

# The Stories in Bottles

Native Georgian Kate Parham recounts her journey to learning about and loving wine.

**I'M STANDING IN** the middle of a dim room, surrounded by hundreds of fragrant oak barrels. A charming young French winemaker, Pierre (of course!), discusses the acclaimed Bordeaux blend aging in front of me. I'm at Château Cheval Blanc, perhaps the most famous, and certainly most expensive, wine producer in Bordeaux's Saint-Émilion. I think to myself, "How did I get here?"

It all started during my college years. I was studying journalism at the University of Georgia, spending my non-classroom hours babysitting for a prominent Southern chef and expanding my love of food.

But it wasn't until my boyfriend's stepfather poured me a glass of California Sauvignon Blanc that I began to truly appreciate wine. Up until

specializing in wine, food and travel. I moved to Dallas, where I learned that the climate in Texas Hill Country mirrored that of Spain's, so Tempranillo grows beautifully in both. I next moved to Virginia, where I discovered that Thomas Jefferson was all but responsible for wine in America. And today, my time is spent traversing the world in search of the next great bottle.

I've explored Shiraz and Riesling in South Australia's Barossa Valley, tasted some of the most vibrant and delicious biodynamic wines from Niagara Falls during a wine festival in British Columbia, and reconnoitered chateaus in the world's most famed wine region, Bordeaux.

Which brings me back to Cheval Blanc. There I sat, mesmerized by

core of what makes wine so wonderful: Every wine has a story, one that connects you to different people, places and cultures across the globe. If I've learned anything from my pursuits, it's that it's worth the effort to seek out special wines, to pause to appreciate what you're sipping, to listen for the story behind each bottle.

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that point, I thought wine was one of two things: cheap and unremarkable, or great and extremely expensive. But that \$15 bottle gave me pause: it was crisp, clean, just a hint of sweetness, perfectly balanced. For once, I wanted to savor each sip, to learn about the vineyards, the process, the people.

I spent the rest of that summer exploring California bottles—Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay—and came back to Georgia with a newfound appreciation for wine. Soon after, I became a freelance journalist

Pierre as I sipped his silky cabernet franc with an intensity I've only experienced once before: earlier that day at another vineyard in Saint-Émilion called Château La Bastienne. La Bastienne is one of the smallest producers in the region, and the price point couldn't be more opposite of Cheval Blanc, but I loved their wine all the same. Their story was just as romantic, the fourth generation winemaker's passion and ambition palpable, their wines just as satisfying.

That simple conclusion is at the



**Kate Parham** is a freelance journalist who continues to travel the world and immerse herself in wine culture.