



In Pursuit of Beauty

What Matters When You Taste Wine

By Karen MacNeil

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I once had an employee (a woman who was smart and knew a lot about wine) who, when she loved a wine would always describe it as "pretty." It drove me crazy. Just about every time she used that descriptor, I'd ask her what she meant by it. "A pretty wine is... pretty," she'd say unhelpfully.

If she'd been a man, I'd have probably challenged him for (possibly) being misogynistic. But she was a woman. I had to let it go.

But now, years later, I wonder if pretty isn't a wonderful word to use to describe wine. Or a word that I like even more—beautiful.

Beauty stirs human emotion. To describe anything as beautiful is to say that you are moved by that thing. It has touched you in a way that evokes awe. Is there a better way to describe a wine?

We've all heard the phrase "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and in fact, one of the things I like most about the concept of beauty is its subjectivity. Beauty cannot be challenged. If you find something beautiful, you are describing a kind of intimacy—a powerful passionate connection with that thing. Like falling in love, you don't need a reason, a justification, or a validation. What anyone else thinks is beside the point.

Many in the wine industry have, for too long, pretended that wine can be analyzed along a quantifiable "grid" of factors. A lot of tannin; little tannin. High acid; low acid. And so on.

But the tasting grid (now ubiquitously taught in wine schools around the world) just might be causing us to miss the larger point. Tasting a wine is not really about "finding" blueberries or black currants or brioche.

Tasting wine is about the pursuit of beauty.

About Karen MacNeil

Karen MacNeil is the CEO and President of Karen MacNeil & Company LLC, and the author of the best selling book *The Wine Bible*. She gives keynote addresses and exclusive wine tastings for companies and individuals around the country. You can find out more and contact her at www.karenmacneil.com