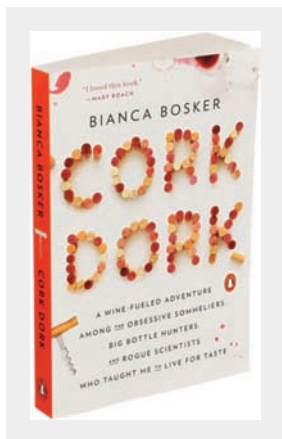


# Book Review: *Cork Dork*

## Michael Friedman

*Cork Dork: A Wine-Fueled Adventure Among the Obsessive Sommeliers, Big Bottle Hunters, and Rogue Scientists Who Taught Me to Live for Taste.* Bianca Bosker. New York: Penguin, 2017. 329 pages. ISBN 978-0143128090.



This book traces the year I spent among flavor freaks, sensory scientists, big-bottle hunters, smell masterminds, tipsy hedonists, rule-breaking winemakers, and the world's most ambitious sommeliers. It is not a wine buyer's guide, or a credulous celebration of all wine-drinking traditions. In fact, it explores the ways in which the industry is—in the words of one Princeton University wine economist—"intrinsically bullshit-prone." But clear aside the bullshit, and what remains are insights that have relevance far outside the realm of food and drink.

—Bianca Bosker

As did just about all of us in the Council of Science Editors' Book Club who read this book last spring, I found Bosker's writing to be funny, informative, and engaging. I guess that's no surprise given that she is an award-winning journalist who

MIKE FRIEDMAN is the Journals Production Manager at the American Meteorological Society.

has written about food, wine, architecture, and technology for *The New Yorker* online, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times Style Magazine*, *Food & Wine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, and *The New Republic*. She was technology editor of *The Huffington Post* when she heard about the World's Best Sommelier Competition, and that was all it took for her to decide to dive into what turned out to be an 18-month adventure in which she ended up becoming a certified sommelier herself.

What a wild ride this book was. From laugh-out-loud funny to the sober realization at just how serious people can be about wine (no pun intended), Bosker offers an insider's view of just how...umm...unique the world of wine is. Starting as a complete novice, Bosker's thorough exploration of this realm—from tasting, to service, to the science involved—ends up with her complete conversion to an expert taster whose brain actually changes from her experiences. And going along on that ride with her was a thrilling and educational roller coaster.

She makes easy connections with leading sommeliers (including Morgan, her idiosyncratic guide through this alternative universe), sensory scientists, wine merchants, and obsessed wine drinkers around the world. Her enchanting style, and fumbling, humorous adventures navigating the various corners of the wine universe make this book an easy and fun read. A favorite (recurring) theme in the book is the range of bizarre, completely off-the-wall descriptions the blind tasters, especially Morgan, come up with when summarizing a wine. For example, Morgan describes an Australian Shiraz as "That 'Incredible Hulk just stepped out of the nuclear reactor' type of thing". Other adjectives of tastings included "wet asphalt," "asparagus pee," and "dried pomegranate."

Reading *Cork Dork* was inspiring, and sparked an interest in exploring wine myself (though much more modestly than Bosker). And I wasn't the only one: The book inspired several of us to set out on a wine-tasting evening during the CSE Annual Meeting in New Orleans last May. I think I can speak for my fellow participants (you know who you are) in saying that we are all for making this an annual tradition. Look out Columbus!