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Robert Kacher, champion of inexpensive French wines

By Dave McIntyre
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"People do still spend \$30 or more for a bottle of wine, you know," Robert Kacher said as he poured me a taste of Pouilly-Fuisse from Christophe Cordier. He leaned close as he pushed the glass of white Burgundy across the table, as though confiding a secret.

His remark carried as much nuance as the chardonnay: a gentle rebuke at the media for fixating on cheap wines during a down economy, and irritation at his own reputation as an importer of terrific, inexpensive French wines that overshadow the higher end of his portfolio.

"There's still a wonderful demand for great French wine," he said.

Over the next few minutes as Kacher's student, I learned how the wine's grapes are farmed at low yields in order to increase ripeness, harvested by hand, pressed in whole clusters with the stems, then fermented and aged in oak barrels: one-third in new barrels, one-third in second-use barrels, the remainder in barrels soaking up their third harvest. The wine was rich and luxurious, with just enough oak to give structure without threatening to obscure the fruit.

Then he poured another wine by Cordier, made from older vines at a slightly higher elevation. It was similar yet strikingly different: more precise and focused, with an appealing delicacy and refinement.

"Same oak treatment, same vinification," Kacher said. "The difference is terroir."

Kacher, 58, is the dean of Washington area wine importers, the founder of Robert Kacher Selections. His Franco-centric portfolio has won praise from critics, including Robert M. Parker Jr., and has been embraced by retailers and consumers across the country. The French government named him a chevalier de l'Ordre du Merite Agricole. His quick success after launching his company in 1984 ignited a wave of boutique importers in this region; it is a market that thrives to this day. He helped clue in consumers to the importance of the importer when exploring foreign wines.

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