, that he shoehorned them into the book.

If there's one big criticism, it's the repetition. In any book of this sort, there is going to be overlap between the chapters. The stories of port and sherry, madeira and marsala, champagne and cognac and claret, are all linked by the same wars, the same colonisation, the same treaties and epidemics and disasters and wealth. One has to be very organised (or have a very good editor) to make sure that the same anecdote/juicy fact isn't paraded several times. There was also, on occasion, a sense that the author had got a little carried away in the enthusiasm of the moment and, in addition to the non-booze chapters, gone off on a slight tangent - again, sort of related to booze, but not really.

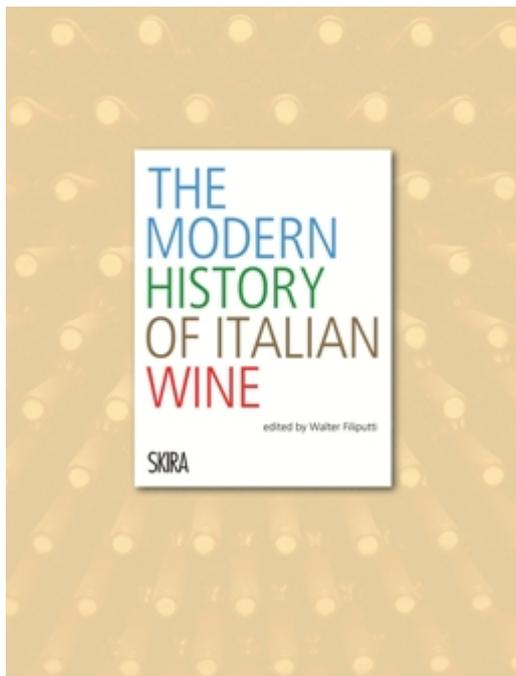
What I really liked was the 'Drinking the empire' section at the end of each chapter. It's here that Henry Jeffreys' love of all things artisan, eclectic and liquid comes to the fore, with a brief list of what to try and why. If you wanted a project to 'drink the empire', this is your handbook.

The Modern History of Italian Wine

Walter Filiputti

Skira

£42, \$60, CA\$80



Having just read Rod Phillips' 2,500-year history of French wine, I found it impossible not to lay these two books side by side in contrast: one outsider's unemotive, minute and forensic research of the connecting facts that throughout hundreds of years have led to French wine as it

is today; and a committee of deeply passionate nationals collaborating to produce a snapshot of just the last 50-odd years that have led to Italian wine as it is today; a small-fonted, simple tome of dry text; and a large, glossy, beautifully bound coffee-table book with colourful, fabulous photographs; the plain, precise language of a scientist laying out the evidence for analysis; and the rapturous prose of patriotism. Woe betide anyone expecting a book on Italy, written by Italians, to be less than animated.

But the irony of contrast between the two books lay near the start of each. In *The History of French Wine* we read about the Etruscans (Tuscans, to you and me) bringing the first wine, millions of litres of it, and the first vines to French shores, teaching the French to drink and make wine. In *The Modern History of Italian Wine*, we read about the Italians (Tuscans, to be precise) visiting Bordeaux and bringing back French wine styles, grapes and winemaking knowledge to Italy. The birth of French wine, thanks to Tuscany, and the rebirth of Tuscan wine, thanks to France.

The Modern History of Italian Wine is the brainchild of Walter Filiputti, who believed that there was an important story to tell about the radical revolution that started in the 1960s and that, over an incredibly short time, irrevocably and unrecognisably changed the face of Italian wine. He also believes that this revolution in the wine industry had a knock-on effect throughout every sector of industry in Italy, affecting everything from fashion to food, manufacturing to agriculture. His vision is that by mapping what happened, it can be used as a blueprint for the continuing success and growth of Italy as a nation, as well as inspiring and equipping young people with an understanding of their roots.

With the help of four other editors (Mario Busso, food and wine writer; Davide Rampello, professor of arts and culture; Angelo Solci, oenologist and wine merchant; and Attilio Scienza, professor of viticulture) and 30 other contributors, this story has been written in three parts: Renaissance, Innovation, and Geography.

Part 1, Renaissance, sets the scene: "*Contadino*" (peasant/farmer) was a derogatory term... Until the 1970s, it was very difficult for a farm/peasant boy to marry outside his social class. They were considered labourers more than anything else.' Italian wine simply wasn't on the international map. Hugh Johnson's *World Atlas of Wine* in 1971 relegated the whole of Italy to a miscellaneous chapter on southern and eastern Europe. France got 72 pages. And although the total production of Italian wine is slowly decreasing, economist Stefano Micelli sets out to prove that quality has gone up immeasurably - from cheap, badly made plonk to wines that stand side-by-side with the best in the world - and offers the reasons why. Filiputti takes his magnifying glass to the people and estates that led the charge from obscurity to icon (and the rather unexpected role that Prince Phillip played in the rise of the Supertuscans). The Renaissance section also looks at the impact of international markets, and here is a veritable honours board of American journalists, authors, chefs, entrepreneurs and sommeliers who brought Italian wine to the American people. Pages and pages of glowing American names are followed by a couple of pages on Germany, a couple of pages on Switzerland, and then a rather desultory nod towards Britain despite [Nicolas Belfrage's](#) valiant contribution (at least Walter Speller gets a mention, however briefly). Us Brits clearly didn't do much for the renaissance.

Part 2, Innovation, focuses first on Milan, the hotbed of wine intellect. The rise of oenologists (much despised in the 1960s), AIS (Italian Sommelier Association), ONAV (Italian National Organisation of Wine Masters), Riedel, Vinarius, and a surge in the production of new and advanced winemaking machinery, all began to gain traction and recognition from the 1960s to the 1980s. Via the rather heartening and unexpectedly brave story of Nonino grappa, Filiputti

traces the rescue and revival of the now-so-important autochthonous grape varieties of Italy. He follows this up with the controversy and crisis of the 1963 DOC laws that split the wine-producing Italian world in two and gave rise to the paradoxical pre-eminence of table wines. Subsequent chapters deal with the history and impact of Vinitaly, changing attitudes from chemicals to sustainability, terroir, and revolutions in the vineyards and cellars. His observations on the impact of barriques are particularly thought-provoking.

Part 3, The Geography of Italian Wine, is nearly half the book. It is primarily made up of the profiles of 200 wineries, believed by the editors to be the most instrumental in modernising Italian wine, and they have cleverly grouped these producers by decade - not the decade in which they were founded, but the decade in which they began to innovate. Each decade of producers gets an introduction, setting the backdrop and giving context to their stories.

The book itself is not without fault. While the translators have accomplished a formidable task, it requires a very special kind of editor to turn the voices of 35 people into a seamless whole without detracting from their individual styles. The English translation of this book does need such an editor. There are a number of grammatical errors which detract from the flow, and several passages, which are probably mellifluously clear in the original Italian, become somewhat clunky, overly elaborate and labyrinthine in the translated text. It is also worth considering that a passionate philosophical outpouring in Italian may never be quite as convincing in English! Simplicity might have been a better way to go.

My other criticism is that there are a number of chapters and segments which seem to have a very tenuous link, if any, to the theme of the book. These crop up here and there, often sandwiched between very relevant and exciting material, making them even more perplexing. Perhaps a little pruning would not have gone amiss.

More than anything, this is a fervently emotional book. There is not an ounce of dispassion between the pages. Filiputti and his team have thrown themselves into it heart and soul, and have amassed their history from a staggering number of sources and voices, drawing on everything from poetry to science and economics. Between them, they have a way of coaxing wonderful stories out of people, and have managed to compile a mellification of quotations from the men and women they interviewed. It's Italian to its very core.