

Five Things You Didn't Know About Wine from Books & Books Wine Instructor Patrick Alexander

By [Hannah Sentenac](#) Wed., Mar. 27 2013 at 9:00 AM



Wikipedia

Let's face it: there's probably a lot you don't know about wine. Unless you're a professional sommelier, it's nearly impossible to master the wide world of vino. It spans centuries, continents and even religions. Everyone loves the grape juice.

Though we'll likely never know it all, we can certainly attempt to expand our knowledge -- particularly so we don't look like ignorant asses when choosing a first-date dinner selection. The good news is that Books & Books, Coral Gables' favorite indie bookseller, offers classes on the art of wine appreciation.

Their Spring Wine Appreciation course kicks off on April 1, and ahead of the liquid learning launch, we talked to instructor Patrick Alexander on some little known facts about wine. Check out what we learned after the jump.

See also:

- [*Premium Blend's Chocolate Wine, 24 Percent Wine-Based Rum Substitute*](#)
- [*Tapas, Inexpensive Vino at Time for Wine in Edgewater*](#)

1. "People have been drinking wine enthusiastically for 9,000 years and for nearly all of that time it tasted awful."

Because oxidization is a fairly recent discovery (the process that happens when air meets wine), old school wines quickly adopted a vinegar-flavor. According to Alexander, they tried to hide the taste by

adding everything from sea-water and spices to pine resin and honey. To no avail, natch. But people still drank it, despite its disgusting taste, because it was safer than water.

2. "The world's most expensive wine, Chateau d'Yquem, which sold for more than \$100,000 per bottle two years ago, is made from rotten grapes."

Yep, this 1811 vino is made from grapes infected with the botrytis cinerea, or "noble rot" fungus. The fungus actually concentrates the sugar and acid in grape juice -- a good thing for winemakers. It's also mighty labor-intensive, and thus, mighty pricey.

3. "Almost all the vineyards in Europe today were planted by the Romans."

Those Romans. They were on top of it. 'Till they weren't.

4. "Almost all the vineyards in Europe have Californian roots."

In the late 19th century, Europe's vineyards were destroyed by the phylloxera devastation (basically, a pest plague). The only roots immune to the pesky phylloxera were Californian, Alexander says, so the vineyards were re-planted with Californian roots, on which European vines were grafted. Hybrid magic!

5. "Champagne is made with red grapes."

Everyone's favorite bubbly beverage is actually made with a blend of Chardonnay (white) and Pinot Noir (red) grapes, says Alexander. The skins are removed before fermentation so the red grapes don't color the vino (unless it's pink champagne, then they stick around to add a little color).

Wanna learn more from Alexander? Sign up for Books & Books Spring Wine Appreciation classes, kicking off on April 1. They're limited to 16 people, so sign up quickly. They run Mondays from 6 to 7:45 p.m. from April 1 through May 6 at the Coral Gables location. The class runs \$299 per person and includes 12 hours of lectures, 24 different wines, all class materials and a four course wine-pairing dinner specially prepared by Chef Allen. [Check out their website](#) for details and to sign up!